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THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF GERMAN IDEALISM

Edited by
Matthew C. Altman



The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism

Also by Matthew C. Altman

A COMPANION TO KANT'S "CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON"

THE FRACTURED SELF IN FREUD AND GERMAN PHILOSOPHY (*coauthored*)

KANT AND APPLIED ETHICS: The Uses and Limits of Kant's Practical Philosophy

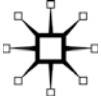
The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism

Edited by

Matthew C. Altman

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Preface

German Idealism was the dominant philosophical movement from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, but it is still very much alive. Contemporary philosophers continue to draw on the German Idealists to formulate their own ideas, and historians of philosophy work to clarify their positions and to evaluate their philosophical legacy. Although its most important proponents, especially Kant and Hegel, have received considerable attention in the scholarly literature, surprisingly little has been published that explores German Idealism as a whole in one volume, and from a variety of interpretive standpoints. *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism* attempts to remedy that.

This anthology includes essays from some of the most accomplished scholars in the field, who cover in depth the work of the four major figures – Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel – and clarify how a number of philosophers who have been underrepresented in the relevant scholarship, such as Jacobi, Maimon, Reinhold, and the German Romantics, fit within the German Idealist tradition. Chapters address the different philosophical subfields to which the German Idealists made the most important contributions, including epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, political philosophy, the philosophy of history, and the philosophy of religion, among others. Although no one volume can do justice to the full variety and complexity of German Idealism, the *Palgrave Handbook* aims for comprehensiveness. The sheer range of topics and quality of the contributions make it the most thorough and accessible secondary source on German Idealism.

The *Palgrave Handbook* is not merely an expository work, however. Each contributor sets out a particular interpretation and defends a thesis. In some cases, authors develop or revise positions that they have taken in their other publications, but other contributors take novel approaches that challenge existing paradigms. Thus the book serves as a touchstone for meaningful discussions about the movement's philosophical and historical importance. In short, the book not only explains German Idealism, but engages the reader in critical reflection about how to interpret what it means and how to assess its continuing importance for us.

Contributors to this volume include both established and emerging scholars in the field, all of whom produced philosophically rigorous yet accessible chapters on some very difficult material. Needless to say, the book would not have been possible without their extraordinary efforts.

Ellensburg, Washington
July 2014

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Kienhow Goh is an independent scholar. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Syracuse University in 2010. His main research interests are Fichte's theory of freedom, the will, action, and the body.

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Paul Guyer is the Jonathan Nelson Professor of Humanities and Philosophy at Brown University. He is the author, editor, and translator of two dozen works on and by Kant, and is General Coeditor of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. The second edition of his monograph *Kant and A History of Modern Aesthetics* (in three volumes) both appeared in 2014.

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Daniel Breazeale, and Tom Rockmore (2010); and *Spinozas Affektenlehre und ihre Rezeption im Deutschen Idealismus, der Romantik und der Moderne*, ed. Violetta L. Waibel (2012).

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Note on Sources and Key to Abbreviations

Works by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are referenced in the text parenthetically, using the abbreviations listed below. When citing an English translation, the German source is also indicated, with the exception of Kant's work, for which the *Akademie* pagination is already given with the translations, and those cases where section numbers are shared between the translation and the original (as indicated below). Where there is no mention of an English version, the translation is the author's own. Works cited only in endnotes are given with their full publication information.

At the end of each of the following entries (where applicable), I list the volume number of the author's collected works in which the German version appears.

Kant

As is standard in Kant scholarship, each parenthetical reference to Kant's writings gives the volume and page number(s) of the Royal Prussian Academy edition (*Kants gesammelte Schriften*) (Ak), which are included in the margins of the translations.

- A/B *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787). Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. (Ak 3, 4). The volume number is not included in references to the *Critique of Pure Reason*.
- Ak *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. 29 vols. Ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften and successors. Berlin: Reimer, later de Gruyter, 1900–. References to this edition are given in the form Ak 8:5, indicating volume and page number. Where applicable, the number of the *Reflexion* (R) is given in addition to the volume and page number.
- An *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798). Trans. Robert B. Louden. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, 231–429. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 7)
- ANM *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763). In *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote, 203–41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. (Ak 2)
- C *Correspondence*. Trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. (Ak 10–13)

- CB “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786). Trans. Allen W. Wood. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, 163–75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 8)
- CF *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798). Trans. Mary J. Gregor and Robert Anchor. In *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, 233–327. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 7)
- CJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. (Ak 5)
- CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 137–271. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 5)
- EAT “The End of All Things” (1794). Trans. Allen W. Wood. In *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, 221–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 8)
- G *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 41–108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 4)
- ID *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World [Inaugural Dissertation]* (1770). In *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote, 375–416. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. (Ak 2)
- IUH *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784). Trans. Allen W. Wood. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, 107–20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 8)
- LAn *Lectures on Anthropology*. Trans. Robert R. Clewis, Robert B. Loudon, G. Felicitas Munzel, and Allen W. Wood. Ed. Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Loudon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. (Ak 25)
- LDR *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (1817). Trans. Allen W. Wood. In *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, 339–451. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 28)
- LE *Lectures on Ethics*. Trans. Peter Heath. Ed. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. (Ak 27)
- LF *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* (1746–49). Trans. Jeffrey B. Edwards and Martin Schönfeld. In *Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins, 1–155. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. (Ak 1)
- LM *Lectures on Metaphysics*. Trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. (Ak 28)
- LP *Lectures on Pedagogy* (1803). Trans. Robert B. Loudon. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, 437–85. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 9)

- MF “Succinct Exposition of Some Meditations on Fire” (1755). Trans. Lewis White Beck. In *Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins, 309–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. (Ak 1)
- MFS *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786). Trans. and ed. Michael Friedman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. (Ak 4)
- MM *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 363–602. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 6)
- NE *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755). In *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote, 3–45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. (Ak 1)
- NCR “On a Discovery whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One” (1790). Trans. Henry Allison. In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath, 283–336. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. (Ak 8)
- OBS *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). Trans. Paul Guyer. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, 23–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 2)
- OBS_n “Selections from the Notes on the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*” (1764–65). In *Notes and Fragments*, trans. Curtis Bowman, Paul Guyer, and Frederick Rauscher, ed. Paul Guyer, 1–24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. (Ak 20). Because this translation does not include the *Akademie* pagination in the margins, references to OBS_n include the page of the translation followed by the *Akademie* volume and page number.
- OP *Opus postumum* (1804). Trans. Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen. Ed. Eckart Förster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. (Ak 21–22)
- OT “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (1786). Trans. Allen W. Wood. In *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, 7–18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 8)
- PP *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 315–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 8)
- Pro *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as a Science* (1783). Trans. Gary Hatfield. In *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Henry Allison and Peter Heath, 49–169. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. (Ak 4)
- Rel *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793). Trans. George di Giovanni. In *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, 55–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 6)
- TelP “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (1788). Trans. Günter Zöllner. In *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner

- and Robert B. Louden, 195–218. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (Ak 8)
- TP “On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice” (1793). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 277–309. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 8)
- UNH *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755). Trans. Olaf Reinhardt. In *Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins, 182–308. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. (Ak 1)
- WE “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784). In *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 15–22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Ak 8)

Fichte

Parentetical citations of English translations of Fichte’s work are followed by citations of the corresponding German originals, from *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (GA).

- AGN *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808). Ed. Gregory Moore. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. (GA I/10)
- AP “Appeal to the Public” (1799). In *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, trans. Curtis Bowman, ed. Yolanda Estes, 92–125. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010. (GA I/5)
- EPW *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*. Trans. Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- FNR *Foundations of Natural Right, according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1796–97). Trans. Michael Baur. Ed. Frederick Neuhauser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. (GA I/3–4)
- GA *J. G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Ed. Reinhard Lauth et al. 42 vols. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962–. References to this edition are given in the form GA I/7:13, indicating part, volume, and page number; or, in the case of correspondence, are in the form GA III/6, no. 22, indicating part, volume, and letter number.
- GR “Review of Friedrich Heinrich Gebhard, *On Ethical Goodness as Disinterested Benevolence* (1792).” Trans. Daniel Breazeale. *Philosophical Forum* 32, no. 4 (winter 2001): 297–310. (GA I/2)
- IWL *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*. Trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994.
- JD “Juridical Defense” (1799). In *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, trans. Curtis Bowman, ed. Yolanda Estes, 157–204. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010. (GA I/6)

- K *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo. Kollegnachschrift K. Chr. Fr. Krause 1798/99*. Ed. Erich Fuchs. Hamburg: Meiner, 1982.
- NM *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy: (Wissenschaftslehre) nova methodo (1796/99)*. Trans. Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. (GA IV/2, K)
- OL “On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language” (1795). Trans. Jere Paul Surber. In *Language and German Idealism: Fichte’s Linguistic Philosophy*, by Jere Paul Surber, 117–45. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1996. (GA I/3)
- SE *The System of Ethics, according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre (1798)*. Trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöller. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. (GA I/5)
- VM *The Vocation of Man (1800)*. Trans. Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987. (GA I/6)
- WL *The Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre) (1794)*. Trans. and ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970. (GA I/2)
- WL₁₈₀₄ *The Science of Knowing: J. G. Fichte’s 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre (1804)*. Trans. Walter E. Wright. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. (GA II/8)

Schelling

Parenthetical citations of English translations of Schelling’s work are followed by citations of the corresponding German originals, from *Schellings sämtliche Werke (SW)*.

- AW *The Ages of the World (1815)*. Trans. Jason M. Wirth. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. (SW I/8)
- Br *Bruno; or, On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things (1802)*. Trans. and ed. Michael G. Vater. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984. (SW I/4)
- DC *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism (1795)*. In *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, trans. and ed. Fritz Marti, 156–218. Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1980. (SW I/1)
- EHF *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom (1809)*. Trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. (SW I/7)
- EPh *Schellingiana 1. Einleitung in die Philosophie (1830)*. Ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt. Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1989.
- FO *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (1799)*. Trans. Keith R. Peterson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. (SW I/3)

- FPr *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* [extract] (1802). In *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood, 206–25. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. (SW I/4)
- GPh *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures* (1854). Trans. Bruce Matthews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. (SW II/3)
- GPP *Grundlegung der Positiven Philosophie: Münchener Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*. Ed. Horst Fuhrmans. Turin: Bottega D’Erasmus, 1972.
- HMP *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1833–34). Trans. Andrew Bowie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. (SW I/10)
- IPN *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of This Science* (1797). Trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. (SW I/2)
- IPP *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy; or, On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge* (1795). In *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794–1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti, 63–149. Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 1980. (SW I/1)
- IPU *Initia Philosophiae Universae: Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21* (1820–21). Ed. Horst Fuhrmans. Bonn: Bouvier, 1969.
- MR *Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature (Münchener Rede)* (1807). Trans. Michael Bullock. In *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry*, ed. Herbert Read, 323–64. London: Faber and Faber, 1968. (SW I/7)
- PA *The Philosophy of Art* (1802–3). Trans. and ed. Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. (SW I/5)
- POP *Philosophie der Offenbarung [Paulus Nachschrift]* (1841–42). Ed. Manfred Frank. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977.
- Pr *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801). In *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood, 141–205. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. (SW I/4)
- PRel *Philosophy and Religion* (1804). Trans. Klaus Ottmann. Putnam, Conn.: Spring, 2010. (SW I/6)
- SS “Stuttgart Seminars” (1810). In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau, 195–243. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. (SW I/7)
- STI *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Trans. Peter Heath. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978. (SW I/3)
- SW *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*. Pt. 1, vols. 1–10; Pt. 2, vols. 1–4. Ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling. Stuttgart and Augsburg: Cotta, 1856–61. References to this edition are given in the form SW I/8:24, indicating part, volume, and page number.
- T *Schellingiana 4. Timaeus* (1794). Ed. Hartmut Buchner. Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994.

- TE *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the "Science of Knowledge"* (1797). In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau, 61–138. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. (SW I/1)
- WA *Die Weltalter: Fragmente, in der Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813*. Ed. Manfred Schröter. Munich: Biederstein, 1946.

Hegel

Parentetical citations of English translations of Hegel's work are followed by citations of the corresponding German originals, usually from *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (HW). References to an "addition [*Zusatz*]" are indicated with a "Z" following the page or section number.

- BH *Briefe von und an Hegel*. 4 vols. Ed. Johannes Hoffmeister and Friedhelm Nicolin. Hamburg: Meiner, 1969. References to the letters are given in the form BH 3:4, indicating volume number and letter number.
- D *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801). Trans. and ed. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977. (HW 2)
- EL *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (1830). Trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991. (HW 8) References to Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic* are given by section number, which are shared by the original (in HW 8) and the translation. In these cases, the German original is not cited.
- EPM *Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), Together with the Zusätze*. Trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller. Ed. M. J. Inwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. (HW 10) References to Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* are given by section number, which are shared by the original (in HW 10) and the translation. In these cases, the German original is not cited.
- EPN *Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830). Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970. (HW 9) References to Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* are given by section number, which are shared by the original (in HW 9) and the translation. In these cases, the German original is not cited.
- EPS *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, and Critical Writings* (1817). Trans. Arnold V. Miller, Steven A. Taubeneck, and Diana I. Behler. Ed. Ernst Behler. New York: Continuum, 1990. (HW 8) References to Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* are given by section number, which are shared by the original (in HW 8) and the translation. In these cases, the German original is not cited.

- GW *Gesammelte Werke*. Ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–.
- HL *Hegel: The Letters*. Trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- HW *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*. Ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970. References to this edition are given in the form HW 5:11, indicating volume and page number.
- ILA *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835). Trans. Bernard Bosanquet. Ed. Michael Inwood. New York: Penguin, 1993. (HW 13)
- IPH *Introduction to "The Philosophy of History"* (1837). Trans. Leo Rauch. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988. (HW 12)
- JR *Jenaer Realphilosophie* (1805–6). In *Frühe politische Systeme*, ed. Gerhard Göhler, 201–89. Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1974.
- LA *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1835). 2 vols. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975. The page numbers run continuously through the two volumes. (HW 13–15)
- LHP *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1805–6). 3 vols. Trans. R. F. Brown, J. M. Stewart, and H. S. Harris. Ed. Robert F. Brown. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. In-text citations of LHP refer to volume and page number. (HW 18–20)
- LPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832). 3 vols. Trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart. Ed. P. C. Hodgson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. (VPR) In-text citations of LPR refer to volume and page number.
- LPW *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History* (1837). Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. (VPW)
- PhG *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. (HW 3)
- PR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821). Trans. H. B. Nisbet. Ed. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. (HW 7) References to the preface are indicated with page numbers, followed by the page numbers from the German edition. All other references to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* are given by section number, which are shared by the original (in HW 7) and the translations. In these cases, the German original is not cited. References to "remarks [*Anmerkungen*]," which are Hegel's elucidatory comments appended to some of the main numbered paragraphs of PR, are indicated with an "A" following the section number.
- PSS *Hegels Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes/Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (1817). 3 vols. Trans. and ed. M. J. Petry. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978.

- SL *The Science of Logic* (1812, 1813, 1816). Trans. and ed. George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. (HW 5–6)
- VPR *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*, Vol. 5: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, Band III. Die vollendete Religion* (1832). Ed. Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Meiner, 1984.
- VPW *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Band I. Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (1837). Ed. Johannes Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Meiner, 1955.

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A version of Chapter 36 (Beiser) was first published in the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*.

Introduction

What Is German Idealism?

Matthew C. Altman

The era of German Idealism stands alongside ancient Greece and the French Enlightenment as one of the most fruitful and influential periods in the history of philosophy. The names and ideas of the great innovators continue to resonate with us, to inform our thinking and spark debates of interpretation: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; Voltaire and Rousseau; Kant and Hegel. Beginning with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781 and ending about ten years after Hegel's death in 1831, the period of "classical German philosophy" transformed whole fields of intellectual endeavor and founded others. The German Idealists blurred the distinction between epistemology and metaphysics, showing that the study of nature is impossible without investigating the subjective conditions for the possibility of experience. Their conception of autonomy as rational self-legislation challenged thousands of years of ethical theory and supported political and educational theories that both extended and qualified the ideals of the Enlightenment. In aesthetics, their focus on the formal qualities of the art object and the sensibility of the viewer established new traditions of art interpretation that have influenced artists and critics of their own time and ours. And they set limits to religious faith, supporting religion only insofar as it makes manifest and reinforces the ethical commitments that we can discover through rational reflection and exemplify in community with others.

Kant's "Copernican revolution in philosophy" – the idea that the world must conform to our representation of it, rather than vice versa – inaugurated a movement that philosophers could take up or argue against, but that could not be ignored (Bxvi–xviii). The idealist project was carried on and transformed by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, as well as lesser-known figures such as Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Jakob Friedrich Fries, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and Friedrich Eduard Beneke; and later by Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg and Hermann Lotze. It spread in the nineteenth century to Britain and the United States, where idealist metaphysics was defended by F. H. Bradley and

Josiah Royce, and Hegel's political philosophy was adapted and popularized by T. H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet. German Idealism has been reinterpreted in the present day by a number of important analytic and continental philosophers, including Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, John McDowell, Slavoj Žižek, and Robert Brandom. Critics of idealism have been just as prominent: contemporaries of Kant and Hegel such as F. H. Jacobi, Salomon Maimon, G. E. Schulze, and the early German Romantics; materialists such as Marx and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century; and Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and the Logical Positivists in the twentieth century all position themselves against the views that were advanced during those fifty years in Germany. In many ways, the challenges posed by German Idealism not only have defined modern intellectual history, but they continue to structure our philosophical debates, even if we do not always accept their answers.

Idealisms before 1781

Idealism has a long history, going back at least to ancient Greece. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant feels it necessary to distinguish his transcendental idealism from Platonic idealism (A5/B9, A313/B370–A320/B377, A853/B881–A854/B882), and yet Kant's philosophy is nonetheless considered part of the Platonic tradition, as opposed to the empirical naturalism of Aristotle. Although it oversimplifies things, Plato believed that the physical world as it exists and as we perceive it is a distorted manifestation of Ideas or Forms (*eidoi*). Of course, philosophers debate what Plato meant by this, whether he defended a commitment to metaphysical entities or was simply describing how we make sense of the world conceptually or linguistically. Regardless, Plato emphasized the value of Ideas and their status as the governing principles that structure the multiplicity of appearances. Famously, in the *Republic* Plato condemns representational art as a simulacrum of an appearance – the world itself being the appearance here – an additional step removed from what is ultimately real or true. According to Plato, the Ideas have both epistemological and ontological priority, in the sense that we really know something only when we know its Idea, and something is what it is to the extent that it participates in or exemplifies the form of the thing. For example, a ruler is best able to create just laws when he or she contemplates the Idea of Justice, and laws can be judged by the extent to which they approximate this Idea.

Although Plato formulates the most important and influential form of idealism prior to Kant, other premodern philosophers defended similar positions. For Pythagoras, the ideas are numbers, in the sense that they are immaterial and unchanging, and the truths of geometry and arithmetic make comprehensible and orderly the seeming chaos of physical events. Parmenides

said that “thinking and being are the same,” meaning (perhaps) that nothing but thought exists, or that all existing things are bound by the constraints of reason, specifically logic.¹ And Plotinus, a Neoplatonist, claimed that there is some ideal entity, which he calls the One (and associates with the good), which is the ideal basis of all things that are differentiated in time.² For all of these thinkers, the reality of material objects depends on their participation in or derivation from ideas. Plato’s theory of Forms also had an impact on the philosophy of the Middle Ages, especially evident in the Great Chain of Being, according to which there is a hierarchy of existence from the most material (soil) to the most spiritual (God), with things having more objective reality the closer they are to God. The ideal is privileged over the material; the latter has its basis in the former.

The turn inward inaugurated by Montaigne and Descartes in the modern period also transformed the basic tenets of idealism. The ideas that structure or make possible reality were reconceived in terms of human consciousness rather than as freestanding metaphysical entities. Berkeley most clearly represents this kind of idealism. He claimed that all we know are objects of consciousness, and so he concluded that all it means for objects to exist is that they are represented as objects by the mind, either our minds or the mind of God: in his words, “*esse is percipi*,” to exist is to be perceived.³ The material world exists only as it is represented by and for consciousness.

Although Berkeley was the most prominent modern idealist prior to Kant, some historians of philosophy, including Hegel (LHP 3:192 [HW 20:242]),⁴ also consider Leibniz’s theory of monads to be a form of idealism, because he holds that the only real beings are mind-like simple substances that have perception and appetite. Existing bodies and motion are derived from these monads. Unlike Berkeley, however, Leibniz did not reduce matter to mind. Instead, he tried to conceive of a single substance that would make both mind and matter possible as derivatives, in contrast to Descartes’s strict distinction between spiritual and material substances.

German variations

Characterizing idealism in general becomes much more complicated after the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant and his successors formulated different versions of idealism and characterized (or mischaracterized) one another’s views in an effort to defend their own, often using the same terms for different things or different terms for the same things. For example –

- Kant calls Berkeley’s position *material idealism* (B274, B518–19n), *dogmatic idealism* (A377, B274; Pro 4:375), or *genuine idealism* (Pro 4:374), meaning that the world is nothing but perceptions for consciousness.

- Kant calls Descartes's position *material idealism* (B274, B518–19n), *skeptical idealism* (A377; Pro 4:375), *problematic idealism* (B274), or *empirical idealism* (A369; Pro 4:293), meaning that we cannot establish through experience that there is a world outside of the mind.
- Kant calls his position *transcendental idealism* (A369), *critical idealism* (Pro 4:293–94), or *formal idealism* (B518–19n; Pro 4:337, 375), meaning that, although there is a mind-independent world, we can know it only as an appearance, subject to our epistemic conditions.
- Fichte calls his (and Kant's) positions *critical idealism* (WL 147 [GA I/2:311]; IWL 26–27 [GA I/4:200]) or *transcendental idealism* (IWL 26–27, 59 [GA I/4:200, 227]), meaning that the subject and the object are differentiated within consciousness according to rational laws, and that even the supposed thing in itself depends for its existence on thinking.
- Fichte defines *dogmatic idealism* (WL 147 [GA I/2:311]) or *transcendent idealism* (IWL 26–27 [GA I/4:200]) as the view that the world is structured or made possible by an intelligence that is not bound by any laws of thought.
- Hegel calls Kant's and Fichte's positions *subjective idealism* (D 117, 132–33 [HW 2:50, 68–69]; EL §§42Z, 45Z, 131Z) in order to criticize their seeming reduction of the world to individual consciousness as it apprehends appearances and conceptualizes the thing in itself.
- Schelling calls his position *absolute idealism* (IPN 50–51 [SW I/2:67–68]; Br 157–58 [SW IV/1:256–57]), meaning that a primordial, productive force – an Absolute – gives rise to both the spontaneity of thinking and the dynamic natural world.
- Hegel calls Schelling's position *objective idealism* (D 161, 166 [HW 2:101, 107]), meaning that, according to the *Naturphilosophie*, the subjective is immanent in and emerges out of the objective substance. This is in contrast to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, where the object is posited by the subject.
- Hegel also calls Schelling's position *absolute idealism* (D 155 [HW 2:94]), meaning that the synthesis of the consciousness and nature is achieved in the Absolute. Hegel would later criticize Schelling's lack of true differentiation between subject and object, claiming that Schelling's (objective) Absolute is a kind of Spinozistic substance. Hegel famously calls it “the night in which... all cows are black” (PhG §16 [HW 3:22]).
- Hegel calls his own position *absolute idealism* as well (EL §§45Z, 160Z), but in his formulation it means that self-consciousness and nature achieve unity in the absolute Idea, meaning that being and thinking are ultimately synthesized through reason.
- Hegel refers to his own philosophy as well as Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* as forms of *speculative idealism* (D 118, 173 [HW 2:51, 115]), because they analyze knowledge scientifically, by

focusing entirely on the spontaneity of judgment rather than mixing it with a consideration of the thing in itself.

- Critics of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel often refer to their positions as *speculative idealism* in order to deride what they see as a return to metaphysical speculation, beyond the bounds of sense and into the nature of reality as it is in itself, which violates the epistemic limits established by Kant's critical philosophy.

Given the various kinds of idealism, the different interpretations of a particular philosopher's work by himself and others, and the ways in which Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel build upon and transform one another's work, it would be foolhardy to identify any one position as the definitive or only form of German Idealism. Characterizations are broad and vague by necessity – to wit: Philosophically speaking, all German Idealists are, in one way or another, committed to the mind-dependence of the world that is represented in consciousness. They deny the realist claim that knowledge can be entirely reduced to the effect of material things on the mind or brain; or, they deny that there are facts apart from descriptions. Historically speaking, German Idealism is a constellation of related views that emerge initially as responses to Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy, and specifically as attempts to defend or improve upon Kant's transcendental idealism, rather than simply rejecting it (as, say, empiricists do).

The *Critique of Pure Reason* was at first misinterpreted as a defense of Berkeleyan idealism, so Kant, in a second, revised edition published in 1787, included a Refutation of Idealism in which he distinguishes his view from the claim that there is no mind-independent world (Berkeley's dogmatic idealism) or that we cannot know whether a mind-independent world exists (Descartes's problematic idealism) (B274–79). Instead, Kant defends what he calls transcendental idealism: although a mind-independent world affects our senses, we know appearances only subject to our ways of knowing, and we can never know things as they are apart from those epistemic conditions, as they are in themselves. Specifically, Kant claims that space and time are pure forms of sensible intuition – that is, we perceive things in space and time because of how we receive sensory data – and that we organize our experience by means of *a priori* concepts of the understanding (or categories). In making objective judgments about our sensible intuitions (what is *presented* to us through the senses), we apply these necessary and universal rules and thus *represent* them – for example, we relate some perceptions as cause and effect (using the category of causality), and we conceive of some successive representations as one persisting thing (using the category of unity). If we try to apply these forms and concepts to the world itself, however, we commit a kind of logical mistake that leads to unjustified existence claims (paralogisms) and contradictory conclusions

(antinomies). Transcendental idealism thus shows that metaphysical speculation about God, freedom, and the soul, as claims about what exists beyond possible experience, is theoretically unfounded.

The philosophers who followed Kant attempted to complete or correct what they took to be shortcomings in the critical philosophy, and their resulting attempts to formulate systematic philosophies diverged, often significantly, from Kant's transcendental idealism. Reinhold attempted to unify the sensibility and the understanding, alternatively, under the faculty of representation and the principle of consciousness. Fichte claimed that Kant's appeal to a thing in itself as the source of perceptions violated the core principle of the critical philosophy: that the objectivity of things for consciousness depends on making subjective judgments. Self-consciousness, objective representations, and the supposed source of representations are all posited as such by the I. Schelling claimed that Fichte reduced being to thinking instead of discovering the basis of both in a unitary absolute. Nature as a productive force gives rise to the subject and the object through a process of splitting. In an attempt to overcome Fichte's overemphasis on the I and Schelling's apparent appeal to an absolute substance, Hegel identifies subject and object in the self-governing activity of reason, or *Geist*. Subjective consciousness and objective representations are formed through the process of self-alienation, and are eventually synthesized with the achievement of absolute knowing.

Schopenhauer's classification among the German Idealists is uncertain, but he and Fichte, more than any other figures of this time, insisted that they simply extended and made explicit the premises of Kant's idealism. Schopenhauer claimed that all of the post-Kantian idealists, especially Hegel, misidentified the basis of subject and object in consciousness. Instead, the conscious subject who seems to act on the basis of reasons and the objects of experience, including the body, are manifestations of a purposeless force that Schopenhauer calls the Will. The world as we represent it, including our commitment to separate individuals in space and time, is an illusion and a distortion of reality. By recognizing the convergence between his views and some of the tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism – especially the beliefs that the world is unreal and transitory, and that desire gives rise to suffering – Schopenhauer calls attention to other ancient idealist traditions in the East, which existed historically at the same time as Plato and the Neoplatonists.

Is Kant an idealist?

The biggest disagreement between Kant and the post-Kantian idealists concerns his empirical realism. Kant calls himself a transcendental idealist *and* an empirical realist, which (among other things⁵) means that, although the

form of experience is contributed by the subject, the matter of experience, or the sense data about which we make judgments, is given to the senses by a mind-independent thing (A50/B74–A51/B75; Pro 4:30). Fichte says that Kant's (or rather his followers') commitment to a thing in itself is a remnant of dogmatism (IWL 68–69 [GA I/4:236–37]), and Hegel says that it demonstrates that Kant's philosophy is an incomplete stage in the development of consciousness, because it has not achieved an absolute synthesis between subjective consciousness and objective things. The distinction between appearances and the thing in itself is a distinction of the understanding, and the thing in itself is made a determinate thing only through the activity of thinking (PhG §§145–48 [HW 3:117–20]; SL 41, 93–94 [HW 5:59–60, 129–30]; EL §§44, 46). For the speculative idealists, the subject-object distinction is only apparent; the separation between the two is made possible by the fact that the two are ultimately united – through the I (Fichte), the Absolute (Schelling), or *Geist* (Hegel). This synthesis allows us to give a systematic account of both the spontaneity of consciousness and the givenness of the object, rather than conceiving of them as two separate and very different kinds of things. Because Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel jettison the idea of a mind-independent thing, some historians of philosophy claim that German Idealism really begins after Kant, because only according to those thinkers does the entirety of the world consist of representations for consciousness. We should not forget that Kant added a Refutation of Idealism to the B-edition of the first *Critique*.

Although it is true that, under transcendental idealism, there is a real world that is not affected by or defined in terms of ideal concepts, there are several reasons to include Kant in a book on German Idealism. First, although Kant distinguished himself from some forms of idealism, he does explicitly commit himself to one idealist theory, albeit one that is epistemic (regarding conditions for the possibility of experience) rather than ontological (committed to the ideality of being). At the risk of stating the obvious, Kant self-identifies as an idealist, so, if we take the phrase literally, it would be strange not to apply the German Idealist label to Kant.

Second, because the philosophers who follow Kant define their views in terms of the critical philosophy, as variations on or corrections to Kant's philosophy, a text on German Idealism would hardly make sense without him. Excluding Kant would explicitly leave out a serious discussion of his work, but his work would be implicit throughout the volume and would lurk, more or less unacknowledged, in the background of any discussion of Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel. In short, Kant began the German Idealist movement and was its most influential figure.

Third, Kant made idealism respectable; or rather, he formulated a version of idealism that was so compelling and so challenging – unlike the work of, say, Berkeley – that it preoccupied European philosophy for fifty years and

continues to impact our philosophical orientations. Few contemporary philosophers would seriously entertain the idea that we see things just as they are, without transforming our experience through the activity of judgment. This is one of the legacies of German Idealism as a whole, but is mostly attributable to Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy.

Finally, it is a matter of some debate whether the post-Kantian idealists actually rule out the existence of a mind-independent world in their philosophy. It is true that Kant's successors reject Kant by claiming that we do not approach the world as an appearance of some underlying reality, and instead claim that any experience is a matter of taking it to be something, or conceiving of it in a certain way. On this view, they remain agnostic about the existence of the thing in itself, claiming only that it is not the sort of thing that we could conceptualize. Although this blurs the Kantian distinction between intuitions and concepts, it is not as drastic a disagreement as we traditionally have thought. On this reading, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel are not engaged in radically different kinds of projects, so they ought to be classified as part of the same philosophical movement.

Structure of the anthology

The book is organized roughly in chronological order, with seven major sections, four of which are devoted to the four most important figures in German Idealism: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Each of these four sections begins with an introduction that sets their philosophies in their biographical and historical contexts (Naragon on Kant, Bykova on Fichte, Matthews on Schelling, and Novakovic on Hegel), and are followed by overall assessments of their philosophical achievements (Guyer on Kant, Zöller on Fichte, Wirth on Schelling, and Pinkard on Hegel). Chapters then cover the most philosophically innovative and historically significant aspects of their work. Chapters on Kant address his theoretical philosophy (Rosenkoetter), ethics (Denis), theory of freedom (Vilhauer), aesthetics (Watkins), philosophy of religion (Palmquist), political philosophy (Wood), and anthropology (Cohen). Fichte scholars cover his philosophical method (Neuhouser), theory of subjectivity and objectivity (Altman), theory of natural right (James), and philosophy of religion (Hoeltzel). Chapters on Schelling include studies of his philosophy of science (Grant), philosophy of religion (Vater), and philosophy of art (Shaw). And chapters on Hegel discuss his metaphysics (Žižek), conception of *Geist* (Fritzman and Parvizian), philosophy of history (Coe), theory of agency (Sedgwick), logic (di Giovanni), aesthetics (Speight), and political philosophy (Bristow). Each chapter not only explicates key concepts in the philosopher's work, but also argues for a particular interpretation that positions the author with regard to other contemporary interpretations.

Taken together, the chapters give a nearly complete picture of the four most important German Idealist philosophers.

The German Idealist movement is more complicated than this, of course; it is not entirely defined by these four individuals. Despite the enduring presence of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel in the fields of philosophy and intellectual history, the focus on these four thinkers alone is, at least in part, a result of Hegel's own selective interpretation of the period, with him as the culminating figure. Recent work on German Idealism has complicated the traditional story of the movement, to the extent that any study that aims for comprehensiveness must expand its focus to include other figures and trends. To that end, this book also includes sections on contemporary reactions to Kant's critical philosophy, German Romanticism, and other German Idealists of the nineteenth century.

Even though the importance of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was widely recognized upon its publication, Kant's idealism was not universally accepted. Philosophers took sides, with figures such as Reinhold defending Kant and correcting what he saw as some of its shortcomings, and others such as Jacobi and Maimon launching criticisms and proposing alternative positions. The chapter on Jacobi examines his criticism of Kant's practical philosophy, specifically Jacobi's claim that Kant's abstract moral theorizing has little relevance for lived existence. Instead, Jacobi focuses on the cultivation of natural sentiments (Crowe). The critical philosophy also faced challenges from skeptics, including Schulze (under the pseudonym Aenesidemus)⁶ and Maimon. The chapter on Maimon explains how he criticized Kant's theoretical philosophy, claiming that the rational demands of explanation cannot be met given the first *Critique's* distinction between sensibility and understanding. Maimon advanced an "apostate rationalism," according to which skepticism is a product of rational inquiry itself (Thielke). The second section ends with a chapter on Reinhold, which explains his attempt to ground the Kantian philosophy on a higher, more rationalistic principle, and shows how, as a result, mathematics takes on a more central role in the *Elementarphilosophie* than it does for Kant (Goh).

The early German Romantics – including Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Friedrich Hölderlin – also had a considerable impact on the development of German Idealism. The strict disciplinary boundaries that we have now were absent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so the authors, artists, and literary theorists who were part of the Romantic movement in Germany were impacted by the work of the German Idealists, and they in turn conversed with and responded in writing to the philosophies that were being formulated. Together they formed an intellectual community, first in Jena and then in Berlin, in which there was a sharing of ideas, the extent to which we are only now beginning to appreciate. The two chapters on German Romanticism focus

on the challenges that they posed to the assumptions of the German Idealists, by emphasizing sensibility and aesthetic appreciation over the power of reason (Millán); or, in the case of Hölderlin, by formulating a metaphysics grounded in the experience of beauty, through which we are capable of apprehending being as such (Waibel).

The final section of the book includes two chapters on idealist philosophers who are often overlooked in studies of German Idealism, but for very different reasons. As I mentioned, Schopenhauer claimed that he interpreted the Kantian philosophy properly, and that Hegel especially distorted its implications. However, his identification of the thing in itself with the Will, and his claim that this bare force drives all things forward, including natural events and human actions, led him to positions that, in some cases, seem contrary to the basic principles of idealism. The chapter on Schopenhauer explores how we are to understand the Will and whether or not it commits him to a form of metaphysical idealism (Wicks). The final chapter all-too-briefly covers three idealist philosophers – Fries, Herbart, and Beneke – who have been overshadowed by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, but whose achievements have been unfairly diminished (Beiser). The three of them engaged in important philosophical debates, especially with Hegel, and they extended the principles of German Idealism in such fields as psychology, aesthetics, education, and logic. Any attempt at a comprehensive study of German Idealism should include them.

Conclusion: The importance of idealism

The conclusion of the book considers the philosophical legacy of German Idealism, which has been alternatively rejected, revived, and reinterpreted since its decline in the nineteenth century. At this point, it suffices to say that this relatively brief movement had a profound influence on the course of Western intellectual history. *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism* provides readers with an extensive introduction to German Idealism, but also shows how it can illuminate some of our most fundamental philosophical questions in epistemology, logic, metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, political theory, and other fields. In this sense, there is no clear “end” to the period of German Idealism. It remains a dynamic and vibrant philosophical tradition.

Notes

1. Quoted in E. D. Phillips, “Parmenides on Thought and Being,” *Philosophical Review* 64, no. 4 (1955): 553.
2. The historical importance of Plotinus’s philosophy should not be underestimated. For the German Idealists – really, for all of educated Europe at the time – Plotinus

was to Plato what Aquinas was to Aristotle. That is, people read Plotinus and not Plato, and their understanding of what Plato said and meant was filtered through the interpretation of Plato by Plotinus. So, when Kant talks about Platonic idealism, he is for the most part talking about Plotinus.

3. George Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), §3; see also §6.
4. See also HW 20:238, where Hegel writes: “The Leibnizian philosophy is an idealism, intellectualism [*Leinizens Philosophie ist ein Idealismus, Intellektualismus*].” As Michael Inwood notes, Hegel usually uses derivatives of the Latin *intellectus* to refer to “the intelligible world of Plato, Neoplatonism and Leibniz, in contrast to the phenomenal world” (*A Hegel Dictionary* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1992], 242).
5. The second, more common meaning of Kant’s empirical realism is that our knowledge is limited to representations, and so space and time are “real” in the sense that they are true of the world of objective representations and are true of any possible experience that we could have (A28/B44, A35–36/B52).
6. Although Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761–1833) was an important critic of the Kantian philosophy, many of his criticisms are also voiced by Jacobi and Maimon. Because Jacobi’s and Maimon’s positions are more philosophically interesting and historically important, Schulze does not have his own chapter in this anthology.

Part I

Kant

There is no important problem in any branch of philosophy which is not treated by Kant, and he never treated a problem without saying something illuminating and original about it. He was certainly wrong on many points of detail, and he may well be wrong in his fundamental principles; but, when all criticisms have been made, it seems to me that Kant's failures are more important than most men's successes.

— C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (1930)¹

¹ C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), 11.

1

Kant's Career in German Idealism

Steve Naragon

Immanuel Kant helped launch “the next big thing” in German Idealism during the summer of 1791, two months after celebrating his sixty-seventh birthday. It had been ten years since the publication of his long-awaited *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the past decade had been filled with a remarkable output of writings developing Kant's “critical philosophy,” including his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), as well as an important second edition of the first *Critique* (1787). Although the first *Critique* lacked sympathetic and competent early readers, support for his philosophical innovations widened steadily during the 1780s, and a growing stream of pilgrims began to make their way to Königsberg, a city of fifty thousand souls lying in the far northeastern corner of Europe.¹

Kant had been teaching at the university – called the *Academia Albertina*, after its founder – for thirty-six years, the last twenty-one as the Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, which was one of eight salaried professorships in the “Philosophy Faculty” (really a faculty of arts and letters), and during the summer of 1791 he was also serving as dean of that faculty. Kant was lecturing on logic every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday (the main class days) from 7–8 in the morning, and on physical geography every Wednesday and Saturday from 8–10; earlier on Saturdays, from 7–8, he would meet with his logic students to test their understanding and answer their questions.

In Kant's day, professors lectured in their own lodgings or else they rented a room in someone else's home. Kant had rented rooms during his first three decades of teaching, but finally bought and moved into a home of his own just north of the Königsberg Castle in May 1784, after which he was able to hold all his lectures in a room on the first floor. On July 4, 1791, a Monday, the university was two months into the summer semester, and early that morning a twenty-nine-year-old Johann Gottlieb Fichte walked through Kant's front door and joined the other auditors to hear Kant lecture on logic. He had arrived in town the previous Friday specifically to meet the famous Professor Kant.

Fichte (1762–1814) would likely have stood out in the classroom, being a good decade older than most of the students. He had already completed his theology studies at Jena and had been working as a private tutor for the past eight years. Presumably he listened quietly to Kant's lecture and left,² and more than a month passed before the socially awkward Fichte managed to arrange a proper meeting with the great man. Fichte wrote in his diary: "For a long time I've wanted to pay Kant a serious visit, and found no means. Finally I began to work on a critique of all revelation, and to dedicate it to him" (GA II/2:415).

He finished this small book in about five weeks, sent it to Kant with an introductory letter, and finally paid him that visit on August 23. The meeting went well, since Kant liked the book (although he had read only the first eight pages).³ Unfortunately, Fichte was running out of money and decided that he should return to Saxony to live with his parents, but lacked the money even for that. So in a heartfelt plea that would have moved anyone, but not Kant, Fichte asked to borrow the necessary funds (letter of September 2, 1791; Ak 11:278–82). Kant turned down his request, but offered what he perhaps thought was a better alternative: that Fichte sell his book to a local publisher. This Fichte did, and his *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* was published in 1792. Because it was published anonymously, and because the reading public had been expecting something from Kant on the topic of religion, many believed this book to be Kant's, including Gottlieb Hufeland, a Jena law professor and admirer of Kant's, who wrote a glowing review of the book. Kant finally clarified the matter of authorship in the same newspaper that published Hufeland's review,⁴ and the good name and career of Johann Gottlieb Fichte was established.

Kant's early education

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), arguably the most important Western philosopher since the Middle Ages, was born into a home of very modest means, at the far eastern end of the Baltic Sea, in the bustling port city of Königsberg (now the Russian city of Kaliningrad). He was the fourth child and first surviving son in his family, with one older and three younger sisters and a younger brother who survived into adulthood.⁵ He was born the same year as Königsberg itself, which had been formed from the three medieval towns of Kneiphof (a small island located where the New and Old Pregel rivers meet), Altstadt (to the north), and Löbenicht (to the east). The Kants lived in that part of Königsberg given over to members of the harness and saddle guilds, in the Vorderste Vorstadt, just south of the Kneiphof island. At the east end of this island sat the fourteenth-century red brick cathedral, or *Domkirche*, where Kant's parents had been married and where Kant and his siblings were later baptized. On the north side of this cathedral stood a few low buildings that

made up the *Academia Albertina*, a Lutheran university founded in 1544 in the wake of the Protestant Reformation.

Kant received his first taste of student life at a German school in his neighborhood, where a single teacher gave instruction on reading, writing, arithmetic, and Christianity, but he would not have attended here for long, since at the age of eight he transferred to the *Collegium Fridericianum*, a Pietist Latin school. This was at the urging of Franz Albrecht Schultz (1692–1763), a forty-year-old Pietist theologian and pastor who had arrived in Königsberg just the year before, and who oversaw the German school that Kant had been attending. Local children hoping to enter the university, and too poor for a private tutor, needed to study at one of the three Latin city schools or else at the *Collegium Fridericianum*, which had beds for about seventy-five boarders, and which also accepted day-students, of which Kant was one. From Easter 1732 (having just turned eight) until Michaelmas 1740 (when he was sixteen), Kant walked across town each day to attend this school. Classes began every morning at 7 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m., with time set aside for play and for worship. He attended as a charity student, and without Schultz's intervention he likely would not have gone at all. Kant was grateful to Schultz for this, however much he came to dislike his years there – Kant's friend Hippele later wrote that “terror and fear would overcome him as soon as he thought back to the slavery of his youth”⁶ – and his extreme distaste for institutional religion likely began at this time as well.

Kant's studies at the *Collegium* included Latin and theology for all seventeen of his semesters there, as well as Greek for at least ten semesters and Hebrew for eight, French for six, handwriting for eleven (at one point he fell back a level), singing for six, geography for at least four, history for three, antiquities for five, poetry for four, arithmetic for nine, mathematics for two, and philosophy beginning in his next to last year.⁷

The curriculum included nothing from the natural sciences, nor was there any study of modern literature. Instruction in Hebrew and Greek focused on Bible translation, with no classical Greek works. Of more relevance to Kant's later philosophical career was the study of Cicero in the context of the Latin class. Kant excelled in Latin, becoming a fine stylist, and “even as an old man recited the most beautiful passages of Latin poets, orators, and historians.”⁸ But in general, as Kant once mentioned to a former classmate, “any sparks in us for philosophy or math could not be blown into a flame by those men,” to which the classmate replied: “But they were good at blowing them out.”⁹

Pietism and rationalism in Königsberg

Kant came of age in the wake of two strong challenges to orthodox Lutheran theology: Pietism and rationalism. Pietism was a revivalist, anti-intellectual

movement within the context of the German Lutheran church that was inspired by Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and his *Pia Desideria* (1675), and was similar to the Methodism that was sweeping England. In the words of Isaiah Berlin:

[Pietism] laid stress on the depth and sincerity of personal faith and direct union with God, achieved by scrupulous self-examination, passionate, intensely introspective religious feeling, and concentrated self-absorption and prayer, whereby the sinful, corrupt self was humbled and the soul left open to the blessing of divine, unmerited grace.¹⁰

Kant's family belonged to this Pietist movement, as did all of his instructors at school, so this religion deeply informed the first sixteen years of Kant's life. The spiritual center for Pietism at the time was the university at Halle, the largest of the four Prussian universities (the others were Königsberg, Frankfurt/Oder, and Duisburg). August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) had studied under Spener at Dresden and then brought the movement to Halle, and he was instrumental in helping Friedrich Wilhelm I (who reigned from 1713 to 1740) install Pietists at the university in Königsberg.

Rationalism was championed by Christian Wolff (1679–1754), also at Halle, who developed a scholasticism consistent with the scientific advances of his day. He viewed the special revelation of scripture as consistent with, but separable from, the natural revelation of rational theology. Just a year before Kant was born, the Pietists had convinced the king to expel Wolff from Halle, having been particularly scandalized by the rectoral address Wolff gave on July 12, 1721 – “On the Moral Philosophy of the Chinese” – in which he argued that Chinese (i.e., Confucian) and Christian ethics were fundamentally the same, and thus that ethics as such was not in need of a special Christian revelation.¹¹

This struggle between the Pietists and the rationalists played itself out in Königsberg as well, but a peculiar blend of these two forces also emerged. Schultz had studied under both Francke and Wolff in Halle, and he managed to reconcile these seemingly antagonistic positions. He was sent to Königsberg precisely because of his Pietism, assumed the directorship of the *Collegium Fridericianum* shortly after arriving in town, and eventually helped oversee all of its churches and schools. Yet in his inaugural dissertation he argued that faith and reason can be harmonized, and that Wolff's philosophy is acceptable and even useful for the faith.

Wolff himself had maintained that “if anyone has ever understood him, it is Schultz in Königsberg.”¹² Kant's student and later close friend, T. G. von Hippel (1741–96), studied theology under Schultz, and wrote that he “taught me theology from a different perspective, bringing in so much philosophy that one

was led to believe that Christ and his Apostles had all studied in Halle under Wolff."¹³

Martin Knutzen (1713–51), under whom Kant would later study, had nearly completed his own studies when Schultz arrived in Königsberg, and under his influence soon developed much the same blend of rationalism and Pietism – what Erdmann described as a Pietist content of divine revelation trussed up in the Wolffian form of definitions, theorems, and lemmas.¹⁴ Both of these men were of considerable importance for Kant, shaping the intellectual backdrop of his early years as a student at the university.

Kant's university studies

Kant's transition into university life must have been exciting. Near the end of his last term at the *Collegium Fridericianum*, in the summer of 1740, the old king died and on July 20 his son arrived in town to be installed as the new king, Friedrich II (later dubbed "the Great"), beginning what was to become a forty-six-year reign promoting Enlightenment ideals throughout the land, and particularly in the universities. Wolff was coaxed back to Halle from his chair in Marburg, and Pietists everywhere were put on notice. Two months after the coronation, Kant matriculated at the *Academia Albertina*. He was sixteen years old, a standard age for such beginnings.

The little we know of his studies is that he attended lectures by C. F. Ammon (mathematics), J. G. Teske (experimental physics), Knutzen (mathematics, logic, metaphysics, and moral philosophy), and Schultz (theology).¹⁵ He may also have attended J. D. Kypke's lectures on logic and metaphysics, since they were free. Rink reports that he took classes for "about three years."¹⁶

Kant's relationship with Knutzen is a puzzle. Kant's early biographers describe a close mentoring relationship between Knutzen and Kant, and most accounts since have repeated and embellished this. According to Ludwig Ernst Borowski (1740–1831), one of Kant's students and earliest biographers, Knutzen "was the teacher with whom Kant felt most connected. He attended all his courses on philosophy and mathematics without interruption. ... Knutzen ... found in Kant splendid talents ... eventually loaning him works by Newton."¹⁷ Yet when Knutzen mentions his better students, he does not mention Kant; nor does Kant mention Knutzen.¹⁸ Kant's first work (*Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces* [1746–49; LF 1:3–181]), which Borowski viewed as Knutzen-inspired, was dedicated not to Knutzen but to J. C. Bohl, a professor of medicine at the university. Insofar as Knutzen had a favorite student, it was Friedrich Johann Buck (1722–86), the same Buck who in 1759 would be given the Professorship in Logic and Metaphysics, instead of Kant.¹⁹ So the relationship could not have been very close, although Kant did receive from Knutzen at least this much: an introduction to Wolffian metaphysics and Newtonian science.

Becoming Professor Kant

Kant was the first major modern philosopher to spend his life teaching at a university, and most of his immediate followers – certainly those whom we now identify as German Idealists – sought to make that their home as well. When Kant decided on this academic path is unclear, but it appears to have come rather late. Most students in the eighteenth century took classes for two to three years without seeking a degree; only those wishing to teach at the university needed one, either a doctorate to teach in theology, medicine, or law, or a master's degree to teach in the philosophy faculty.

Kant stayed at the university, or at least with his friends in Königsberg, for eight years, until poverty forced him to leave in the summer or fall of 1748 to serve as a private tutor in the countryside.²⁰ He did this for about five years²¹ – three years in one home, and two in a second – working with young boys ranging in age from seven to fourteen. These tutoring positions were usually taken by young theology students waiting on their first church appointment, although this was not Kant's situation, who listed himself as a “student of philosophy” (rather than as a “theology candidate”).

Of the eight years between entering the university and leaving Königsberg, no more than three years were spent attending lectures, so how did Kant spend those remaining five years? Had he been pursuing an academic career, he would have written a Latin dissertation to present to the philosophy faculty, as this was a prerequisite for graduation. Kant did not do this. Instead he wrote what he took to be an important book on a physics problem of his day, and he wrote it in German for publication outside the university. This first publication – written between 1744 and 1747 – was a 240-page work that attempted to reconcile the Cartesian and Leibnizian accounts of force (*Living Forces* [1746–49; LF 1:3–181]),²² and this was followed by a book nearly as long that offered a Newtonian account of the formation of the universe, also in German, and published in 1755 (*Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* [UNH 1:217–368]). Kant clearly had been working on this second book during his five years in the countryside, if not earlier. Apart from that, he wrote a few shorter pieces for a local paper (in the summer of 1754, perhaps after his return to Königsberg) on the rotation and age of the earth.

This scholarly activity suggests that Kant was looking to create a name for himself outside of academia, a path certainly in keeping with the careers of many of the individuals with whose ideas he was engaged: Descartes, Newton, Leibniz, and many of their followers.²³ And yet Kant returned to Königsberg in the summer of 1754, perhaps by then with the intention of teaching. He submitted his master's thesis (“Succinct Exposition of Some Meditations on Fire” [MF 1:371–84]) the following spring on April 17, 1755, sat for the oral exam on May 13, and received his degree on June 12. He was then required to submit a

second Latin thesis for the privilege of teaching at the university. This was to be publicly defended, which he did – his *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (NE 1:387–416) – on September 27. And thus did Kant's teaching career at the university begin. It lasted almost forty-one years.

Kant's lectures and his students

Kant's life was shaped by the rhythms of the academic year, which in Prussian universities was divided by Michaelmas (September 29) and Easter (fluctuating between March 22 and April 25), with a new semester beginning about two weeks after each of these dates: winter semester the second week of October, and summer semester sometime in April or May. Most classes – and all “public lecture” classes – met four times each week.

The philosophy faculty in eighteenth-century Königsberg included eight full professors, the occasional associate professor, and a fluctuating number of unsalaried lecturers (*Privatdozenten*) whose only remuneration came at the end of the semester, collected directly from the students, normally at the rate of four thaler per head.²⁴ The salaried professors were required to offer “public lectures” (normally one each semester) that students attended for free, but they also offered various “private lectures” alongside the *Privatdozenten*, and paid for by the students directly. Kant taught as a lecturer for twenty-nine semesters (1755–70) before finally receiving the professorship in mathematics, which he quickly exchanged for the professorship in logic and metaphysics,²⁵ teaching in that capacity for fifty-three semesters (1770–96).²⁶

The records are incomplete, but Kant appears to have taught logic most often (56 times), followed by metaphysics (53) and physical geography (49). He taught these three courses nearly every semester until he became a full professor, after which he taught each of them once a year. His first course on anthropology was given in 1772–73, and every winter semester thereafter (for a total of 24 semesters). These four courses formed the core of his teaching as a full professor, with metaphysics and anthropology offered in the winter, and logic and physical geography in the summer. Kant also offered private lectures in mathematics nearly every semester at the beginning of his career, but abruptly stopped after 1763–64 (15 semesters total). Theoretical physics (21) and moral philosophy (28) were alternated during much of his career, along with natural law (12), which he first taught in 1767, and philosophical Encyclopedia²⁷ (10), which he first taught in 1767–68. Occasional courses were given on natural theology (4) and pedagogy (4).

Kant and his early biographers claim that his classrooms were always well-attended, and the records tend to bear this out, but not always. Other well-regarded instructors were teaching the same courses as Kant – for instance, there might be four or five private courses on metaphysics, apart from the public course offered by the full professor – and yet there were fewer than four

hundred students enrolled at the university.²⁸ The competition for students must have been intense, especially among the unsalaried lecturers whose income was entirely tuition-based.

If there was an overall theme to Kant's lectures, it was this: "I do not intend to teach philosophy, but rather how to philosophize."²⁹ Kant repeated this sentiment throughout his teaching career. He sought to help his students master an activity, rather than a set of dogmas – how to think, rather than what to believe. Kant "compelled his hearers to think for themselves," according to J. G. Herder, who studied with Kant in the early 1760s. Even during his first semesters as an instructor, Kant would "always remind us that he would not teach philosophy, but rather how to philosophize, etc. ... To think for oneself. ..." ³⁰

Near the end of Kant's career (April 1795), we hear that his "presentation is entirely in the tone of ordinary speech and...not very beautiful...yet everything that his delivery lacks in form is richly replaced by the excellence of the content."³¹ And at the beginning of his career (1763–64), we hear:

How interesting Kant was in his lectures. He would enter the room in a sort of enthusiasm, saying: we left off here or there. He had memorized the main ideas so deeply and vividly that the entire hour was lived in these alone; often he took little notice of the textbook over which he was lecturing.³²

Kant would bring with him his copy of the required textbook used for the class³³ and sometimes notes on loose sheets of paper. His textbooks were interleaved with blank pages so that there was ample room for his own notes, and over the years these pages were entirely filled, yet he rarely read from these notes or the textbook, but instead would engage the author in a conversation, using the text as an organizing principle and as a springboard for his own ideas.

Kant often chose a student from the audience to look in the eye while lecturing, using this as a gauge of how well he was being understood. He must have found many of those eyes discouraging. Borowski studied with him during his earliest years and noted that "a lively attentiveness was always required. Without this his lectures couldn't be understood, and one would get lost."³⁴ Kant was generally hard to understand – in content, and sometimes in delivery – and students were advised to take his easier classes first (physical geography, anthropology, moral philosophy) or else begin with an easier professor.³⁵

Kant's interests and where they led

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.* (CPrR 5:161)

Kant's philosophical project, broadly understood, was to reconcile the physical and moral worlds – the world of Newtonian mechanics with the world of persons – and doing this required some hard and innovative work in metaphysics. The lines quoted above, and found on a plaque once adorning Kant's tomb in Königsberg, come from the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). The passage continues:

I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. (CPrR 5:161–62)

These two worlds were basic facts for Kant and were captured by the names of Newton and Rousseau. Kant encountered Newton while still a teenager in Knutzen's lecture hall; he read Rousseau twenty years later in the early 1760s, and this second encounter was just as transformative as the first. Rousseau was for Kant a second Newton, as suggested in a remark written into his copy of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764):

Newton saw for the first time order and regularity combined with great simplicity, where before him was found disorder and barely paired multiplicity; and since then comets run in geometrical courses. Rousseau discovered for the first time, beneath the multiplicity of forms human beings have adopted, their deeply buried nature and the hidden law by the observation of which providence is justified. ... After Newton and Rousseau, God is justified. ... (OBS_n 9 [Ak 20:58–59])

Another remark suggests how Rousseau transformed Kant's moral landscape:

I feel a complete thirst for knowledge and an eager unrest to go further. ... There was a time when I believed that this alone could constitute the honor of mankind, and I had contempt for the rabble who know nothing. *Rousseau* brought me around. This blinding superiority disappeared, I learned to honor human beings. ... (OBS_n 7 [Ak 20:43–44])

Unfortunately, these two worlds – Newton's physical world of material bodies understood with and governed by causal laws, and Rousseau's moral world in which each human, as a free and rational being, is of inestimable worth living in a community of equals – are not easily held together. For how is freedom possible in Newton's universe? And without freedom, what becomes of the moral universe? If every event in the physical universe is the direct result of one or more previous events, then every event happens necessarily and human

freedom is an illusion. The laws of nature appeared to leave no room for the concerns of morality and the freedom it assumes.³⁶

That was one puzzle confronting Kant. A second puzzle arrived at about the same time in the form of David Hume, who famously argued that physical causation is nothing more than a subjective sense of connection between two events based on regularities encountered in the past, and that there is no objectively necessary connection between these events, which are themselves entirely “loose and separate.”³⁷ Kant viewed this as a serious problem for the natural sciences, as these are meant to be systems of objective and necessary causal laws. But if Hume is correct, such laws are merely contingent empirical generalizations.

Kant’s intellectual life has traditionally been understood as falling into two periods – the pre-critical and the critical – with the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) marking the divide. These two puzzles fell on the pre-critical side, and their solution marked the divide. The metaphysical doctrine providing the solution, and which defined his new “critical philosophy,” was what Kant called transcendental idealism, which holds that knowledge is possible only when the mind partly constitutes the thing being known.

Kant arrived at transcendental idealism by asking a deceptively simple question: “How is experience of an objective, public world possible?” He concluded that this requires the mind to structure the experienced world: first, by the sensibility passively receiving and shaping (as spatiotemporal) an unknowable given, and second, by the understanding actively structuring this spatio-temporal array into the world of physical objects. The mind is no longer a passive recipient of sensations, but instead actively structures those sensations into an objective world, and each mind does this, and does this in the same way, resulting in a public, shared world.

Transcendental idealism redraws the boundary between the knowing subject and the known object and, like any boundary, it has two sides, one humbling and one affirming. The humbling side limits our knowledge claims to the world of appearances (the phenomenal world), denying that we are capable of speculative insight into reality, thus humbling traditional metaphysics into silence. The affirming side reminds us that this phenomenal world that we *can* know just is, after all, the spatiotemporal world of material objects in which we live and play and pursue science. What is more, transcendental idealism shows us that at least some propositions about this world are *a priori* knowable, namely, the formal part contributed by the knowing self. We cannot have *a priori* knowledge of any *particular* causal laws, but we *can* know *a priori* that such laws exist to be discovered empirically. Thus Kant’s two puzzles are solved, for although the phenomenal world is entirely law-governed by causal relations, it is at least possible that there exists a noumenal (real) self that is free and thus that morality is possible.

In planning out his new system, Kant had imagined writing a methodological propaedeutic (which turned into the *Critique of Pure Reason*) followed by a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morality.³⁸ The former appeared in 1786 as the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (MFS 4:467–565), while the latter did not appear until 1797 as the two-part *Metaphysics of Morals* (MM 6:205–355, 373–493): the *Doctrine of Right* (concerning the nature of law and the state) and the *Doctrine of Virtue* (concerning the system of moral duties that bind individuals). Kant's best known and most closely studied work on moral philosophy was also the first that he published: the relatively short *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785; G 4:387–463), in which he introduced the concept of the categorical imperative and made autonomy a central feature of how we understand morality.

Responses to the *Critique*

Kant's critical philosophy did not enjoy a promising start.³⁹ The *Critique of Pure Reason* is a hard read today and it was perhaps just as hard for those living in Kant's day and speaking his language. Some of the brightest minds, such as Moses Mendelssohn and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, complained in all sincerity that they could not make sense of it.

This poor reception helped motivate Kant to write a summary introduction, the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783; Pro 4:255–383), which was further shaped by an early anonymous review written by the popular philosopher Christian Garve (and heavily edited by J. G. H. Feder), which viewed the *Critique* as belonging to the tradition of Humean skepticism and Berkeleyan idealism.⁴⁰ While Kant had only respectful words for Hume's work, he wished to sharply distinguish his own brand of idealism from what he called the "dogmatic idealism" of George Berkeley, and several additions in the 1787 second edition of the *Critique*, such as the Refutation of Idealism, were responding to the Garve/Feder review.

Not until K. L. Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786–87)⁴¹ did the *Critique* begin to receive its proper audience, and camps soon formed of Kantians and anti-Kantians. C. G. Schütz and Gottlieb Hufeland's *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (1785–1804), a daily newspaper from Jena featuring book reviews, provided an early sympathetic forum for the new Kantian philosophy, while the Wolffian J. E. Eberhard published the *Philosophisches Magazin* (1788–92) featuring articles critical of Kant, and in which Eberhard himself argued that Kant's "new" philosophy was, at best, a rehashing of Leibniz and Wolff.⁴² Kant spent the 1780s and 1790s filling out his critical philosophy and responding to critics, for which he often enlisted the aid of colleagues. Of these, most notable was Johann Schultz (1739–1805), a mathematics professor at Königsberg, whose review of Kant's 1770 *Dissertation* was found by Kant to

be so insightful that he later asked for Schultz's help in promoting the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In 1797 Kant publicly declared Schultz to be his most reliable expositor.⁴³ Not even Schultz was a blind follower, however, and problems he raised in 1785 with what is commonly viewed as a key section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely, the Transcendental Deduction, nearly led to a falling out with Kant, but also encouraged him to heavily revise that section for the second edition that appeared in 1787.⁴⁴

Completing the system: Kant's third *Critique*

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790; CJ 5:165–486) was Kant's most influential work for the generation of philosophers that followed, bringing to center stage the concepts of purpose and systematicity, and marking the emergence of aesthetics as a serious philosophical discipline. Kant himself gave the book a preeminence in his system, writing in the preface that "with this I bring my entire critical enterprise to an end" (CJ 5:170).

When Kant was writing the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), he did not have in mind to write any more critiques: one was to be quite enough. But while working up a second edition of this *Critique* (published in 1787), the material that he was developing on practical reason (primarily his defense of God, freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul as "postulates of practical reason") expanded to the point that an entirely separate treatment was in order,⁴⁵ which he then published as the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788; CPrR 5:1–164).

The origins of the third *Critique* are less straightforward, with the idea to write it falling hard on the heels of working out the second. A letter to C. G. Schütz in June 1787 (C 10:490) indicated his intentions, and six months later we find him writing in a letter to Reinhold (December 28 and 31, 1787):

I am now at work on the critique of taste, and I have discovered a new sort of a priori principles. ... For there are three faculties of the mind: the faculty of cognition, the faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire. ... This systematicity put me on the path to recognizing the three parts of philosophy ...: theoretical philosophy, teleology, and practical philosophy. ... (C 10:514–15)

Teleological explanation, where one understands nature as a system of purposes rather than a large clockwork following Newtonian laws, was now to be properly addressed by Kant.

The structure of the third *Critique* strikes the casual reader as simply odd, for Kant appears to have published two books under a single cover: the first concerns aesthetics (the nature of the beautiful and the sublime, of genius, and

of the moral dimensions of aesthetic judgment), while the second concerns primarily biology (the use of purpose or final causation in our explanation of living organisms, as well as the purpose of nature as a whole). What unites these two halves is the concept of purposiveness guiding judgment, whether that judgment is aesthetic or teleological. With aesthetic judgments, beautiful works of art or natural objects fill us with a disinterested pleasure suggesting a harmonious fit between the mind and the object contemplated; with teleological judgments of nature, organisms appear purposive in their growth and development.

Kant intended with this third *Critique* to complete his critical project by bridging the “incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible” (CJ 5:175–76). He hoped to demonstrate the possibility of these two realms forming a coherent whole, and so to bring within a single focus the starry heavens above (the domain of nature as legislated *a priori* by the understanding) and the moral law within (the domain of freedom as legislated *a priori* by reason). Unifying theoretical and practical philosophy under a single principle or system was a preoccupation passed on to those following Kant.

Kant and religion

Prussia's first patron of the Enlightenment, Friedrich the Great, died on August 17, 1786, and was succeeded by his religiously conservative nephew, Friedrich Wilhelm II. Kant's long-time admirer and ally at the Berlin court, K. A. von Zedlitz, was eventually replaced as Minister of Education and Religious Affairs by J. C. Wöllner – the man whom Friedrich the Great described as “a deceitful and intriguing parson” – and after just one week in office, on July 9, 1788, Wöllner issued a religious edict aimed at suppressing the display of Enlightenment beliefs among teachers and clerics, followed in December by a censorship edict to exert more control over religious publications. Kant himself was reprimanded on October 1, 1794, for his publication the previous year of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793; Rel 6:1–202), and perhaps also for his more recent chapter, “The End of All Things” (1794; EAT 8:327–39), which satirized the government censors. Kant was forbidden to teach or write on matters of religion because he had, in the words of the cabinet order, misused his philosophy “to distort and disparage many of the cardinal and foundational teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of Christianity” (Ak 11:525).

Kant's early life had been deeply informed by religion, and he remained steadily engaged with religious questions until the very end. In his publications, beginning with his *New Elucidation* (1755) and *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763), he criticized the ontological proofs found in Descartes and Wolff, but then developed a proof

based on the necessary conditions for the possibility of existence in general. By the time of his critical writings, however, Kant was quite certain that all such proofs for God's existence fail and that the scope of natural theology was rather narrow. In general, religious doctrine is beyond the domain of human knowledge, incapable of either proof or disproof, but since certain supersensible ideas – including God, the afterlife, and freedom of the will – have important practical implications for us, Kant found it important “to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (Bxxx).

In sum, the purpose of religion is to bolster our moral lives in community by helping to make actual the moral kingdom of ends (see, for instance, *Rel* 6:97–99). At the same time, any religion demanding assent to a creed is an affront to our humanity and a breeding ground for hypocrites. As for special revelation, Kant rejected from the very start any use of it to explain physical phenomena, and eventually morality as well. His *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755) offered an account of the universe's design based strictly on Newtonian mechanics. In addition, three chapters of 1756 sought to dissuade his readers from viewing the Lisbon earthquake, and earthquakes in general, as anything more than physical events. According to Kant, they are neither punishments meted out by an angry god, nor do they offer any clues about God's nature or existence. Kant had little patience for claims of special revelation, which he found deeply problematic – for by what criterion could we ever be certain that some event had a divine origin, much less what it might mean?⁴⁶

Personally, Kant appears to have had little use for organized religion, and perhaps just as little for a personal god. As an adult he rarely passed through a church door.⁴⁷ When a friend asked Kant near the end of his life what he thought about the afterlife, Kant replied, “Nothing certain.”⁴⁸ And Johann Brahl, a frequent dinner guest and long-time editor of the *Hartung* newspaper, noted in 1798 that, “while Kant postulates God, he does not himself believe in it,” nor does he fear death.⁴⁹

Kant is dead; long live Kant!

Two stories have come down to us of how Kant might have died, but did not; and in both cases someone had thought to murder him during one of his regular afternoon walks. The first involved a deranged butcher, whom Kant skillfully talked down. The second involved an escaped prisoner who resolved to shoot dead the first person he met, which turned out to be Kant on his walk, but the sight of the elderly professor so moved the convict that he instead shot a young boy who happened by.⁵⁰ As it turns out, Kant died peacefully in his own bed, just a month shy of his eightieth birthday, on February 12, 1804 – although for all practical purposes he had disappeared sometime

the previous year. In both body and mind, by the end Kant was an entirely wasted man.

A number of publications appeared under Kant's name during his last years. The occasional pieces were no more than a few paragraphs in length: a short preface to R. B. Jachmann's book on religion (1800; Ak 8:441), an afterword for a German-Lithuanian dictionary (1800; Ak 8:445), a public notice denouncing Gottfried Vollmer's unauthorized publication of Kant's physical geography lectures (1801; Ak 12:372). Younger colleagues edited three volumes from manuscripts – G. B. Jäsche's *Logic* (1800; Ak 9:1–150), and F. T. Rink's *Physical Geography* (1802; Ak 9:151–436) and *Pedagogy* (1803; Ak 9:439–99) – but Kant had no hand in any of these.

Among these last publications was a two-page public notice denouncing Fichte in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (August 28, 1799), written just seven years after the notice in that same newspaper in which Kant clarified the authorship of Fichte's first book. Fichte was now seen by many as Kant's proper interpreter and successor, and Kant had observed just the year before that Fichte was annoyed at him for not supporting him more publicly.⁵¹ But far from wishing to support Fichte, Kant was now quite ready to wash his hands of him and his "totally indefensible system," insisting that the critical philosophy, as set forth in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever" (C 12:370–71).⁵²

Kant was buried on February 28, 1804, just north of the church where he had been baptized eighty years earlier. This was in an arcade given over for the remains of professors, and Kant was interred at the far eastern end. Kant the man is dead, but his philosophy has lived on quite vigorously, kept alive either for its own sake or for the sake of where it leads to next.

Notes

1. I have drawn primarily from the following early sources: Johann Christoph Mortzfeld, *Fragmente aus Kants Leben. Ein biographischer Versuch* (Königsberg: Hering und Haberland, 1802); Ludwig Ernst Borowski, *Darstellung des Lebens und Charakters Immanuel Kants, Von Kant selbst genau revidirt und berichtet* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1804); Reinhold Bernard Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant geschildert in Briefen an einen Freund* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1804); Ehregott Andreas Christoph Wasianski, *Immanuel Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis seines Charakters und häuslichen Lebens aus dem täglichen Umgange mit ihm* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1804); Johann Gottfried Hasse, *Letzte Äusserungen Kants von einem seiner Tischgenossen* (Königsberg: Nicolovius, 1804); Friedrich Theodor Rink, *Ansichten aus Immanuel Kants Leben* (Königsberg: Goebbel und Unzer, 1805); and material gathered in 1804 for Samuel Gottlieb Wald's memorial address for Kant, but first published in Rudolf Reicke, *Kantiana. Beiträge zu Immanuel Kants Leben und Schriften* (Königsberg: Theile, 1860). Emil Arnoldt assessed the above and other material in his "Kants Jugend und die fünf ersten Jahre seiner Privatdocentur," *Altpreussische*

- Monatsschrift* 18 (1881): 606–86. Still definitive is Karl Vorländer, *Immanuel Kant, der Mann und das Werk*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Meiner, 1924); and the more recent (and in English) Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), both of which I have made constant use. Finally, an excellent brief developmental summary of Kant's writings can be found in Paul Guyer, *Kant* (London: Routledge, 2006), ch. 1.
2. Fichte's account in his diary is brief: "I paid an early visit to Kant, who received me without any special show of interest. I stayed for his lecture. He seemed sleepy" (GA II/2:415).
 3. As noted in Kant's letter to Borowski, dated September 16, 1791 (C 11:284).
 4. Kant, "On the Author of the Essay, 'Toward a Critique of All Revelation'" (1792; Ak 12:359–60).
 5. Vorländer, *Immanuel Kant*, 2:385. Relevant excerpts from the Kant family papers are printed in Arnoldt, "Kants Jugend," 608–9.
 6. Reported by Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel in his autobiography and reprinted in Friedrich Schlichtegroll, *Biographie des Königl. Preuß. Geheimenkriegsraths zu Königsberg, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, zum Theil von ihm selbst verfaßt* (Gotha: Perthes, 1801), 78–79.
 7. On Kant's experiences here, see Heiner F. Klemme, *Die Schule Immanuel Kants. Mit dem Text von Friedrich Schiffert über das Königsberger Collegium Fridericianum, 1741* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), esp. 32–60.
 8. Wald, quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 6.
 9. Borowski, *Darstellung*, 161–62.
 10. Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 258.
 11. Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 258–59.
 12. Wald, quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 6; a nearly verbatim quote is given by Hippel in Schlichtegroll, *Hippel*, 160.
 13. Quoted in Schlichtegroll, *Hippel*, 162.
 14. Benno Erdmann, *Martin Knutzen und seine Zeit: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Wolfischen Schule und insbesondere zur Entwicklungsgeschichte Kants* (Leipzig: Voss, 1876), 116.
 15. Heilsberg, quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 48; and Borowski, *Darstellung*, 28. See also Manfred Kuehn, "Kant's Teachers in the Exact Sciences," in *Kant and the Sciences*, ed. Eric Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11–30.
 16. Rink, *Ansichten*, 27.
 17. Borowski, *Darstellung*, 28, 29, 163–64. See also Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 10; and Kraus as quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 7.
 18. See Hans-Joachim Wasch Kies, *Physik und Physikotheologie des jungen Kant. Die Vorgeschichte seiner Allgemeinen Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987), 20n4.
 19. Both Erdmann (*Martin Knutzen*) and Wasch Kies (*Physik und Physikotheologie*) promote the view of a close relationship between Knutzen and Kant. A more skeptical position is found in Kuehn, *Kant*, 78–84; and Kuehn, "Kant's Teachers," 22–23.
 20. Wasch Kies, *Physik und Physikotheologie*, 25–27, offers the best evidence for this disputed date of Kant's departure.
 21. This early chronology is contested. For an account, see "The Hofmeister" at www.manchester.edu/kant/Students/studentHofmeister.htm.

22. This matter had already been resolved by Jean le Rond d'Alembert in 1743, although Kant had not heard the news, which presumably had not yet reached Königsberg.
23. Kant was also studying the work of academics such as Wolff, who taught at Halle and Marburg, and Crusius, who taught at Leipzig. But Lambert and Maupertuis were outside the university, as was Euler (other than for a brief stint at St. Petersburg). Hume and Rousseau were non-academics, but Kant did not read them until later.
24. Johann Friedrich Goldbeck, *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Universität zu Königsberg in Preußen, und den daselbst befindlichen Lehr- Schul- und Erziehungsanstalten* (Leipzig: Buchhandlung der Gelehrten, 1782), 102, estimates student living expenses (room, board, and firewood) at 60 thaler per year, so these tuition fees for private lectures were not trivial.
25. Kant petitioned to have his mathematics position switched with either F. J. Buck (professor of logic/metaphysics) or K. A. Christiani (professor of practical philosophy). The king chose the former course, but it appears from his letter that Kant was equally comfortable assuming either professorship.
26. Most of the data regarding Kant's teaching comes from Emil Arnoldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10 vols., ed. Otto Schöndörffer (Berlin: Cassirer, 1906–11), vols. 4–5.
27. This was an introductory course that surveyed the philosophical disciplines (logic, metaphysics, practical philosophy) and their history.
28. Franz Eulenburg, *Die Frequenz der deutschen Universitäten von ihrer Gründung bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904), 296.
29. From a recently discovered reflection of Kant's, reproduced in Steve Naragon and Werner Stark, "Ein Geschenk für Rose Burger," *Kant-Studien* 104, no. 1 (2013): 5. See also Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 28–29; Kant's "Announcement of the Program of his Lectures for the Winter Semester 1765–1766" (1765; Ak 2:307); and the Dohna logic lectures of 1792 (Ak 24:698).
30. Borowski, *Darstellung*, 84, 188. The same sentiment is found in Kant's chapter "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'" (1784; WE 8:35), and at the end of his "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" (1786; OT 8:146).
31. From a letter written by an Austrian nobleman, W. J. G. von Purgstall (1773–1812), and quoted in Karl Hugelmann, "Ein Brief über Kant," *Altpreuussische Monatsschrift* 16 (1879): 608–9.
32. C. F. Jensch, as quoted in Johann Friedrich Abegg, *Reisetagebuch von 1798* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1976), 251.
33. By government decree, professors had to use an approved textbook in each of their courses.
34. Borowski, *Darstellung* 85, 185–86.
35. Wald, quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 18. Hippel, who matriculated at the university in 1756, wrote that he took the less challenging courses from Buck before attending Kant's lectures (*Hippels sämtliche Werke*, vol. 12: *Hippels Leben*, ed. Gottlieb Hippel [Berlin: Reimer, 1835], 91). Kant was aware of these difficulties and encouraged students to attend K. L. Pörschke's lectures first in preparation (Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 30).
36. Ten years earlier, Kant considered a similar challenge – this time from the side of Wolffian rationalism. In *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755; NE 1:387–416), Kant addressed this conflict between rationalism and human freedom, but at the time sided with Wolff over Crusius's "liberty of indifference" (NE 1:398–405). Kant eventually abandoned the rationalist account

- of freedom – calling it the “freedom of the turnspit” in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (CPrR 5:217–18).
37. David Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* [later editions: *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*] (London: Millar, 1748), sect. 7 (“Of the Idea of Necessary Connection”), pt. 2. Kant first raised this worry about causal connection in his chapter *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763; ANM 2:167–204): “I fully understand how a consequence is posited by a ground in accordance with the rule of identity: analysis of the concepts shows that the consequence is contained in the ground. ... But what I would dearly like to have distinctly explained to me, however, is how one thing issues from another thing, though not by means of the law of identity” (ANM 2:202).
 38. An early version of this plan can be found in Kant’s letter to J. H. Lambert (December 31, 1765) (C 10:56).
 39. Apart from Kuehn’s biography, see also his “Kant’s Critical Philosophy and Its Reception — the First Five Years (1781–1786),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 630–63; Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Brigitte Sassen, *Kant’s Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
 40. Published in the January 19, 1782 issue of the *Göttingen Gelehrten Anzeigen*.
 41. Reinhold published his letters in installments in C. M. Wieland’s *Teutsche Merkur* (August 1786 to October 1787), and Kant publicly thanked Reinhold in his “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (1788; TeLP 8:160, 184).
 42. Kant replied to Eberhard with his “On a Discovery whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason Is to Be Made Superfluous by an Older One” (1790; NCR 8:187–251), and also enlisted his colleague Johann Schultz to critically review Eberhard’s magazine.
 43. Kant, “Against Schlettwein” (1797; Ak 12:367–68). See Johann Schultz, *Erläuterungen über des Herrn Professor Kant Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Königsberg: Dengel, 1784), and his *Prüfung der Kantischen Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2 vols. (Königsberg: Hartung, 1789).
 44. Schultz’s criticisms are found in his anonymous review of J. A. H. Ulrich, *Institutiones logicae et metaphysicae scholae suae scripsit* (Jena: Cröker, 1785), in *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* (December 13, 1785), 247–49, translated into English in Sassen, *Kant’s Early Critics*, 210–14. See also Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786; MFS 4:467–565), where he publicly answers Schultz, in part by demoting the Transcendental Deduction’s role (MFS 4:474–76).
 45. A note in the November 21, 1786 issue of the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* claims that the new edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* would also include a “Critique of Pure Practical Reason” (Ak 3:556).
 46. One instance of special revelation considered central to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – namely, God’s command that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac – was singled out for special scorn in Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798; CF 7:63).
 47. Christian Friedrich Reusch, *Kant und seine Tischgenossen. Aus dem Nachlaß des jüngsten derselben, des Geh. Ob.-Reg.-Rats Dr. Chr. F. Reusch* (Königsberg: Tag & Koch, 1848), 5.

48. Hasse, *Letzte Äusserungen*, 28–29.
49. Abegg, *Reisetagebuch*, 147. Konrad Ludwig Pörschke (1752–1812), a former student and then colleague of Kant's, told Abegg that Kant had assured him that "he had been teaching for a long time without ever doubting any of the Christian dogma, [but] gradually one piece after another fell away" (Abegg, *Reisetagebuch*, 184).
50. August Hagen, "Kantiana," *Neue Preußische Provinzial-Blätter* 6 (1848): 16.
51. Abegg, *Reisetagebuch*, 144. Abegg quotes Kant's comments about Fichte: that he has not read "all" of his writings, but that a recent book review assured Kant that he had nothing to gain from them.
52. See also Wald, quoted in Reicke, *Kantiana*, 23.

2

Kant's Legacy for German Idealism: Versions of Autonomy

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Kant's conceptions of autonomy

One way to characterize Kant's legacy to German Idealism would be to say that it is the respectability of the project of idealism itself. The early eighteenth-century idealism or "immaterialism" of George Berkeley and Arthur Collier¹ had hardly made idealism a respectable position in their time. But when Kant promulgated his "transcendental idealism" in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in 1781, having anticipated it in his inaugural dissertation *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World* of 1770, he put idealism at the center of philosophical discussion in Germany for the next fifty years, to the death of Hegel in 1831, or beyond. Indeed, it could well be argued that Kant made some form of idealism a central issue and viable position in philosophy well into the twentieth century, not only in German Neo-Kantianism, but in British and American Neo-Hegelianism and their parallels in French and Italian philosophy and beyond. To be sure, Kant immediately had to struggle to distinguish his transcendental idealism from the scorned idealism of Berkeley and his few fellows, and no one except Kant's epigones adopted his form of idealism without significant modification. But without Kant, it could hardly be imagined that such philosophers as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer would have had significant philosophical careers at all, let alone that they would have tried to express what they had to say as some form of idealism. So certainly one could try to trace Kant's legacy for the German Idealists simply by characterizing Kant's own transcendental idealism and then examining how the positions of the philosophers just mentioned resembled Kant's position and how they differed.

But here I will take a different approach, one that will allow us to think about Kant's legacy for his immediate successors in areas other than theoretical philosophy. In the final section of the published Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which Kant wrote just before the book was published in the

spring of 1790 and which thus represents his view at that moment of his entire critical enterprise, Kant summed up his work as a philosophy of “autonomy” rather than transcendental idealism. He wrote:

In regard to the faculties of soul in general, insofar as they are considered as higher faculties, i.e., as ones that contain an autonomy, the understanding is the one that contains the **constitutive** principles *a priori* for the **faculty of cognition** (the theoretical cognition of nature); for the **feeling of pleasure and displeasure** it is the power of judgment, independent of concepts and sensations that are related to the determination of the faculty of desire and could thereby be immediately practical; for the **faculty of desire** it is reason, which is practical without the mediation of any sort of pleasure, wherever it might come from, and determines for this faculty, as a higher faculty, the final end, which at the same time brings with it a pure intellectual satisfaction in the object. (CJ 5:196–97)

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* has two parts, its critiques of the powers of aesthetic judgment and teleological judgment, and this passage says nothing about the latter; but Kant immediately remedies this omission by adding,

The power of judgment's concept of a purposiveness of nature still belongs among the concepts of nature, but only as a regulative principle of the faculty of cognition, although the aesthetic judgment on certain objects (of nature or of art) that occasions it is a constitutive principle with regard to pleasure or displeasure. (CJ 5:197)

So we may take Kant to be saying in this passage as a whole that some form of autonomy is at the heart of his conceptions of theoretical cognition, practical reasoning, aesthetic judgment of both nature and art, and the teleological judgment of nature as well.

The third *Critique* was immensely influential for German thinkers coming of age in the 1790s, so another way to consider Kant's legacy for German Idealism would be to focus on the reception and influence of this book on the subsequent generation of philosophers and thinkers. But I do not want to restrict my story in that way either. Instead, in this chapter I will unpack, although perforce sketchily, the several conceptions of autonomy that the Kant of early 1790 himself thought were the keys to his philosophy, and then equally briefly describe how his successors took up these ideas of autonomy, how they responded to problems with them, and how they ultimately built upon them or rejected them. Perhaps this will allow the chapters that follow in this collection to be read, among other ways, as a collective history of the reception of Kant's conceptions of autonomy.²

To begin, we need a definition of autonomy. Kant does not offer one in the passage just quoted. Instead, his best known definition of autonomy is found in his 1785 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, where he says that “Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)” (G 4:440) and, a few pages later, that autonomy is “the will’s property of being a law to itself” (G 4:447). Kant thus characterizes autonomy of the will, the goal of morality and the philosophical specification of the common sense notion of the “good will” as the only thing of unconditional moral worth with which he begins the *Groundwork* (see G 4:393), through two ideas: the ideas of *self-given law* and of *independence from external objects*. These two ideas are not themselves independent of each other, to be sure: rather, following David Hume’s critique of any account of the derivation of truly universal causal laws from the experience of external objects alone that does not take into account the propensities of the human imagination as well, Kant assumes that no experience *dependent* solely on external objects could ever give us genuine *laws*. So if we are to have theoretical, practical, or any other laws at all, they must be in some way independent of external objects and therefore self-given, even if not everything that is self-given might be a law. Our first task, then, is to see how the idea of self-given law independent of external objects could be seen as Kant’s key idea throughout his theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy, aesthetics, and teleology.

(i) *Kant on theoretical autonomy*. In the first *Critique*, Kant had not used the term “autonomy” to characterize the central idea of either his theoretical or his practical philosophy. In the preface to the second edition, however, he had famously characterized his method as a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy, writing that if we assume “that the objects must conform to our cognition” rather than our cognition conforming to objects, an assumption that “would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus,” then we can understand “how we can know anything of them *a priori*” (Bxvi–xvii). At one level there is a disanalogy between Kant’s proposal and that of Copernicus, for the latter’s revolution was precisely to propose that the real position of the sun does *not* conform to our untutored representation of its diurnal and annual motions. But considered more abstractly, Copernicus’s hypothesis works by taking into account the motion of the observer which had been ignored in everyday life and in Ptolemaic astronomy: instead of just assuming that the position of the observer is fixed, so that apparent celestial motions must be due to the celestial objects themselves, the Copernican hypothesis considers that the observer himself, and the earth on which he stands, may be in motion, so that celestial motions may not be what they seem – for example, the position of the sun may be fixed even though it seems to change because of our own motion. That is the level at which Kant is thinking: he is supposing that we, the collective

human subject, make essential contributions to our own cognition, so that there is an element of our cognition that is *self-given*. And more specifically, Kant assumes that we contribute *laws* to our cognition, laws that we can know *a priori* or independent of the experience of objects just because they are the laws of our own minds; thus *a priori* knowledge of the laws of experience is possible because they are self-given. Copernicus himself, of course, was not in the business of explaining *a priori* knowledge of the laws of celestial motion; he was just trying to get the motions right.

Kant's list of the laws that we give to our own experience in the exercise of our cognitive autonomy is longer than he suggests in the Copernicus passage. Although I have elided this point in my quotations, Kant explicitly applies the Copernican metaphor to the forms of *intuition*, or of the immediate and singular representation of objects (see A19/B33, A320/B377), writing that

If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*; but...if the object (as an object of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility to myself. (Bxvii)

But there are laws for forming general concepts of objects as well as singular representations of them, and if we are to have *a priori* knowledge of those laws then they too must be self-given rather than dependent on external objects. And of course in the argument of the first *Critique* as a whole Kant maintains precisely that. His overall argument is that we have *a priori* knowledge of the forms in which singular objects are immediately presented to us, or of the pure forms of sensibility; *a priori* knowledge of the forms in which general concepts of objects may be formed, that is, the pure forms of understanding, the categories; and by combining them, through the schematism of the categories or their correlation with various forms of temporal or spatiotemporal intuition, *a priori* knowledge of the synthetic principles of empirical knowledge, the principles of the conservation of substance, the ubiquity of causation, and interaction among all physical objects – the ultimate *demonstranda* of Kant's theoretical philosophy. The self-given laws of sensibility and of understanding do differ in the scope of their potential subjects: Kant is prepared to limit the laws of spatiotemporal form, or the law that all intuitions must have temporal or spatiotemporal form, to the human subject as we know it, while he is prepared to allow that the categories or pure forms of the understanding are valid for *any* "discursive" subject, any kind of subject that might arrive at cognition by applying concepts to intuitions, even if their forms of intuition might be different from our human forms. In spite of this difference, however, both kinds of thought, the forms of intuition and the forms of understanding or thought, are self-given, given by us to ourselves rather than by the

ultimate objects of our experience, and it is thus our autonomy in the legislation of these laws that makes our *a priori* knowledge of them possible.

The reference to the ultimate objects of our experience leads to the aspect of Kant's philosophy that would present the greatest challenge to almost all of his Idealist successors, with the notable exception of Schopenhauer. Just as Copernicus held that there is a real difference between the actual rest of the sun and its merely apparent motion, so Kant also held that there is a real difference between the sensible form of our experience and its ultimate objects, things as they are in themselves rather than things as they appear to us. While many prominent recent interpreters have tried to avoid ascribing this claim to Kant, arguing instead that he merely distinguished between two *conceptions* of objects, one that *includes* what Henry Allison calls our "epistemic conditions" or the necessary conditions of our experience of objects, more specifically the spatial and temporal form of our representations of singular objects, and one that *excludes* those conditions, apparently just as a way of reminding us that spatial and temporal form and location *are* the necessary conditions of our experience, it should be clear that in distinguishing between appearances and things in themselves Kant is distinguishing not merely two conceptions of objects but objects as they really are from how they necessarily appear to us. Kant does not say that our *concept* of things as they are in themselves omits their spatiality and temporality, but rather that space and time represent "no property at all of any things in themselves nor any relation of them to each other, i.e., no determination of them that attaches to objects themselves and that would remain even if one were to abstract from all subjective conditions of intuition" (A26/B42; cf. A32–33/B49). His position is precisely that spatial and temporal form are self-given and independent of the ultimate objects of experience, and that our *a priori* knowledge of spatial and temporal form can be explained *only* on that assumption: as he puts it in his most fundamental explanation of his transcendental idealism, if our intuitions of spatial and temporal form were not autonomous, self-given independently of external objects, but were merely empirical intuitions of properties or relations objects have independently of laws that we give to their appearance, then

no universally valid, let alone apodictic proposition could ever come from [intuition]: for experience can never provide anything of this sort...If, therefore, space (and time as well) were not a mere form of your intuition that contains *a priori* conditions under which alone things could be outer objects for you, *which are nothing in themselves without these subjective conditions*, then you could make out absolutely nothing synthetic and *a priori* about outer objects. (A48/B65–66, second emphasis added; see also Pro 4:287–88).³

Yet Kant also holds that, although we cannot *know* how things are in themselves through our forms of intuition, we can at least *think* or *conceive* them by means of our forms of understanding,⁴ the categories. Even though such thought cannot amount to knowledge, because general representations such as concepts must ultimately be linked to particular objects through immediate intuitions to yield complete knowledge rather than mere thought, and our intuitions are restricted to how things appear rather than revealing how they are in themselves, such thought is still coherent.

And at the same time, Kant never doubted that we know that things independent of us – things in themselves – *exist* and *affect* us, that is, in some sense are responsible for our experiences even if we cannot call that responsibility causation, which is a specifically spatiotemporal relation (temporal succession in accordance with a rule and spatial proximity as well, even if the latter is mediated through an undetectable ether).⁵ It never occurred to Kant to *doubt* the existence of things in themselves, presumably because the argument for transcendental idealism did not *begin* by simply positing things in themselves and then, in Cartesian style, raising a general doubt about the possibility of knowledge of such things, but in Kant's view just reassigned spatiality and temporality from perfectly ordinary objects to our own autonomy, leaving their existence untouched, in order to explain our *a priori* knowledge of the forms of their spatiality and temporality. It was only when pressed by objections to the first edition of the first *Critique* that his transcendental idealism was just the old idealism of Berkeley poured into a new bottle that Kant decided that he needed an explicit refutation of that sort of idealism and of Cartesian skepticism as well, which had not previously been a special worry for him.⁶ He attempted to provide this refutation in the second edition of the *Critique* by means of an argument that our temporal determination of our own experience presupposes the conception of it as dependent upon objects independent of our representation of them, which independence we *represent* by representing these objects in space even though we know that space is not actually a feature of such objects as they are in themselves (see B274–76, Bxxxix–xli; Pro 4:288–89).⁷

As previously suggested, Kant's transcendental idealism put the issue of idealism at the center of subsequent German philosophy, but it was far from being universally accepted. Schopenhauer accepted both Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts and his distinction between appearances and things in themselves, but Hegel rejected both and pointedly named his own position "absolute idealism" to make it clear that it overcame both distinctions.⁸ Fichte and Schelling took intermediate positions. But before we consider what these subsequent thinkers did with Kant's conception of autonomy in theoretical philosophy, let us look at how Kant deployed the idea of autonomy in practical philosophy, aesthetics, and teleology.

(ii) *Kant on practical autonomy.* Practical philosophy is of course the home of Kant's conception of autonomy and the source of our definition of it. But that does not mean that his use of this concept in this context is transparent. As we saw at the outset, Kant's definition of autonomy refers to law that is self-given rather than given by an external object. Of course, an object that is not an agent could not directly give a law to an agent; what Kant means is that the law is not given to the agent by his own inclination toward an external object. Inclination could not in any case give a law, either to one agent or to all: it is too fickle, sometimes there but sometimes not, there in some agents but not in others. This is why Kant rejects the desire for happiness as the basis for morality: happiness might sound like something that everyone wants all the time, and thus as a possible basis for a law, but in fact it is only a term for the collective satisfaction of the individual desires of one or all, and those are too variable and potentially incompatible to provide the basis for a law. In opening his argument in both the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant then infers that since any end or "matter" given by inclination is inadmissible as a basis for a genuine law for practical reason, the only alternative is that the law require nothing but conformity to the form of law itself, that is, universal validity: "Since I have deprived the will of every impulse that could arise for it from obeying some law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions as such with universal law," he writes in the *Groundwork* (G 4:402); or, more precisely, as he writes some pages later, "nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such" (G 4:421); and in the second *Critique* he similarly argues that since "All practical principles that presuppose an *object* (matter) of the faculty of desire as the determining ground of the will are, without exception, empirical and can furnish no practical laws" (CPrR 5:21), then "If a rational being is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form" (CPrR 5:27), that is, the requirement of universal validity or universalizability for particular maxims, whatever their content might otherwise be. The idea of autonomy seems to be simply that, since inclination or matter is neither self-given nor suitable for law, all that is left to be both law and self-given is the mere form of law, the requirement of universalizability itself, and the autonomous, good will is simply one that imposes that requirement on its otherwise contingent inclinations or desires.

This conception of autonomy was bound to raise the hackles of those, like Hegel, who were suspicious of all of Kant's dualisms, including the dualism between form and matter and between necessity and contingency; in particular, Hegel charged that rather than the necessity of Kant's requirement of universalizability elevating the modality of maxims that would otherwise be expressions of merely contingent inclination, the contingency of inclination

would drag down the requirement of universalizability, so that any maxim that anyone was willing to universalize for any reason would then count as moral. Or so at least Hegel's famous charge of "empty formalism" can be interpreted.⁹ And it sometimes left Kant himself floundering to explain how morality could actually get an object or goal, as he does in some expositions of his concept of the highest good. For example, even quite late, in the preface to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), he suggests that morality would not have a goal at all, thus that there would be nothing for us to do as moral agents, were it not for a merely *natural* desire for happiness which we can act upon as long as it is *constrained* by the requirement that our maxims, whatever else might be true of them, be universalizable (Rel 6:5).

However, from the outset Kant had also had a deeper or more complete conception of the fundamental principle of morality, which might be seen as offering a specification of the matter or object as well as the form of morality on which that object as well as the form can still be seen as self-given. This is the conception of the fundamental principle of morality that Kant formulated in his lectures on ethics from the mid-1770s on, and which continued to inform his thought even as his terminology changed (and the term "autonomy" itself was introduced). In the lectures, Kant stated that the "supreme rule" of morality is that "freedom be consistent with itself" and that the "essential ends of mankind" are "the conditions under which alone the greatest use of freedom is possible, and under which it can be self-consistent." "The *principium* of all duties is thus the conformity of the use of freedom" with the requirement of the greatest and self-consistent use of freedom (LE 27:346). Or as Kant formulates it in a *Reflexion* from the same period,

The *principium* of **moral judgment** (the *principium* of the conformity of freedom with reason in general, i.e., lawfulness in accordance with universal conditions of consensus) is the rule for the subordination of freedom under the *principium* of the universal consensus of freedom with itself (with regard to oneself as well as other persons). (Ak 19:184 [R6864])

For example, the requirement of morality "in all self-regarding actions" is to "so behave that any use of powers is compatible with the greatest use of them," or to act with respect to one's own powers and potentials only in ways that preserve or enhance one's freedom to use them, and never in ways that, even if they seem free when considered in isolation, nevertheless destroy or limit rather than enhance one's future freedom; and the requirement of morality with regard to actions that can affect the external use of their freedom of choice by others is, as Kant formulates it much later in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, that "Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of

each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law" (MM 6:230). What morality requires is that the form of law, or requirement of universalizability, be applied not just to any random preference or maxim, but to freedom itself, that it is freedom itself that is universalized.¹⁰

To be sure, freedom as an object of choice is still abstract or we might say second-order: freedom can only be exercised in choosing to do *something rather than something else*, and there would still seem to be something contingent in every exercise of freedom, in one's choosing to use one's freedom to do just *this*, even if one is concerned to make sure that one's use of freedom is consistent not only with doing this, whatever it is, but also with freedom itself, that is, with one's own freedom over the rest of one's life and everyone else's as well. But still, thinking of what morality requires in this way avoids what Hegel seems to have been worried about, that one could universalize any maxim whatsoever by suitably tinkering with one's preferences; whether a proposed maxim or course of action is consistent with the greatest possible use of freedom, one's own and everyone else's, is a question with a real answer. And one can see this conception of what morality requires as satisfying Kant's definition of autonomy: the requirement that every use of freedom be consistent with every other is formal, or a law, but it is not the mere external object or the inclination for any particular object that gives us this law, but our essence as beings who are both free and rational, and in this sense this law can be regarded as self-given.¹¹ Or, the only law that free and rational beings can give themselves is that they all ought to be as free as they can equally be. Thus, as free and rational beings, we give the law of maximizing freedom to ourselves, whatever our other desires might be. The idea that in making our own freedom a law for ourselves it is our own essence that is speaking to us is in fact present very early in Kant: as he suggests in his notes in his own copy of the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, thus as early as 1764 or 1765, to act in a way that denies or undermines the continuing freedom of oneself or others is "absurd and perverse," for it is to assert that a being that is essentially free is not (OBS_n 12 [Ak 20:93]).

Of course, none of Kant's immediate successors could have been familiar with the material from which I have just been quoting, since none of it was published until late in the nineteenth or in the twentieth century. Yet all of the Idealists struggled to develop such an idea, although some, like Fichte, sensed that something like that was what Kant had been aiming at, while others, like Hegel, thought that they were criticizing Kant the pure formalist in developing a more complex view of autonomy. Only Schopenhauer rejected the conception of freedom as a foundation for morality altogether, or, perhaps better, transformed it into a metaphysical conception very different from Kant's. But again, before we can come back to that, we need to say some more about the remaining applications of the concept of autonomy in Kant's ethics and teleology.

(iii) *Kant on aesthetic autonomy*. Can Kant's introductory subsumption of his theory of aesthetic judgment under the rubric of autonomy be understood in terms of the definition of autonomy that we have adopted from his moral philosophy, that it involves a self-given law? Yes, although this requires some interpretive effort. Following the Introduction, Kant invokes the concept of autonomy twice in the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment." The first use of the concept comes in the General Remark at the end of the Analytic of the Beautiful. Here Kant says that "for the **imagination** to be **free** and yet **lawful by itself**, i.e., that it carry autonomy with it, is a contradiction," although a contradiction that can be averted once we accept his explanation of aesthetic response, that is, the source of our pleasure in beauty and the ground for our judgments of taste, that is, once we see that

a lawfulness without law and a subjective correspondence of the imagination to the understanding without an objective one – where the representation [would be] related to a determinate concept of object – are consistent with the free lawfulness of the understanding (which is also called purposiveness without an end) and with the peculiarity of a judgment of taste. (CJ 5:241)

The second occurrence comes in the run-up to the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments (CJ §§30–40), where Kant sums up the result of his previous analysis of judgments of taste by means of four moments under the rubric of two "peculiarities" instead, and describes the first of them by saying that "Taste makes claim merely to autonomy. To make the judgments of others into the determining ground of one's own would be heteronomy" (CJ 5:282). These passages express several different thoughts, which need to be unpacked.

The first passage suggests that Kant's fundamental conception of aesthetic response as a free yet harmonious play between imagination and understanding can be understood as a kind of autonomy. It can also be understood, as Kant says, as a kind of purposiveness, a purposiveness without an end. What does he mean by this, and then what does he mean by calling this state of mind a kind of autonomy? What Kant means by calling this state of mind one of a purposiveness without an end cannot be that the state is entirely aimless, because it is pleasurable and, as he has earlier made clear, all pleasure is connected with the satisfaction of some end or other (see CJ 5:187). Instead, what he means is that our pleasure in beauty arises from the fact that, in an experience of beauty, the imagination satisfies our general aim in cognition – the unification of our manifold of sensibility – without the subsumption of the object of experience under any specific concept of an end, whether a merely prudential end, one of agreeableness, or a moral end, one of goodness (see CJ §§3–5).¹² This may be understood as the independence or autonomy of the imagination in the

experience of beauty from any concept of a determinate prudential or moral end, and at least the first of these, the independence of our response to beauty from any concept of a prudential or agreeable end, may in turn be understood as the independence of our response to beauty from any external object of inclination, which as we saw is part of Kant's definition of autonomy in the moral context. In his exposition of the first "moment" of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, that "**taste** is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction **without any interest**" (CJ 5:211), Kant also states that the pleasure in an experience of beauty is independent of the *existence* of its object and connected only with the "mere contemplation (intuition or reflection)" of or on "the mere representation of the object" (CJ 5:204–5). This may not really be a different point from the independence of aesthetic experience from a concept of a determinate end. For Kant explicates his claim not by saying that our representation of an object is independent of its actual existence, but rather by saying that in a judgment of taste we do not care about any use that *depends* on the actual existence of an object, a form of interest that would be mediated by a concept of the purpose of the object. Rather, we care only how our imagination responds to our representation of it, whether with a free play that nevertheless satisfies the understanding's interest in "lawfulness" or unity and is pleasurable for that reason, or not.

In the experience of beauty, then, the imagination is autonomous in that it is independent of any concept of its object, or at least any determinate concept of its possible purpose, and it is in a certain sense independent of the object itself, being concerned only with our representation of it. More generally, our response to beauty, or even beauty itself, may also be considered "self-given," since its core is our pleasure in an object, and as Kant claims in the very first section of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, pleasure is never considered a property of the object, but rather of the subject (CJ 5:202–3).¹³ The second passage previously quoted adds a further dimension to Kant's conception of aesthetic autonomy. What Kant means by autonomy here is that an individual subject can make a judgment of taste only on the basis of her own actually felt pleasure in an object, thus independent of the judgment of others, but that in making such a judgment she nevertheless claims on the basis of her own pleasure nothing less than "the assent of **everyone**," as if her judgment "were objective" (CJ 5:281). In the terms of the second "moment" of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, in making a judgment of taste one speaks with a "universal voice" (CJ 5:216), not predicting that under actual conditions everyone else *will* agree with one in finding the object of one's judgment pleasurable but rather claiming that under optimal conditions they *should*, or even "demanding" that they should (CJ 5:213). Or, in the terms of the fourth "moment," in making a judgment of taste one attributes an "exemplary" necessity to one's own pleasure in the object, "a necessity of the assent of **all** to a judgment that is regarded as an

example of a universal rule that one cannot produce" (CJ 5:237) – because to actually produce a rule would be to subsume the object under a determinate concept after all. In this regard, a judgment of taste is autonomous in that it is self-given, independent not only from a concept or even the existence of its object but also from the actual responses of others, yet it also promulgates a sort of law, the claim that everyone ought to experience the same pleasure in the object that one does oneself. Thus both criteria of Kant's concept of autonomy are satisfied in the case of taste.

But how is this possible? Kant's answer to this constitutes his deduction of judgments of taste: since one's own pleasure in a beautiful object is due not to any mere physiological agreeableness or other idiosyncrasy but to the free play of one's imagination and understanding, and those are cognitive faculties that one shares with every other normal human being, one can justifiably suppose that insofar as one is correct in ascribing one's own pleasure to that source – a falsifiable assumption, to be sure (see CJ 5:237) – then one is also correct in supposing that others will feel the same pleasure as long as their imaginations and understandings are free to operate under optimal conditions like one's own. Kant's supposition that under optimal conditions everyone's cognitive capacities must act in the same way is dubious.¹⁴ But that point need not be pursued here, as it was not central to the German Idealist reception of Kant's aesthetics.

Instead, having said what aesthetic autonomy means for Kant, I now want to say what it does not mean. It does not mean what later thinkers have meant by the "autonomy of art" or "art for art's sake," that art or the aesthetic more generally has nothing to do with morality, that the creation of art and the reception of art or of nature insofar as it too can be aesthetic is free from all constraints from the side of morality. On the contrary, Kant makes it clear from the outset that in spite of the freedom of the determination of aesthetic response by concepts, including moral concepts, or indeed precisely because of that freedom, aesthetic experience turns out to be morally significant, or morally propaedeutic. As he says immediately following the passage from the final section of the Introduction with which we began,

The spontaneity of the play of the faculties of cognition, the agreement of which contains the ground of this pleasure [in beauty] makes that concept [of beauty] suitable for mediating the connection of the domain of the concept of nature with the concept of freedom in its consequences, in that the latter at the same time promotes the receptivity of the mind for the moral feeling. (CJ 5:197)

This is partially explicated by what Kant then says at the very end of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment," namely that the beautiful is

the symbol of the morally good because of a number of analogies between the experience of beauty and the moral determination of the will, above all that “the **freedom** of the imagination...in the judging of the beautiful” is analogous with “the freedom of the will...conceived as the agreement of the latter with itself in accordance with universal laws of reason” (CJ 5:354) – that is, to say, autonomy.

And Kant fills out what he means along the way. First, while no concept of moral goodness is in the first instance part of the content of the simplest kind of experience of beauty, the beauty of individual natural objects like tropical birds or flowers, the power of one’s own moral will is in some sense, whether fully conscious or not, part of the content of the experience of at least one form of the sublime, the dynamical sublime (CJ 5:§28); and Kant then adds that the experience of the “beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest,” while the experience of the sublime prepares us “to esteem it, even contrary to our (sensible) interest” (CJ 5:267). Once we concede that there is any role for feelings in the moral determination of the will, as Kant does in the *Doctrine of Virtue* of the *Metaphysics of Morals*,¹⁵ then we must acknowledge that aesthetic experience is conducive to moral conduct.

Kant further argues in his theory of “aesthetic ideas” that morally significant ideas are typically part of the content of works of art, although ones that the imagination plays with in our experience of such works rather than ones that fully determine our experience of those works (CJ 5:§49). Having argued that, he even goes so far as to say that even natural beauty “can in general be called the **expression** of aesthetic ideas” (CJ 5:320). Kant does not explain this remark, but perhaps what he has in mind is that it is natural for us to read moral content even into objects that are not themselves moral agents, and that since in any case aesthetic properties may be triggered by the properties of objects but are never literally in objects the way their objective properties are but are only artifacts of our experience of objects, there is nothing to stand in the way of our doing this with morally significant ideas. In any case, whatever argument Kant might have had in mind, his claim that all beauty is an expression of ideas was certainly to become central to the aesthetics of German Idealism, although in very different ways at the hands of, for example, Hegel and Schopenhauer.

Finally, Kant makes it clear that our response to art in particular is not isolated by our overriding interest in morality, but is constrained by it:

In all beautiful art what is essential consists in the form, which is purposive for observation and judging, where the pleasure is at the same time culture and disposes the spirit to ideas, hence makes it receptive to several sorts of pleasure and entertainment – not in the matter of sensation (the charm or the emotion), where it is aimed merely at enjoyment, which leaves behind nothing in the idea, and makes the spirit dull, the object by and by loathsome,

and the mind, because it is aware that its disposition is contrapurposive in the judgment of reason, dissatisfied with itself and moody.

If the beautiful arts are not combined, whether closely or at a distance, with moral ideas, which alone carry with them a self-sufficient satisfaction, then the latter is their ultimate fate. (CJ 5:326)

In Kant's view, human beings are never indifferent to morality, and their enduring satisfactions must always be permissible in the eyes of morality and even conducive to morality. Pleasure in the mere form of objects or even in mere sensation or emotion, the pleasures of mere agreeableness, may be fine for a moment, but if there is no moral benefit to such experience we will ultimately turn against it. To keep our interest, art and perhaps nature itself must express moral ideas, even though to please us it must also always trigger some free play of our imagination. For Kant, the autonomy of aesthetic experience is not itself autonomous from moral autonomy proper but must ultimately combine with it.

(iv) *Kant on the autonomy of teleology.* Before we can turn to a brief sketch of the fate of Kant's ideas of autonomy in German Idealism, we must conclude this section with a brief account of his conception of the autonomy of teleological judgment. Kant's basic idea in his mature critique of teleology is that we can only understand organisms by conceiving of them as purposive rather than merely mechanical, indeed as both internally and externally purposive. That is, we cannot understand all the properties and powers of organisms – paradigmatically, their capacities for growth, self-maintenance, and reproduction (see CJ 5:§64) – as effects of their parts as causes, but must see the parts themselves as also caused by purposiveness in the whole, and that in turn as the product of an external designer, for which there is no place within nature but which we must posit as outside or behind nature, not as a world-soul but as God (see especially CJ 5:§73). Yet we also recognize that this way of conceiving of organisms is necessitated by the restriction of our understanding to mechanical causation, so at the same time as we recognize that we must understand objects teleologically we also recognize that this is because of the nature and limits of our own cognitive capacities and not because of the nature of reality itself that we must so understand objects.

We might say that this distinction between how we know we must conceive of things and yet how we can recognize that our way of conceiving of them might not represent them as they really are replicates Kant's fundamental distinction between appearances and things in themselves, except in this case the distinction is necessitated by limits on the explanatory power of the understanding, specifically its mechanical conception of causation, rather than by our synthetic *a priori* knowledge of space and time. Further, once we have linked the purposiveness of some things – organisms in nature – to an intelligent

designer, then it is also natural for us to ascribe the design of all of nature to that designer (CJ 5:§67), and further to attribute an ultimate end or purpose to that design. But then we can understand that too only from our own point of view, but now that of practical rather than theoretical reason: once we posit a designer for all of nature, we need to posit an unconditioned end, but the only such end we can conceive is our own good will, or complete moral development. So we are led from our experience of organisms through our inability to understand them mechanically to a view of the world as aiming at our own moral perfection (CJ 5:§84). Of course, we cannot conceive of our own moral perfection as being achieved by natural means; rather, we can conceive of it as being achieved only through our own free choice, so we can only conceive of nature as an arena suitable for the realization of our own moral vocation, not as a mechanism that can itself realize or guarantee the realization of our moral vocation.¹⁶

Kant offers numerous descriptions of what we might call the epistemological status of this view, and we can practically pick one at random from the pages of the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment.” Here is one:

It cannot be treated for the determining power of judgment, i.e., not merely can it not be determined whether or not things of nature, considered as natural ends, require for their generation a causality of an entirely special kind (that in accordance with intentions), but this question cannot even be raised, because the objective reality of the concept of a natural end is not demonstrable by means of reason at all (i.e., it is not constitutive for the determining, but is merely regulative for the reflecting power of judgment). (CJ 5:396)

What is necessary for us to conceive of objects of experience at all and thus is ineliminable from our conception of them is constitutive, while what we recognize as structuring our “reflection” on objects but not our most fundamental concepts of objects themselves is regulative, guiding our thought in various ways but not constituting our thought. And I say “in various ways” because it is in fact Kant’s argument in the second half of the third *Critique* that the conception of the purposiveness of organisms and of the whole of nature is regulative for us in two ways: it regulates or guides our scientific inquiry, but also our efforts to be moral, or it at least makes both of these rational for creatures like us. With this sort of assessment in hand, we can then say that for Kant the teleological perspective is clearly *self-given*, insofar as it reflects features of our own thought that we do not take to be indicative of the nature of reality itself. And while we might not want to say that what we give to ourselves in the teleological perspective is a single law like the moral law that we give to ourselves in moral autonomy, we might say that what we give to

ourselves in the teleological perspective is the possibility of *seeking* or *pursuing* law, the possibility of seeking laws for the behavior of organisms at one stage of teleological thought and of nature as a whole at the next, and the possibility of pursuing the moral law, or seeking to *realize* it, at the ultimate stage of teleological thought. So in these ways we can see how to think of teleological judgment too as a kind of autonomy.

With this sketch of Kant's philosophy as a whole as a system of autonomy, we can now look briefly at the reception of this conception of autonomy in German Idealism.

The fate of Kant's conceptions of autonomy in German Idealism

(i) *Theoretical autonomy*. German Idealism is conventionally thought to have begun in response to F. H. Jacobi's objection that Kant's theoretical philosophy makes no sense either with the assumption of the existence of things in themselves or without it, which might be thought of as an objection that Kant's conception of theoretical autonomy is not complete without the assumption of things independent from thought yet not compatible with the existence of such things. In Jacobi's words,

However much it may be contrary to the spirit of Kantian philosophy to say of the objects that they make *impressions* on the senses and that in this way they bring about representations, still it is not possible to see how even the Kantian philosophy could find entry into itself without this presupposition.... For even the word "sensibility" is without any meaning, unless we understand by it a distinct real intermediary between one real thing and another, an actual means *from* something *to* something else.... I must admit that I was held up not a little by this difficulty in my study of the Kantian philosophy, so much so that for several years running I had to start from the beginning over and over again with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, because I was incessantly going astray on this point, viz. that *without* that presupposition I could not enter into the system, but *with* it I could not stay within it.¹⁷

Just the last clause of this is usually cited, but we can see from its context that what Jacobi meant was that without the assumption of things in themselves ontologically distinct from the self we can make no sense of the assumption that objects act on our sensibility to provide the materials of cognition, but that this assumption is incompatible with Kant's position that, as theoretically autonomous, the self must be the source of *all* its cognition, that, as Kant had put it in his statement of the Copernican revolution in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique* (in the same year as Jacobi's work), objects must conform "to the constitution of our faculty of intuition" rather than vice versa (Bxvii).

Kant always met such criticism with incomprehension, because in his view he had argued against the spatiotemporality of things in themselves, but said nothing to question either their existence or their "affection" of our sensibility. He never seems to have realized that he had caused (pardon the pun) at least some of the confusion by putting the spatiotemporal relationship of cause and effect rather than purely logical relationship of ground and consequence on the table of (unschematized) categories, thus apparently depriving himself of the latter as a category for the disputed affection of our sensibility by things in themselves. But German Idealism may be regarded as having taken Jacobi's criticism very seriously and as having looked for ways to avoid it, at least in the cases of Fichte and Hegel, by either expanding the conception of the theoretical autonomy of the self or the conception of the self itself.

Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* may be regarded as a radicalization of Kant's foundation of his theoretical philosophy on the transcendental unity of apperception. For Kant, this was a purely formal notion, leading to no Cartesian inference to the existence of a substantial self or soul, as the Paralogisms of Pure Reason made clear, and grounding only the formal structure within which empirical intuitions given by the non-self were to be organized into representations of determinate objects. But for Fichte, "*The self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence*" (WL 99 [GA I/2:261], emphasis in original), and Fichte insists through his conception of "intellectual intuition" that the self knows itself as it really is, not merely as it appears; and further he brings things in themselves apparently other than the self into the sphere of the self through his claim that "Every opposite, so far as it is so, is so absolutely, by virtue of an act of the self, and for no other reason. Opposition in general is posited by the self" (WL 103 [GA I/2:266]). It may be debated whether by this Fichte means that the self is itself responsible for the *idea* of its opposite, a formal notion that is to be given content by an agency genuinely distinct from the self, or that the self is actually responsible for the content of its opposite; but whatever exactly he means, it is clear that he is trying to expand the sphere of the autonomy of the self and to undercut the charge of outright incompatibility between the autonomy of the self and the efficacy upon it of an external thing in itself that Jacobi had brought.

By contrast, Schelling at the moment of his greatest influence, the period from the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* of 1797 to the *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, might be regarded as trying to undercut Jacobi's objection by naturalizing Kant's transcendental idealism, that is, by having the formative power of the self emerge from knowable nature rather than from the obscurity of the in-itself in his philosophy of nature, and then having the self create for itself what clearly must be a representation of nature rather than nature itself in his system of transcendental idealism. In Schelling's view, it is nature that "gives the body a soul" and must thus be responsible for its

properties, including its cognitive powers (IPN 40 [SW I/2:53]), but the mind in turn that makes nature visible. Or as he puts it, "Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature," and once we realize this, "then, in the absolute identity of Mind *in us* and Nature *outside us*, the problem of the possibility of a Nature external to us must be resolved" (IPN 42 [SW I/2:56]). That is, once we realize that the autonomy of thought is itself a product of nature, then there can be no problem of incompatibility between the autonomy of thought and the agency of nature, because the former itself emerges from the latter. Or perhaps from something that we should no longer call nature in our ordinary sense, because that connotes opposition to mind, but from something that we must think of as an "absolute" that is neither *merely* "Nature as Nature" nor *merely* "ideal world as ideal world" but a whole that contains both – this view is what Schelling calls "Idealism" (IPN 50 [SW I/2:67]). Idealism in this sense is certainly remote from Berkeleyan idealism, though perhaps a development of Kant's transcendental idealism if we take seriously his suggestion in the Paralogisms that ultimately it may be the same kind of thing that underlies both the appearance of the self and the appearance of external objects, so there is no danger that the two cannot communicate with each other because they are "after all not so different in kind from one another" (B428).

Hegel's solution to Jacobi's problem with Kant's conception of theoretical autonomy may be regarded as more Fichtean than Schellingian, although not without traces of the latter. That is, Hegel's insistence that all knowledge is ultimately "Spirit" coming to know itself, or that "absolute knowing" is the self-knowledge of "Spirit," may be regarded as a successor to Fichte's idea that the self posits both its own existence and that of its opposite, but as overcoming what might be a focus on the individual subject in Fichte's theory. Instead, Hegel emphasizes the collective subject of humankind throughout its history from which any individual subject momentarily emerges, an idea that might be seen as influenced by Schelling's conception of the ground out of which both nature and mind emerge. But perhaps nature itself remains more of a surd, an undigested other, for Hegel than it does for either Fichte or Schelling. Hegel begins his philosophy of nature in the *Encyclopedia* by saying that "Nature confronts us as a riddle and a problem, whose solution both attracts and repels us: attracts us, because Spirit is presaged in Nature; repels us, because Nature seems an alien existence, in which Spirit does not find itself" (EPN 3 [HW 9:12]). Hegel proposes to proceed by tracing the emergence of our *idea* of nature, but it is not entirely clear whether this is meant to resolve the puzzle with which he begins or to sidestep it, whether his solution is ultimately Kantian, limning our representation of nature while leaving nature as it is in itself beyond our ken, or Fichtean, reducing nature to a projection of our own thought.¹⁸

Hegel's obscurity on this point might have been one reason for Schopenhauer's animosity to him, while Schopenhauer's own resolution of the problem of knowledge is closer to that of Schelling, whom Schopenhauer at least occasionally concedes is not as bad as Fichte and Hegel.¹⁹ That is, Schopenhauer characterizes the ground of all existence in naturalistic terms, as like our own will but our own will understood naturalistically rather than rationalistically, as a seething cauldron of unsatisfiable desires and urges rather than an expression of pure practical reason, and he then regards all principles of thought – the fourfold expressions of the Principle of Sufficient Reason – and all concepts or “Platonic Ideas” as mere objectifications of this will. Schopenhauer insists that he is the sole true heir of Kant, and takes Kant's insistence that space, time, and causality are mere forms of sensibility and thought for granted, which can raise a Jacobian question of how he can then purport to know so much about the will as it is in itself as the ground of all appearance. But perhaps it makes more sense to think of him as the heir of Schelling rather than Kant, starting with a conception of nature and then of thought as emerging from it through the fourfold forms of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and ideas of the objectifications of the will rather than as having to infer the former from the latter. We might also say that by the time we get to Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation* (although this, published at the end of 1818, is actually almost simultaneous with Hegel's 1817 *Encyclopedia*), the Kantian idea of the autonomy of thought has run its course. Certainly that is the case in Schopenhauer's radical departure from Kant's conception of the autonomy of practical reason. So let us now turn to that subject.

(ii) *Practical autonomy*. Fichte's *System of Ethics* (1798) is an explicit attempt to generate moral philosophy from the concept of autonomy (SE 58 [GA I/5:67]), although from a conception of autonomy that perhaps stresses more the independence of moral action than its lawfulness, or that emphasizes that morality is self-given without equally stressing that it requires self-given law. Fichte states that “the principle of morality is the necessary thought of the intellect that it ought to determine its freedom in accordance with the concept of self-sufficiency, absolutely and without exception” (SE 60 [GA I/5:69]). What Fichte means by self-sufficiency is the independence of the will from mere stimulus (*Antrieb*) or “feeling as such” as “the sheer, immediate relation of what is objective in the I to what is subjective therein” (SE 46 [GA I/5:57]); self-sufficiency can also be understood as the independence of the will from anything other than itself. In one of Fichte's numerous formulations, “we are supposed to determine ourselves consciously, purely and simply through concepts, indeed, in accordance with the concept of absolute self-activity” (SE 52 [GA I/5:61]). Like Kant, he thinks of the determination of the will by feelings or impulses – or inclinations, in Kant's terminology – as sheer passivity, and conceives of morality as requiring instead self-activity, spontaneity, or in a word, autonomy.

But Fichte is so busy stressing that morality requires sheer self-activity that he is less clear than Kant about why the principle of *self-activity* or *self-determination* can only be the *law* requiring the concession of *equal* freedom to all others, thus about what the connection between freedom or self-giveness and a self-given *law* recognizable as the moral law actually is. Perhaps the inference, like Kant's argument for the categorical imperative, is supposed to be obvious that once we have eliminated mere impulse from the determination of moral action on the ground that it is merely passive rather than active then we have also eliminated any ground for self-preferential treatment: it is our passive impulses that distinguish us from one another rather than our capacity for sheer self-activity, in which we are identical. But if this is what Fichte has in mind, it could surely use a more explicit statement. Otherwise Fichte's ethics might seem open to an analogue of Hegel's charge against Kant: as Hegel's charge of "empty formalism" was that in fact any maxim can be universalized, thus that Kant's moral law of universalizability leaves entirely contingent what maxim any individual actually adopts, so Fichte's emphasis on self-activity for its own sake also leaves the concrete content of moral principles entirely contingent in spite of Fichte's attempt to eliminate the influence of impulse.

Hegel's practical philosophy is also intended to be a philosophy of freedom. Seeing Kantian "morality," as he calls it, entirely in terms of adherence to a strictly formal law rather than as requiring adherence to law for the fullest possible realization of human freedom, he sees his own account of "ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]" as a critique or at least a very substantial supplement to Kant's position rather than, as Fichte had seen his own moral philosophy, as a development of it. Not that Hegel entirely rejects what he takes to be the Kantian and Fichtean conception of autonomy as sheer self-activity; rather he sees it as incomplete, as "only *one aspect* of the will... namely this *absolute possibility* of *abstracting* from every determination in which I find myself or which I have posited in myself, the flight from every content as a limitation.... this is *negative* freedom or the freedom of the understanding" merely (PR §5). Hegel proposes to supplement the negative freedom of mere morality with the "Idea of the good realized in the internally *reflected will* and in the *external world*; – so that freedom, as the *substance*, exists no less as *actuality* and *necessity* than as *subjective* will; – the *Idea* in its universal existence in and for itself; [the sphere of] *ethical life*" (PR §33). This turns out to mean that human freedom, although it certainly requires a degree of independence from or mastery over (as Kant would have put) mere impulses or inclinations, is fully realized only within the framework of social institutions beginning with the family, adding to that various extra-familial economic and social institutions, guilds, corporations, and what is now called civil society, and culminating in the political organization of the state, which itself exists at several levels from local to national.

But the perennial charge against Hegel's conception of ethical life is that the activities of the individual end up being circumscribed by all these institutions, that her role is more assigned than chosen, so that somewhere along the line individual freedom ends up disappearing. If this is right, then it could be argued that, although Hegel's conception of freedom is informed by positive law, it ends up coming apart from the law that Kant intended for freedom, namely the law that freedom should be exercised only in ways compatible with the greatest possible use of freedom by oneself and others, each as individuals. It might be argued that, although in a way very different from Fichte's, Hegel's conception of freedom comes apart from the law requiring maximally equal freedom for all, and thus does not fully realize the potential of Kant's conception of practical autonomy.

Neither Schelling nor Schopenhauer has been mentioned in this discussion of the German Idealist reception of Kant's conception of moral autonomy. Schopenhauer regarded practical as well as theoretical reason as a feature of mere appearance rather than of reality itself, the irrational or at least nonrational will, so he could hardly have conceived of the moral law as a self-given law, at least a law self-given *by reason*. That hardly means that for him morality permits the unconstrained pursuit of individual satisfaction – that would be nothing but a formula for frustration. Instead, Schopenhauer thought that redemption from the frustrations of empirical existence could come only through insight into the ultimate identity of all humans, indeed all sentient beings, as objectifications of one and the same underlying reality, which would in turn produce feelings of compassion at the empirical level. Insofar as this redemptive attitude is mediated by metaphysical insight, it might be contended that it is after all a product of some form of reason; but such insight does not yield anything like Kant's categorical imperative or depend on it, so Schopenhauer's approach to ethics is remote from Kant's.²⁰

Schelling, meanwhile, gave little attention to his ethics, although his *System of Transcendental Idealism* attempts a Fichtean-style "deduction" of the central ideas of Kantian moral philosophy from the conditions of the possibility of self-consciousness, and his later work on the *Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) offers a theological explanation of the necessity of evil, so that work might be seen as a response to Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which had allowed that the *possibility* but not the necessity of evil is an inescapable consequence of freedom – but then again so must be the possibility of conversion from evil to good.²¹ Perhaps this can be regarded as part of a debate with Kant over the ultimate threat to autonomy rather than over the nature of autonomy itself.

(iii) *Aesthetic autonomy*. In the case of aesthetics, however, both Schelling and Schopenhauer were major players in the German Idealist response to Kant, while this time Fichte was the odd man out. But while Schelling, Schopenhauer, and

Hegel all developed Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas as the essence of art, and in the case of Schopenhauer also Kant's hint that aesthetic ideas are crucial to the aesthetic experience of nature as well, only Schopenhauer took up Kant's conception of the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment, and all of them firmly rejected Kant's central concept of the free play of imagination and understanding.²² To the extent that the independence of imagination and understanding from concepts in their free play is a significant part of Kant's conception of aesthetic autonomy, to that extent the Idealist aestheticians reject Kant's conception. And while we saw that Kant's conception of aesthetic autonomy is not identical to later conceptions of the autonomy of art, Hegel certainly rejects any such idea: his transformation of Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas into a strictly cognitivist approach to artistic beauty (natural beauty being of no interest to him), epitomized by the claim that "art's vocation is to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic configuration ... and so to have its end and aim in itself, in this very setting forth and unveiling" (LA 1:55 [HW 13:82]),²³ leads directly to his notorious thesis of the "end of art," that "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past" that has "lost for us genuine truth and life" (LA 1:11 [HW 13:25]) – this is because on Hegel's approach, art is not merely "far removed...from being the highest form of spirit, acquir[ing] its real ratification only in philosophy" (LA 1:13 [HW 13:28]), but is rather *superseded* by philosophy as the only adequate cognition of spirit itself. On Kant's conception of the autonomy of aesthetic response and judgment, the aesthetic was not locked in a losing battle with the cognitive.

Hegel's position may also be seen as a rejection of Schelling's statement in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* that art (or the philosophy of art) is "the universal organon of philosophy – and the keystone of its entire arch" (STI 12 [SW 1/3:349]). By this Schelling had in mind that a work of art illustrates better than anything else the "identity of the conscious and unconscious activities" of nature and mind that together constitute reality (STI 225 [SW 1/3:619]). This conception of art can in turn be seen as a development of Kant's conception of genius, according to which "**Genius** is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art" by allowing the artist to create something richer than any explicit concept and thus intention he can formulate (CJ 5:307). Schelling would back off from the extravagant claim in his 1802–3 lectures on *The Philosophy of Art*, but although he still has no room in this account for Kant's concept of free play, his whole approach might yet be seen as a development from Kant's conception of aesthetic ideas. Just as Kant's theory was that an aesthetic idea was the presentation of an idea of reason through sensible materials that could not be derived from that idea but that instead allowed for a free play between the imagination and that idea within the understanding's abstract constraint of lawfulness, so Schelling's thought is that there is always an interplay between the "ideal" or intellectual and the "real" or sensible in art and our experience

of it, a “mutual informing of the real and the ideal to the extent that this informing is represented in reflected imagery” (PA 30 [SW I/5:383]). Different forms, media, and genres of art differ in their particular relationship between real and ideal, sculpture for example leaning more to the real and poetry to the ideal, and arts of different periods may differ in this dimension as well. But the crucial difference between Schelling and Hegel, and in this regard the crucial continuity between Schelling and Kant, is that for Schelling art can never simply be replaced by philosophy, for that would be to eliminate the real altogether in favor of the ideal: “For this reason philosophy, notwithstanding its inner identity with art, is nonetheless always and necessarily science, that is, ideal, whereas art is always and necessarily art, that is, real” (PA 6 [SW I/5:349]).

Schopenhauer develops Kant’s notion of aesthetic ideas in a very different way and also combines it with his version of Kant’s moment of disinterestedness to yield his characteristic aesthetic theory, which is in turn based upon his version of transcendental idealism. Schopenhauer’s theory is that the will that is the substratum of all appearance presents or “objectifies” itself in different ways, at different “grades,” ranging from elemental forces like gravity to higher forms such as human intentionality, and that the characteristic or essential form of each of these kinds of objectification of the will may be captured in what he calls a “Platonic” rather than Kantian “Idea.”²⁴ He then holds that such Ideas are effortlessly presented in cases of natural beauty, wrung out of nature by us at some risk to our safety in the case of the sublime, and captured by artists and communicated to the rest of us in the case of artistic beauty; this is Schopenhauer’s development of Kant’s theory of aesthetic ideas and artistic genius. He then holds that the contemplation of these Ideas liberates us from our ordinary desires and frustrations, precisely because they are universals rather than particulars linked to our own individuality, and thus that “we lose ourselves in” a beautiful or sublime object “completely, i.e., we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, the clear mirror of the object,” as a “pure, will-less, painless, timeless *subject of cognition*.”²⁵ This image may be seen as a radical development of Kant’s notion of disinterestedness, although there is nothing playful about it.

(iv) *The autonomy of teleology.* Hegel’s philosophy of art dominated the subject, at least in Germany, for several decades after his death, through such figures as Karl Rosenkranz, Rudolf Lotze, and Friedrich Theodor Vischer, while Schopenhauer’s view subsequently influenced both philosophers and artists through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Thomas Mann. But this is not the place to pursue that story.²⁶ Instead, this chapter will conclude with just a comment on the fate of Kant’s approach to teleology in German Idealism. Again, this seems to have been a topic of the third *Critique* that did not interest Fichte, and we can safely say

that Schopenhauer's conception of the essential irrationality of all existence was profoundly opposed to Kant's revival of teleology, even merely regulative rather than constitutive as that was. But the philosophies of both Schelling and Hegel may be regarded as profoundly and entirely teleological, but also as attempting to reverse Kant's reduction of teleology to a merely reflective and regulative point of view of humans on nature. Their attempts to break down the barrier between humans and nature more fully than Kant did, although with an emphasis ultimately on the human rather than the natural side – thus their difference with Schopenhauer – might be thought of as undertaken precisely to restore teleological judgment to its pre-Humean and pre-Kantian pride of place. But that is too big a claim to prove here.

Conclusion

Kant's "Copernican revolution" in theoretical philosophy was itself ultimately transformed into a reinterpretation of all areas of human thought and practice into forms of autonomy. Beginning with theoretical philosophy, where his successors thought that by leaving things in themselves in place Kant had failed to fully appreciate the autonomy of human knowledge, Kant's conceptions of autonomy were radicalized in one way or another by the leading German Idealists. The exception that proves the rule was Schopenhauer, who stood by Kant's transcendental idealism while resisting his celebration of autonomy, at least in the practical sphere. But an exception that proves the rule is not one that confirms it – that makes no sense – but rather one that puts it to the test, and Schopenhauer's response to Kant needs to be considered alongside those of the canonical German Idealists precisely because he raises the question of whether it is as easy to get rid of the un-autonomous surd – the thing in itself in theoretical philosophy, irrational willing in practical philosophy – as his competitors liked to think. But that is also too big a claim to prove here.

Notes

1. Arthur Collier (1680–1732), fourth in a line of Colliers who were rectors of Langford Magna, near Salisbury, published *Clavis Universalis; or, a New Inquiry after Truth, Being a Demonstration of the Non-Existence, or Impossibility of an External World* (London: Gosling) in 1713. He was still remembered by Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, but by few since.
2. For recent approaches to the development of German Idealism that stress the Idealists' responses to Kant's claim that philosophy must be "systematic" or "scientific," see Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Walter Jaeschke and Andreas Arndt, *Die*

- Klassische Deutsche Philosophie nach Kant: Systeme der reinen Vernunft und ihre Kritik 1785–1846* (Munich: Beck, 2012). For an approach focusing on the Idealists' "struggle against subjectivism," or their attempt to overcome Berkeleyan tendencies in Kant, see Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), although, as the dates cited in this title make clear, this work deals with Fichte and Schelling but not Hegel.
3. The "methodological" or "epistemological" interpretation of transcendental idealism has been maintained by Henry E. Allison in *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), and further defended in the second edition (2004); but was anticipated by Graham Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Outline of One Central Argument in the "Critique of Pure Reason"* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); and Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974). Allison's characterization of his interpretation as "epistemological" is misleading, because the alternative interpretation of transcendental idealism suggested here is also epistemological, turning as it does on Kant's explanation of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. I have defended this account at length in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 354–69; and Paul Guyer, "Debating Allison on Transcendental Idealism," *Kantian Review* 12, no. 2 (2007): 10–23.
 4. This possibility is absolutely central to Kant's theory of reason, or of its pure practical postulates, and makes no sense at all if we take him to introduce only a *concept* of things in themselves but not actual things in themselves.
 5. Kant attempted to work out a physics with an ether and thus without genuine action at a distance in his *Opus postumum*, the manuscript on which he worked from 1797 until a year or so before his death, which was unknown to the German Idealists. See Paul Guyer, "Kant's Ether Deduction and the Possibility of Experience," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Kant Congress*, ed. Gerhard Funke and T. M. Seebohm (Bonn: Bouvier, 1991), 110–23, reprinted in Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 74–85; Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 290–315; and Eckart Förster, *Kant's Final Synthesis: An Essay on the "Opus postumum"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 75–116.
 6. See Paul Guyer, "Kant on Common Sense and Skepticism," *Kantian Review* 7 (March 2003): 1–37, reprinted in Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 23–70; and Michael N. Forster, *Kant and Skepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
 7. I have discussed this argument at length in a number of places, including *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, pt. 4.
 8. See Paul Guyer, "Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37–56.
 9. Hegel made this charge in his 1802 chapter on natural law (NL 76–77 [HW 2:460–62]), and repeated it in the *Philosophy of Right* (PR §135). For my approach to this charge, see Paul Guyer, "The Inescapability of Contingency: The Form and Content of Freedom in Kant and Hegel," in *Philosophie nach Kant*, ed. Mario Egger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 439–62. For an alternative approach, see Sally Sedgwick, "Hegel on the Empty Formalism of Kant's Categorical Imperative," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2011), 265–80.

10. I have been working out this approach to Kant's practical philosophy in publications beginning with my "Kant's Morality of Law and Morality of Freedom," in *Kant and Critique: New Essays in Honor of W. H. Werkmeister*, ed. Russell M. Dancy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), 43–89; and "Freiheit als 'der innere Werth der Welt,'" in *Das Recht der Vernunft: Kant und Hegel über Denken, Erkennen und Handeln*, ed. Christel Fricke, Peter König, and Thomas Petersen (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 231–62; both reprinted, the latter in English, in Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129–71, 96–125. See also Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom*, esp. chs. 6–8; and Paul Guyer, *Kant*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014).
11. I do not think Kant ever worked out a fully explicit argument for his position, but I believe that the underlying idea is that the only way we can truly be free from control by our mere impulses is by acting in accordance with the principle that everyone is always to be as free to act as they choose as is consistent with everyone else always being that free. I think that the author who comes closest to me in ascribing such a view to Kant is Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), although I think that she slides too quickly from the idea of being liberated from impulse by something that is more than a momentary reason *for me* to the idea that I can be liberated from impulse only by something that is a reason *for all* – this is precisely the step that I think needs to be explained. See Paul Guyer, "Constructivism and Self-Constitution," in *Kant on Practical Justification: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Mark Timmons and Sorin Baiasu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 176–200.
12. I have developed this interpretation in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chs. 3 and 6; and Paul Guyer, "The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited," in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77–109. My interpretation has been criticized on a variety of grounds, notably by Hannah Ginsborg, *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition* (New York: Garland, 1990); and Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the "Critique of Judgment"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
13. Here Kant is just adopting the standard eighteenth-century ontology of beauty, first formulated by Francis Hutcheson in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Treatise I, section 1, paragraph 9; in the revised edition by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 23.
14. See Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, ch. 9, section "Conditions and Proportions," in the second edition, 284–88; and/or Paul Guyer, "The Psychology of Kant's Aesthetics," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008): 483–94.
15. See Paul Guyer, "Moral Feelings in the *Metaphysics of Morals*," in *Kant's "Metaphysics of Morals": A Critical Guide*, ed. Lara Denis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130–51.
16. I have expounded this analysis of the central argument of Kant's teleology in a number of places; see for example Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), ch. 12.
17. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume on Faith; or, Idealism and Reason*, Supplement on Transcendental Idealism, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 336.

18. For an interpretation that ascribes to Hegel a straightforward Kantian approach to nature, on which mind or reason provides the general categories of natural science but the details are filled in by our ordinary experience of an independent nature, see Thomas Posch, "Hegel and the Sciences," in *Companion to Hegel*, 177–202.
19. E.g., in Arthur Schopenhauer, "Fragments for a History of Philosophy," in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1:132.
20. I have contrasted Schopenhauer's and Kant's approaches to moral philosophy, with an emphasis on the role of metaphysical insight in Schopenhauer's approach, in Paul Guyer, "Schopenhauer, Kant and Compassion," *Kantian Review* 17, no. 3 (Nov. 2012): 403–29.
21. Some authors have attempted to find an *a priori* proof of the necessity of evil in Kant's *Religion*, for example Serriol Morgan, "The Missing Formal Proof of Humanity's Radical Evil in Kant's *Religion*," *Philosophical Review* 114, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 63–114; and David Sussman, "Perversity of the Heart," *Philosophical Review* 114, no. 2 (April 2005): 153–77. For an approach closer to the one I have just suggested, see Lawrence R. Pasternak, *The Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant on "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason"* (London: Routledge, 2014).
22. See my treatment of the aesthetics of Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel in Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol. 2: *The Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); as well as earlier treatments in Paul Guyer, "Hegel on Kant's Aesthetics: Necessity and Contingency in Beauty and Art," in *Hegel und die "Kritik der Urteilskraft"* ed. Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 81–99, reprinted in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161–83; and Paul Guyer, "Back to Truth: Knowledge and Pleasure in the Aesthetics of Schopenhauer," in *Better Consciousness: Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value*, ed. Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 11–25.
23. I should note, however, that Allen Speight bases an interpretation of Hegel as an advocate of the autonomy of the aesthetic precisely on this phrase, "so to have its end and aim in itself"; see Allen Speight, "Hegel and the 'Historical Deduction' of the Concept of Art," in *Companion to Hegel*, 358–59. I find this a plausible interpretation of this clause but not of Hegel's larger argument in either the Hotho edited version or the original transcriptions of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics.
24. See especially Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1:197–98.
25. *Ibid.*, 1:201.
26. See Guyer, *History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol. 2.

3

Kant's Three Transcendentals, Explanation, and the Hypothesis of Pure Apperception

Timothy Rosenkoetter

The explanatory priority of pure apperception

Kant's theory of cognition appeals to a host of forms, representational contents, faculties, and synthetic acts. One thing to which Kant's interpreters aspire is a better understanding of how these various explanatory grounds relate to one another. In some cases we are given substantial hints. For instance, there can be little doubt that the fact that our understanding operates by actualizing certain "functions" – such as the disjunctive function that is used when we judge disjunctive propositions – explains our possession of the categories, in this case the category of community. Yet even here Kant is content to leave us to fill in the details. The functions are doubtless only a partial explanation of the categories and it is less clear what else is required for a full explanation. Worse, the explanatory dependence of the categories upon the functions stands out for the amount of explicit attention that Kant devotes to it. The explanatory relations between most other explananda are more obscure. For instance, how precisely does the representation <I> relate to the functions?¹ Or what about <I> and the concept or concepts that allow us to grasp and pursue the ideal of complete systematic unity?

A special case among such questions is whether all of these *prima facie* distinct explanatory factors can themselves be explained by a single explanatory ground. If not, are there two, three, or twenty equally primitive grounds? And in these latter cases can anything be said about why there is more than one and how they suffice in combination to explain less fundamental truths? Though these are all questions whose answers will help us to better understand Kant on his own terms, it is particularly appropriate to pose them when considering Kant within the context of the traditions that he inaugurated. This is because among some of Kant's important successors we find a decided preference for

explanatory monism. For instance, Fichte tells us that Reinhold, following Kant, “performed an immortal service by calling the attention of philosophizing reason to the fact that philosophy in its entirety has to be traced back to one single first principle” (EPW 73 [GA I/2:62]). And in one of his best known attempts to motivate what he takes to be genuine idealism, Fichte suggests that “the self-sufficiency of the I” consists in the fact that it is the “fundamental explanatory ground” (IWL 16 [GA I/4:192]).

How many fundamental explanatory grounds does Kant recognize? An obvious approach to answering this question is to count the number of distinct faculties or capacities, yielding a list that includes at least sensibility, imagination, power of judgment, understanding, and reason. So, for instance, if we ask why systematically unified theories are *ceteris paribus* better theories, Kant’s explanation turns in some way on the faculty of reason, while different faculties are said to explain why all alterations have a cause. Yet a moment’s reflection shows that counting faculties is not an accurate method. Space and time surely count as separate fundamental explanatory grounds, even though both belong to the same faculty. Likewise, whether there are twelve categories or fifteen should make a difference to the answer, even though in either case all of them have their seat in the understanding. Our approach to the question must, in other words, be sensitive to differences in content.² So unless and until we are shown otherwise, each function and category constitutes a distinct explanatory ground, as do our representations of space and time, pure apperception, the concept <object = x>, the three ideas of reason, and the eight concepts of reflection. Nobody assumes that our possession of time explains our possession of space. Similarly, absent some indication to the contrary, we should not assume that our self-consciousness explains our possession of <object = x>³, and *mutatis mutandis* for the other entries on this list. At least on its face Kant’s theoretical philosophy, far from an example of explanatory monism, displays an irreducible pluralism.

Surely one of the most pressing reasons to complicate this picture is to be found in the well-known train of thought that opens the wholly rewritten B-edition version of the Transcendental Deduction of the categories. It commences in §15 with the claim that “the combination [*Verbindung*] (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses” (B129). Instead, combination “can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity” (B130). Then a dubious argument uses a conceptual analysis of <combination> to conclude that a single representation of unity makes all of the various species of combination possible.⁴ Kant’s subsequent attempt to isolate the content of this single representation begins by eliminating two candidates, categories and functions:

A. This unity, which precedes all concepts of combination *a priori*, is not the former category of unity (§10); for all categories are grounded on logical

functions in judgments, but combination, thus the unity of given concepts, is already thought in these. The category therefore already presupposes combination. We must therefore seek this unity (as qualitative, §12) someplace higher, namely in that which itself contains the ground of the unity of different concepts in judgment, and hence of the possibility of the understanding, even in its logical use. (B131)

Though Kant focuses these comments on the category of unity in particular – since “unity” is what is under consideration – his point is actually quite general. Each category is “grounded” in its own function, that is, a root species of combination.⁵ Since *any* act of combination itself presupposes the one common ground of unity (as Kant takes himself to have established through conceptual analysis), none of the functions or categories could be that ground.

Famously, it is pure apperception that Kant identifies as this most original unity. §16 and §17 contain several versions of this claim, among them a line that remains as tantalizing today as it was for the later Idealists: “the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point, to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic and, after it, transcendental philosophy” (B134).⁶ This synthetic unity of apperception is the “highest point” by virtue of being that unity that is “presuppose[d]” by all other unities (B131). It is clear that this priority is not genetic. That is, Kant does not hold that we acquire the concept <I> before we acquire all other concepts (cf. B1). This makes it tempting to follow Fichte and hold that *apperception enjoys explanatory priority*. But is this correct? And what exactly does it mean? These are the two questions to which this chapter is addressed. Answering them is necessary if we are to relate Kant’s philosophy, to the point that he developed it, to the aspiration for explanatory monism that we find among successors such as Reinhold and Fichte.

It is in order to make progress on these questions that I turn to an almost forgotten corner of the first *Critique*. As part of his extensive rewriting of the *Analytic of Concepts* for the B-edition, Kant chose to add a short section (§12) offering a reinterpretation of “the transcendental philosophy of the ancients” and its principle containing the three transcendentals, “every being is one, true, and good [*quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*]” (B113). Kant is quite critical of this tradition (which he extends to “modern times”), explaining that previous uses of the principle have yielded “merely tautological propositions.” Yet he conjectures that the principle “must have its ground in some rule of the understanding, which, as so often happens, has merely been falsely translated.” In particular, Kant proposes that, though these three transcendentals have hitherto been treated as “predicates of *things* [*Dinge*],” they are really “logical requisites and criteria of all *cognition of things* in general” (B114).⁷ That is, whereas the tradition had interpreted them such that they would qualify, in

Kant's own terms, as three additional *categories*, they are really "logical requirements for every cognition" or "criteria of thinking" (B114). In the case of the first transcendental,

B. [I]n every cognition of an object there is ... *unity* of the concept, which one can call *qualitative unity* insofar as by that only the unity of the comprehension [*Zusammenfassung*] of the manifold of cognition is thought, as, say, the unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a fable. (B114)

Not the fable itself but rather our cognition of it serves as Kant's example of the first transcendental, *unum*, which I will also call " T_1 " to make it easier for the reader to track Kant's terminology.⁸

There are two ways in which this section is relevant to our inquiry. Most obviously, in the course of §15's attempt to distinguish the unity of apperception as prior to the functions and categories, Kant appeals explicitly to §12 (see passage A). It is important to reflect on how surprising it is that Kant chose to add a section on the three transcendentals to the B-edition, given his earlier silence on the topic, the material's apparently marginal importance to his own project, and the fact that Kant's additions to the B-edition tend to concern issues of signal importance to the *Critique*, such as a new version of the Transcendental Deduction.⁹ One possible explanation of Kant's decision is that he believed that the transcendentals would make it easier for readers to understand what he is talking about at that point in §15, namely, the unity of apperception and its priority with respect to the functions and categories.¹⁰ A second, less obvious reason why §12 is relevant is that, on the interpretation I will offer below, it provides the rudiments of a theory of explanation. I propose that we think of the transcendentals in these terms: while the categories are the root concepts that we use to cognize objects, *the three transcendentals are the root concepts that we use to think about explanatory relations among our cognitions*. They are the concepts of *unum* (T_1), *verum* (T_2), and *perfectum* (T_3). Kant takes the theory of explanation built upon them to apply to a broad range of inquiries, but our interest will be in how he uses it to reflect on the pure inquiry that he calls "transcendental philosophy" (B134).

Here is how the chapter will proceed. The next two sections focus squarely on §12, first in order to introduce the text by considering a natural interpretation, and then in order to offer an alternative that is harder to see. On this alternative, §12 provides a meta-theory that specifies the form of *inquiry* in general (a technical term whose precise meaning will be our topic in the chapter's final section). This interpretation will allow us to see that §12 was almost certainly added in order to provide a general characterization, in preparation for §§15–16, of what it is for anything to serve as the "highest point" in an inquiry (B134). To be a highest point is not to enjoy genetic priority. Nor

does the relevant priority depend on relations of conceptual containment or analytic inference. To be the “highest point” is instead to serve as the unifying hypothesis (in a sense to be worked out below) in a manifold of conceptual cognitions, which manifold is unavoidable for finite cognizers precisely because of their discursive natures. Kant’s quite general claim is that such hypotheses partially explain whatever it is they enable us to discover.¹¹ This claim will apply to pure apperception and that which is discovered by means of it – a set which comprises pretty much everything.

While §12 provides fresh materials for the interpreter, it also raises intricate questions about how its three transcendentals relate to uses of the term “transcendental” that were already present in the A-edition. These include various uses of the term to define the very project of the *Critique* (e.g., “transcendental logic”), as well as two terms, “transcendental unity” and “transcendental truth,” that might simply be the A-edition’s German names for *unum* (T₁) and *verum* (T₂).¹² It is maddening that Kant does not tell us. Though a full-scale comparison of the two editions on this full range of questions cannot be my focus here, we will see below that the narrower question of how *verum* relates to “transcendental truth” inevitably arises as we apply *verum* to the case of pure apperception. Here, at least, we will be able to warn readers against a completely natural misunderstanding about which Kant remains silent.

A modest change from Baumgarten?

Though the text of §12 does not tell us whose theory of transcendentals Kant has in mind, we can be reasonably confident that his immediate point of reference is Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. What makes this confidence warranted is the substantial overlap between §12 and the reception of Baumgarten’s doctrine of transcendentals in student lecture notes and handwritten reflections in Kant’s copy of Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, the textbook for those metaphysics lectures.¹³ Our purposes do not require that we cover the subtleties of Baumgarten’s position, however important they are for interpreting the finer points of Kant’s reflections.¹⁴ What we need to know, first, is that Kant presents Baumgarten as holding “[T₁] that every thing is *one* thing, [T₂] that it possesses [*zukommt*] that which it possesses, and [T₃] that it possesses everything that it possesses” (Ak 28:631). Second, we find repeated criticism of Baumgarten for pretending that these principles are informative, as in this passage regarding T₃: “if I say: each thing contains everything that is required for its thing, that is a completely tautological proposition and consequently completely empty” (Ak 28:496). In reciting *quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum*, Baumgarten is simply making explicit that things can be individuated and that some set of determinations belongs to each thing, simply as such. Kant’s view is clearly that these are not facts that anyone who possesses the concept of a thing would

ever lack. The problem with Baumgarten's doctrine, then, is not that it is false but that it is philosophically useless.

The most natural interpretation of the positive position staked out in §12 sees Kant as making just one significant alteration to this doctrine: while Baumgarten had taken the transcendental predicates to apply to *things*, Kant applies them to *concepts*. The principle incorporating T_3 , for instance, would tell us that every concept is composed of all of the marks required to make it the concept that it is. I will call this the *Baumgartian reading*.

One general point in its favor is that while Kant clearly developed his views in dialogue with Baumgarten's position, the only mistake of the tradition that §12 mentions explicitly is a confusion of things and cognitions (one species of which are concepts). The most direct textual support for the Baumgartian reading can be found in §12's descriptions of T_1 in particular. In one, quoted above as part of passage B, we read that "in every cognition of an object there is ... *unity* of the concept" (B114). Later Kant explains that "the criterion of the possibility of a concept (not of its object) is the definition ..." (B115). Kant's idea seems to be that we can discover whether some x is a concept by seeing whether x can be defined. Intuitions and feelings will resist attempts to capture their content definitionally. So they do not possess *unum*, whereas all concepts do.

A third indication that Kant might be proposing principles as trivial as Baumgarten's is that Kant characterizes the transcendentals using the same terminology that he routinely uses to describe pure general logic (e.g., "formal"). Most significant is this passage:

C. The transcendental table of the categories is thus not completed with the concepts of unity, truth, and perfection, as if it were lacking something, but rather, the relation of these concepts to objects being entirely set aside, our procedure with these is only being thought under general [and] logical rules for the agreement of cognition with itself. (B115–16)¹⁵

The final phrase in particular is reminiscent of Kant's descriptions of pure general logic (cf. A59/B84). This makes it natural to assume that the principles incorporating the three transcendentals embody rules that are constitutive of what it is to be a concept, on the model of the Principle of Non-Contradiction, the central principle of pure, general logic. For instance, the principle incorporating T_1 would then tell us that no concept can fail to be one concept, just as the Principle of Non-Contradiction tells us that no concept can contain mutually contradictory contents (cf. A150/B189, A291/B348; ANM 2:171; Ak 29:810).

The first, and most glaring, problem with the Baumgartian reading is that it makes Kant guilty of propounding a doctrine that is every bit as empty as Baumgarten's. "Every thing is one" and "every concept is one" are simply

uninformative with respect to different subject-matters. Since Kant complains that the traditional doctrine had given us tautologies, a Baumgartian reading must either take Kant's purposes in §12 to be purely negative, or concede that Kant's complaints are disingenuous. A second, more serious problem is that not all of the transcendentals apply to every cognition equally. This is clearest with respect to T_2 : "Second, *truth* in respect of the consequences. The more true consequences from a given concept, the more indication of its objective reality. One can call this the *qualitative plurality* of the marks that belong to a concept as a common ground (not thought of in it as a magnitude)" (B114). T_2 is evidently a scalar property: some "concepts" have more *verum* than others by virtue of having more true consequences.

A third problem with the Baumgartian interpretation – though it bedevils any interpretation that takes the transcendentals to make explicit what is true of a cognition just by virtue of its nature as a concept – is its inability to explain why Kant shifts from talk about concepts to talk about explanation with nothing more than an "or":

D. Thus the criterion of the possibility of a concept (not of its object) is the definition, in which the *unity* of the concept, the *truth* of everything that may initially be derived from it, and finally the *completeness* of everything that is drawn from it, constitute everything that is necessary for the production of the entire concept; or the *criterion of a hypothesis* is also the intelligibility of the assumed *explanatory ground* or its unity (without auxiliary hypotheses), the *truth* (agreement with itself and with experience) of the consequences that are derived from it, and finally the *completeness* of the ground of explanation of these consequences, which do not refer us back to anything more or less than was already assumed in the hypothesis, and which merely analytically give back *a posteriori* and agree with that which was thought synthetically *a priori*. (B115)

This passage should prompt us to take the notion of a hypothesis, rather than the notion of a concept, as primary.¹⁶ That is, in subsuming a cognition under T_1 we are thinking of it as a hypothesis and not merely as a concept. The resulting interpretation has a better prospect of explaining the fact that §12 speaks of both concepts and hypotheses than do readings that take concepts and their nature to be Kant's primary concern. This is because we are going beyond merely considering x as a concept when we consider x to be a hypothesis. Yet the contrary direction need not pose any difficulty, since Kant might sometimes use "concept" or "cognition" as a loose or merely less specific label for hypotheses. Moreover, in cases in which a hypothesis has the form "there are Fs," it would be entirely natural for Kant to speak of the hypothesis as a "concept."¹⁷

The transcendentals as a theory of explanation

Though Kant sometimes seems to be predicating one of the transcendentals of a cognition simply by virtue of its intrinsic properties, my claim is that this is always misleading. Each of the transcendentals makes explicit a relation between our cognitions. By comparison, relationality is wholly absent from the Baumgartian reading: we do not need to look beyond $\langle F \rangle$ to know that $\langle F \rangle$ is one concept (T_1) or that $\langle F \rangle$ contains all of its constituent concepts (T_3). The relationality of the transcendentals starts with the very notion of a hypothesis, which is, after all, an explanatory ground for *other* cognitions. In many contexts Kant assumes that hypotheses meet a further, non-relational condition. Namely, the subject using h as a hypothesis must regard h , at least when considered in itself, as uncertain (e.g., A770/B798, in combination with A822/B850; Ak 24:733; and Ak 9:85). I will be arguing that this is an additional condition, which can be clearly separated from the present theory. For now let us bracket it and see if there is enough to work with in what remains. I will take the three transcendentals in order, as each of the latter builds on the first.

Explanation is the first relation expressed by the transcendentals. A cognition h is T_1 insofar as it *explains* other cognitions (p, q, r, \dots), which are its “consequences” (B115). Kant tends to describe these consequences as being “derived [*abgeleitet*]” from the hypothesis (e.g., B115), but it would be a mistake, tempting as it is, to take this term in the narrow sense in which only analytic entailments count.¹⁸ I believe that Kant intends to locate hypotheses within a more inclusive conception of inquiry. Just how inclusive it is we will need to infer from the theory that he provides. Negatively, and in anticipation, we can say: the transcendentals do not apply to merely aggregative processes of accumulating more assertoric cognitions, processes in which the subject pays no heed to whether one result affects the others. Kant calls such aggregates “heaped together (*coacervatio*)” (A833/B861). We might add that in this aggregative case each new cognition is a *quantitative*, rather than a *qualitative*, addition to the whole. Elsewhere, Kant suggests scientific and metaphysical examples (Tycho’s and Copernicus’s dueling hypotheses, the hypothesis of immaterial souls) of the sorts of non-aggregative inquiry that he has in mind.¹⁹ We can illustrate T_1 using §12’s less straightforward example of “the unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a fable” (B114, italics added). Let us suppose that I am antecedently familiar with the contents of a fable, though I do not take it to belong to any particular genre. Once I begin to think of the fable as a tragedy (hypothesis), I attach new significance to its various events. Whereas I had formerly taken the protagonist’s failure to heed a dire warning to be, say, the result of his being in a great hurry, I now realize that this headstrong action flows from the same character trait that made him a decisive leader of

his people. While this consequence is clearly not reached merely by means of analytic entailment, it is crucial that it is conceptually articulated. Kant's model, on my interpretation, does not allow that the relevant consequences of a hypothesis are intuitions.²⁰ This is one thing that Kant is pointing to when he describes the transcendentals as "*logical* rules for the agreement of cognition with itself" (B116, italics added).

Now when, in the lead-up to his example of a fable, Kant describes *unum* as the "unity of the comprehension of the *manifold* of cognition" (B114, italics added), it is overwhelmingly natural for readers to assume that the relevant unity is one of two familiar types, both of which will later figure in §16. It might be what Kant calls "analytic unity," in which case the manifold in question is the concept's extension, which Kant takes to include the objects that are correctly subsumed under the concept (as in our notion of extension), as well as the more complex concepts that contain that concept (e.g., <Greek tragedy>) (cf. B133–34; Ak 9:96). Alternatively, it might be that Kant is invoking "synthetic unity," in which case the manifold in question is a manifold of intuitions, roughly, the set of possible perceptions that one must be disposed to combine and treat as an instance of the concept, if that concept is to be meaningful.²¹ The question of whether *unum* is just another name for synthetic unity is particularly pressing because synthetic unity is a type of qualitative unity, that is, a unity that pertains to heterogeneous elements²², and it is qualitative unity that §15 mentions when directing the reader back to §12 (see passage A). This leads to the suspicion that Kant is simply calling attention to the synthetic unity that <I> must possess if it is to be a meaningful representation. If a cognizer were unable to attribute the entire "manifold of given representations" to the I, that concept would lose its distinctive meaning (B134).²³ A similar point holds for <theme of a fable> and <tragedy>. Neither point has anything to do with the consequences that can be drawn out of a hypothesis through inquiry.

One of my central interpretative claims is that Kant has a different (and less familiar) type of unity in mind in §12. Hypotheses bring about their own distinctive unity, which differs from both analytic and synthetic unity. This unity, which is likewise qualitative, obtains in the first place *between a hypothesis and the consequences* that it enables us to reach, as is indicated by this characterization of T₁ written between 1778 and 1783: "Unity of the hypothesis consists in this, that if I assume something as ground, the manifold admits of being derived from it" (Ak 18:233 [R5560]). The manifold here is neither the concept's extension, nor the intuitions that are ultimately required if the concept is to have meaning. The manifold is instead a set of consequences, which are themselves brought together by their common "explanatory ground" (B115, italics elided). This unity *among the consequences* can be considered the second aspect of T₁, though Kant seems to view it as a weaker relation than the

first. In particular, whereas the hypothesis explains each of its consequences, there is no presumption at this point that members of this manifold explain each other. As we will see, reciprocal explanatory relations such as the latter are characteristic of T_3 .

We can call the distinctive unity of T_1 , following Kant, *unity of hypothesis*. The supposition that §12 is treating this unity, rather than analytic or synthetic unity, makes sense of why Kant is concerned in several places (e.g., passage D) to emphasize that subsidiary hypotheses compromise “unity” (cf. B115; Ak 10:85–86; Ak 16:467 [R2680]; Ak 16:469 [R2681]; Ak 18:233 [R5560]). Namely, the original hypothesis does not actually suffice as the single explanatory focal point if some portion of the relevant manifold requires the introduction of a second hypothesis for its derivation. In contrast, neither the analytic nor the synthetic unity of a concept is affected in the slightest if we start to make use of additional concepts.

The most important objection to this interpretation takes off from passage B’s universality claim: “in *every* cognition of an object there is ... unity of the concept” (B114, italics altered). The worry is just that some cognitions are evidently not hypotheses, so it will not work to identify T_1 with the peculiar unity of a hypothesis. The key to a response is to make clear, first, that T_1 is true of h insofar as it is the explanatory ground in some *possible* inquiry. Second, whether h is T_1 does not depend at all on the truth or falsity of the consequences. This means that some cognitions that are extremely poor hypotheses in our everyday sense of the term – since we would never adopt them, they lead to utterly trivial consequences, or they even lead to some false consequences – will nonetheless possess the unity characteristic of T_1 . In sharp contrast, to assign a level of T_2 to some h is to measure how good a hypothesis it is in our everyday sense. More precisely, each consequence of adopting h is itself true or false, and the more truths there are among them, the more they confirm that h is true. Though Kant treats T_2 as a property of the hypothesis, it is not a property of h simply to the degree that it can be seen to be true on its own. Instead, h possesses T_2 to the degree that it is confirmed *by its consequences*. Thus we see that one and the same type of unity is denoted by T_1 and T_2 . The difference is just that in the case of T_1 we are only assessing possible explanatory relations between cognitions, without attending to the reasons that we might have to believe any of them. To look into whether there are such reasons is already to assess how much T_2 the hypothesis possesses. This response to the objection fits the fact that Kant associates T_1 with possibility and the faculty of understanding, while he associates T_2 with actuality, truth, and the power of judgment.²⁴

Though Kant sometimes suggests that the coherence among the various consequences of a hypothesis is relevant to *verum*, he does allow that their truth can be assessed individually, according to whether they correspond to

their respective objects (cf. B115). In contrast, when using *perfectum* we are no longer, even in part, considering consequences individually. This third transcendental is the pure concept that enables us to assess the manifold of consequences as a single theory that presents a unified viewpoint. Accordingly, the more that a hypothesis and its manifold instantiate this unity, the more T_3 this whole possesses. Within §12 Kant focuses exclusively on theories that possess the full measure of T_3 , as is the case when their manifolds can be “traced back to the unity of the concept,” namely the hypothesis, and when the manifold further “agrees [*zusammenstimmt*] completely with this one and no other one” (B114). Kant views a transcendently perfect theory as the full realization, actualization, or “express[ion]” of its hypothesis (Ak 28:631). There is no reason to think that just any concept (or proposition) can be developed into a transcendently perfect theory. However, in cases in which this occurs the hypothesis surely counts as *fully* confirmed.

T_3 is different from the one relation that we encountered in two guises as T_1 and T_2 . Importantly, it still concerns explanation, and hypotheses still enjoy an explanatory priority with respect to the manifold consequences that compose the theory. Yet now, since no part of a transcendently perfect theory is contingent, each part can itself be used, at least in some measure, to explain the rest (though without thereby enjoying explanatory priority). Analytic entailment is manifestly inadequate to the task of capturing the explanatory relations present in these wholes, which the *Critique* later goes on to treat with the help of various organic metaphors under the title “science” (cf. A832/B860–A835/B863). Rather than seeing the reciprocal relations present in a proper science as simply different from T_1 (and T_2) – thereby positing a clean break within Kant’s theory – the present interpretation sees those relations as a further development of the explanatory relations designated by the earlier transcendentals. Already there, in the midst of ongoing and still incomplete inquiry, the consequences of a hypothesis are appropriately viewed as its fruits, which they would not be if they were always just analytic restatements of something already fully present in the premises. The common feature shared by all three transcendentals is explanation, with the asymmetry belonging to the earlier transcendentals traded in for reciprocity, albeit for reciprocal relations in which one member (the hypothesis) enjoys a newly circumscribed privilege.

It is worth pausing in this context to reflect on Kant’s assumption that there is *just one* hypothesis in the relevant inquiries. As I reconstructed Kant’s rationale for this above, its point is that the entire manifold be interrelated through its derivation from a single hypothesis. The problem with a subsidiary hypothesis *i* is that it divides the manifold into parts, only some of which are explained by *i*. We can now add the observation that Kant’s insistence on the singularity and relative simplicity of hypotheses is an important part of what

makes analytic entailment an inadequate model for inquiry. If Kant had been willing to apply T_1 to complex entities such as sets of premises or propositions with many conjuncts, this would have yielded a very different model. This can be illustrated with Kant's own examples such as the hypothesis of an immaterial soul.²⁵ However, if Kant is indeed using $\langle I \rangle$, a "simple and in content for itself completely empty representation" (A345), as a hypothesis in the inquiry undertaken in the *Critique*, this provides us with the starkest possible illustration. After all, if inquiry based upon this hypothesis were restricted to analytic judgments, the results would be every bit as empty as their starting point.

Recall that we began this section by setting aside one element of hypotheses as they figure most often in Kant's works, namely, their uncertainty. My proposal has been that his theory of transcendentals is built upon the sparer conception of cognitions possessing the unity of explanatory focal points. This is all that is included in the bare thought of h as *unum*, though there are further features that h might possess on top of that. As we saw above, a further feature of some hypotheses is that they lead to true consequences, the number (and perhaps importance) of which can vary, yielding different levels of T_2 . Another feature – which then yields the more familiar conception of an *uncertain* hypothesis – is that relative to this or that epistemic context h cannot be confirmed on its own credentials, so that subjects are dependent on assessing its *verum* if they care to judge its truth. In this case subjects will not be fully certain of its truth unless they are able to develop a transcendently complete theory on its basis.

Kant gives us no reason to think that the full confirmation provided by a perfect theory is relative to epistemic context, and this gives rise to a final observation that is crucial for applying the transcendentals to pure apperception. Though I have argued against the temptation to interpret §12 so that it contains two relatively unconnected theories – T_1 and T_2 as concerned with analytic entailment or synthetic unity, and T_3 as concerned with systematic unity – I do not wish to diminish the following important difference among the transcendentals. How much T_2 a particular hypothesis h possesses depends on what else the subject entertaining h takes to be true. Thus, there is variability between subjects: one inquirer might correctly judge h to have a low level of T_2 , while the other, who has more background knowledge or a better view of its consequences, finds h more promising. This makes T_2 absolutely central to Kant's general account of our ability to conduct inquiry and work toward ever more adequate theories. T_2 is the root concept that allows us to abandon h_1 in favor of h_2 if the former is generating fewer true consequences. However, this also means that T_2 will be unimportant in cases in which subjects are antecedently certain of a hypothesis, or merely find themselves subjectively incapable of entertaining any competing hypotheses. (The latter case will prove relevant in

the next section as we consider the hypothesis of apperception.) In contrast, we should not expect the relevance of T_1 and T_3 to vary among subjects according to their particular epistemic positions. T_1 is the root concept that finite subjects require if they are to so much as conceive of non-aggregative inquiry. T_3 is the root concept that we use to grasp the ideal to which all such inquiry aspires.

The unity of the apperception-hypothesis

At the start of this chapter I speculated that one of Kant's reasons for adding §12 to the B-edition was his interest in affirming that pure apperception is *unum*. In the meantime our results suggest that Kant does in fact mean to be making that connection, and that to do so is not simply to make two points that are emphasized repeatedly later in §16, namely, that $\langle I \rangle$ is both an analytic and a synthetic unity. Instead, it is to make the point that $\langle I \rangle$ has the unity of a hypothesis, with all that this distinctive unity implies. Of course, if $\langle I \rangle$ were not also both an analytic and synthetic unity, it could not serve as a hypothesis. Nonetheless, these are three distinct properties, and distinguishing them can only serve the cause of better understanding Kant's position. Of course, we can safely presume that Kant already realized in 1781 that the unity of a hypothesis is distinct from analytic and synthetic unity.²⁶ Can the present reading shed any light on Kant's reasons for adding a separate treatment of the former to the B-edition?

The close of passage D is one piece of evidence that we have not yet considered. It tells us that the manifold of consequences, and ultimately the entire completed theory, "merely analytically give back *a posteriori* and agree with that which was thought synthetically *a priori*" (B115). We have already examined several reasons to think that Kant is not treating inquiry governed by the transcendentals as one giant analytic judgment. Moreover, there is no reason to think that all hypotheses are *a priori*. So what is Kant talking about? The passage makes perfect sense if Kant is using the theory of explanation he has just outlined to characterize "synthetic method," which is Kant's term for inquiry which proceeds from grounds to consequences,²⁷ and further intends to invoke a sense of apriority, according to which a cognition counts as *a priori* or *a posteriori* only relative to a particular inquiry.²⁸ In this usage, to think something "synthetically *a priori*" (B115) is simply to think it as the explanatory ground of consequences.

In order to answer the question of why Kant was prompted to add §12 in 1787, we need to know that synthetic method had become newly relevant four years previously when, for the first time in Kant's critical era, the *Prolegomena* had followed the contrary, "analytic" method, which begins with consequences that count as *a posteriori* (again, relative to the inquiry) and works backwards. The *Prolegomena* reports that the *Critique* – at this point there is

only an A-edition – had worked synthetically on the question of whether a fully scientific metaphysics is possible. This method yields “a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever” (Pro 4:274). Although the A-edition *Critique* was already an example of synthetic method, there were few explicit indications of this in the text. In contrast, Kant’s new version of the Transcendental Deduction is written so as to call maximal attention to the Transcendental Analytic’s progression from ground to consequences. Not only does the new version of the Deduction begin with the most original seed, pure apperception (§16). Kant prefaces that section with an explicit argument designed to show that there must be a cognition that plays this role (§15). Of course, since the notion of a seed is inherently relational, it makes sense to prepare for its introduction with a section laying out the general theory of this type of relation (§12). One feature of that general theory is that each inquiry has one and only one hypothesis.

This interpretation of the three transcendentals offers a new perspective on various issues concerning both apperception and the B-edition Transcendental Deduction. However, in the space that remains I will pose and to some extent comment on three large questions that are likely to be foundational with respect to any further development of this reading: (1) Why is pure apperception, rather than some other concept, the hypothesis within transcendental philosophy? (2) How is the apperception-hypothesis confirmed? and (3) What are the transcendentals, anyway?

(1) Though we have not yet stated this explicitly, it should be clear that Kant’s model does not allow for a series of hypotheses, each of which explains the next. This is not to say that each of those cognitions is not a hypothesis relative to some inquiry or other. Indeed, that is positively required if we are to take seriously Kant’s claim that every concept is T_1 . So the thought, more precisely, must be that a putative hypothesis h loses its status as T_1 *relative to some particular inquiry* if another cognition explains h within that very inquiry. This brings out a crucial feature of Kant’s account. The question of whether a cognition is T_1 can only be answered relative to an inquiry. That said, Kant may have good reason to think that different *concepts* make possible inquiries of widely varying levels of richness, much as he regards certain formal intuitions, such as the circle, parabola, and ellipse, as “the ground for the resolution of a host of problems” (CJ 5:362), while many other formal intuitions lack this property.²⁹ It might be that certain concepts enable only sterile inquiry (in the limit case perhaps only the unpacking of the concept’s definition in analytic judgments), while the concept $\langle I \rangle$ opens up an entire world of consequences. One question that we should be asking of Kant is why inquiry whose hypothesis is pure apperception is special. I cannot turn to that question here except to note that we have just seen one possible answer

emerge: namely, that it is an objective fact about <I> that it is the most fruitful hypothesis.

(2) Pure apperception functions as a hypothesis in Kant's use of synthetic method. If Kant were making use of all three transcendentals, then the consequences derived in the course of inquiry would play the role of confirming this hypothesis. Moreover, the more true consequences, the more *verum* pure apperception would possess, and only when we succeeded in building a transcendently perfect theory upon its basis would the hypothesis be fully confirmed. Of course, it is quite clear that this is not how Kant actually treats pure apperception. His markedly different approach is familiar from the treatment that the categories receive in the Transcendental Deduction. Their objective reality needs to be confirmed because they are products of spontaneity, and this is accomplished when their use is shown to be a condition for the possibility of our representing an objective world. Pure apperception is likewise a product of our spontaneity, and the categories cannot be used without using <I>, so a successful transcendental deduction should also be sufficient to defend our use of <I>.³⁰

While this solution to the problem of confirmation is familiar, its relation to Kant's use of the transcendentals is not. From the perspective of §12, the obvious question is why a single consequence (namely, that we are able to cognize an objective world) should be accorded preeminent importance. It would seem that a complete and perfect theory – that is, a totality – built upon the basis of pure apperception is required for full confirmation. Otherwise, it will always be possible that further inquiry will turn up a false consequence, which would be sufficient to disprove the apperception-hypothesis. My suggestion is that Kant meets this challenge by changing the “site” of the relevant totality. Rather than being located in the subject and its cognitions, the confirming totality is moved to the object. Rather than being an epistemological matter, it becomes an ontological one (though the relevant objects are taken to be the transcendently ideal objects of nature). What this shift makes possible is a *completed* totality. As finite cognizers we have never attained a transcendently perfect science. Yet the whole of nature, we are constrained to assume, is complete. This is Kant's solution, and it is already bound up with the central theses of the A-edition *Critique*.

We can elaborate on this by asking how it relates to the term “transcendental.” In the A-edition Kant made use of the notion, which he assimilated from Christian Wolff, that the objects of experience have “transcendental truth” if and only if they form an ordered whole.³¹ For Kant the criteria of order are the Analogies of Experience, that is, the principles of pure understanding concerning substance, causality, and causal reciprocity between substances (A176/B218–A217/B265). It is not our cognitions, judgments, or assertions but the objects of experience that possess transcendental truth, and they do so

because they are comprehensively governed by causal laws.³² Kant sees this as accomplishing two things. First, it makes it the case that there is only a single correct answer to any question about the disposition of objects. Second, it makes nature into a whole that contains *all* of the answers concerning the disposition of objects. The first result can ultimately be traced back to the fact that there is only one world of objects. This, along with the second result, can be traced back to the fact that wherever I am, experientially, within the world, there is a path by means of causal connections leading to all other parts of the world: “There is only *one* experience, in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and lawlike connection ...” (A110).

What this does is to take the answers to all possible questions concerning the disposition of objects and it places those answers *in the objects*. There are countless propositions whose truth I have never considered, just by virtue of my being finite. This means that there are countless potential consequences of any hypothesis (including pure apperception) that I have never considered. As Kant tells his students: “If all the consequences are true, then the cognition is true – but who can know all the consequences? That involves omniscience” (Ak 24:719). Yet in declaring objects to be transcendently true, Kant allows the objects to take over the burden that we, in our finitude, cannot shoulder. There are countless questions whose answer I do not know, but this does not matter, since the answer is in the object. This makes it possible for Kant to consider pure apperception to be fully confirmed.

It is a remarkable fact that after having written the A-edition, in which “transcendental truth” is treated, as just described, as a “predicate of *things*” (B114), Kant adds a section on the transcendental *verum*, in which we are told, without further comment, that the key to correctly understanding the transcendentals is to realize that they are *not* predicates of things. This is not to say that there is an inconsistency in Kant’s substantive position. Whatever the philosophical merits of declaring pure apperception and the categories to be fully confirmed on the basis of the Transcendental Deduction – it is not underwritten by the theory presented in §12 – Kant does it in both editions. However, once combined with the interpretative difficulties already presented by §12 alone, this surely counts as one of the more intricate puzzles that Kant left his readers. When doing transcendental philosophy, as opposed to explaining the rotation of the planets or mind-body interaction, Kant makes use of “transcendental truth” (i.e., “order”), as well as T_1 and T_3 . Yet T_2 plays little or no role.

(3) Now that we have some sense of what their content might be, it makes sense to ask after the status of the transcendentals. After all, Kant provides no explicit account of their origin within his theory of cognition, and in its absence some skepticism is warranted about whether they are really a well-considered feature of Kant’s theory.³³ Why, in addition to the Principle of Non-Contradiction, pure apperception, the functions, and the categories, are

there three transcendentals structuring our spontaneity? It might be that Kant does not provide an answer because he thinks that none can be given, as is surely the case if this question is akin to the question of why our sensibility has space and time as its forms, or why we have just two such forms instead of three or twenty. However, we know that Kant thinks that there is something informative to be said in answer to at least some parallel questions. Most obviously, it should be uncontroversial that the fact that the functions are basic modes of combination partially explains our possession of the categories. Can anything of a broadly similar nature to be said about the transcendentals?

The first step is to be clear about the fact that the transcendentals do not purport to be *of* objects or beings. They lack all ontological significance, in this respect differing from the categories and instead resembling the functions. The universal function, for instance, is simply one manner in which we are able to combine representations. So by itself the function does not purport to be about anything. A category that is intentionally directed first arises when functions are applied to "the manifold of intuition in general" (A79/B104–5). It is in large part to make the point that the transcendentals lack this significance that Kant describes them using terms ("formal," "logical") reminiscent of pure general logic.

While the first step is to see how the transcendentals resemble the functions, the second step is to identify something that makes them different. We know that *something* must make them different, since otherwise there would be fifteen functions rather than just twelve. My suggestion, in a first, rough pass, is that we look to a difference in the sizes of what they govern. In particular, functions are tied to judgment and objects in a way that the transcendentals are not. So if functions govern the combination that yields judgments and objects, what is it that the transcendentals govern? The answer suggested above is: inquiry. A strategy for defending Kant's transcendentals is then to point out that there is no reason why it should be any more dubious or suspicious for there to be structures governing inquiry, than for there to be structures governing the combinations that yield judgments and objects. Yet at this point, if not before, we might start to worry about the notion of inquiry, which does not translate or correspond directly to any technical term in Kant's arsenal. What is the origin of inquiry within Kant's theory of cognition?

Kant seeks to make features of our cognitive capacity salient by comparing that capacity to conceivable alternatives. One of these alternatives is an understanding that is not "discursive," but instead goes "from the whole to the parts" (CJ 5:407).³⁴ A remarkable feature of such an understanding is that it would be exclusively intuitive (though not sensitive), and accordingly require no concepts. When contrasting our cognitive lot with such an understanding Kant usually focuses on features that flow from our dependence on sensible intuition. In particular, our cognitive progression from parts to wholes requires

that we use concepts to combine a sensible manifold, thereby yielding the cognition of an object. However, even if we bracket features of our cognition that are tied to sensible intuition, we can see that *the mere fact of our discursivity already makes it inevitable that our cognition will trace some path from part to part*. If, *per impossibile*, we were able to cognize using no intuitions and only concepts, we would still need to begin with cognitions that qualify as parts and proceed from there toward the whole. My suggestion is that these paths (in the first place conceptual) from part to part in the direction of the whole are inquiry, in the sense that is relevant for the three transcendentals.³⁵ If we take a further step and ask what it is for a discursive intellect to progress toward that whole, we can gain insight into the reason why the cognitions that make up inquiry in the relevant sense must be more than merely “heaped together” (A833/B861). Kant’s language of parts and wholes is potentially misleading, since it suggests that a discursive intellect’s cognitive progress is mereological. Instead, these so-called “parts” are more like perspectives. Accordingly, a discursive intellect does not work toward the whole by accumulating parts that together *add up* to one. (This is related to §12’s focus on quality rather than quantity.) The whole is instead attained when inquiry leads to a single perspective that is no longer partial. It is a unitary cognition of the whole, albeit one that is of necessity composed of a manifold. Such a cognition is a transcendently perfect theory.³⁶

Notes

1. Angle brackets will be used to mention concepts (e.g., <F>).
2. There are reasons to suspect that the most precise method for cataloguing fundamental explanatory grounds would be to compile a list of synthetic propositions, none of which can be derived from some subset of the others. We would do well to work at compiling such a list. However, Kant’s own preferred format for addressing the question is to focus on sources of unity, and I will be following him in this chapter. For a work that covers related topics, though focusing much more on post-Kantian developments, see Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
3. I take this to be the concept whose possession constitutes our grasp of the bare idea of an object. I will use the above phrase, though it is clear that Kant treats “something in general = x” as a synonym (A104; cf. A250). Though we cannot address them here, various positions can be taken on this concept’s precise relation to the categories – for example, is it possible to possess <object = x> but not <necessity>? – as well as whether the terms “object in general [*Gegenstand überhaupt*]” (e.g., B128) and “transcendental object” (e.g., A109) are simply different labels for the very same concept.
4. We are initially told that the concept of combination is composed of the concepts of manifold, synthesis, and unity. Kant continues: “The representation of this unity cannot, therefore, arise from the combination; rather, by being added to the

representation of the manifold, it first makes the concept of combination possible" (B131). If Kant's point concerned the order of acquisition, then Paul Guyer would be correct to object that Kant has not eliminated the possibility that we acquire <unity> by first combining particular perceptions, whereupon we abstract out what is common to them (Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], 109). However, I take Kant instead to be arguing that our possession of <unity> explains our possession of <combination> for the same reason that our possession of <male> explains our possession of <bachelor>. The argument fares no better on this interpretation. There are two cases to consider. *First*, the initial analysis is plausible and does not beg any questions if by "synthesis" Kant means an act and by "unity" he just means the end state of that act, as is indeed suggested by the important A77/B103. Yet in this case we have every reason to assume that different types of combination (e.g., combination according to <substance> and combination according to <cause>) lead to different types of unity. There is then no reason to assume that there is a single unity, which makes all of the various species of combination possible. But, *second*, if by "unity" Kant means something other than just the end state of an act combining a manifold (whatever that state happens to be) – and if he means, in particular, a single unity that explains all species of unity – then the putative analysis is question-begging.

5. Functions enable us to combine concepts in judgments, and it is in this guise that they will be most important for this chapter. However, the same functions are also applied to intuition, in which case they yield categories (cf. A79/B104–5, B128; MFS 4:474).
6. In this passage Kant intends "understanding" in its wide sense, which comprises understanding in the narrow sense (the faculty of concepts), power of judgment, and reason. Throughout the chapter I treat pure apperception, not uncontroversially, as equivalent to our possession and ability to use the representation <I>. I will routinely call this representation a "concept" – it is, after all, a cognition and yet not an intuition (cf. A320) – without meaning to imply that it is just like other pure concepts. Eventually, I will suggest that the synthetic unity of apperception is a way of using <I>. In the meantime, it should not be assumed that <I> is simply different from the synthetic unity of apperception, and thus cannot also be the "highest point" cited by B134.
7. Ludger Honnefelder takes §12 to say that the tradition had understood the transcendentals, like Kant, as logical requirements of all cognition, and that its mistake was merely to have taken the transcendentals *also* as ontological categories (Ludger Honnefelder, "Metaphysics as a Discipline: From the 'Transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients' to Kant's Notion of Transcendental Philosophy," in *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400–1700*, ed. Russell L. Friedman and Lauge O. Nielsen [Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003], 66). I see no basis for this in the text.
8. One of the lessons of this chapter is that it is dangerous to assume without investigation that the transcendentals are identical to concepts with similar names (e.g., the category <unity> and "synthetic unity of apperception"), so the English equivalent will only be used when context makes it unambiguous that I am talking about the transcendental. I follow a similar practice for the remaining transcendentals, which will first be introduced below. A further expositional challenge is that Kant gives some of the transcendentals multiple names. For instance, as will become clear below, it is *perfectum* rather than *bonum* that is the appropriate Latin term for T₃, though Kant does not use the former in §12 itself.

9. Norman Kemp Smith is hardly alone in thinking that the section's material is "of no intrinsic importance" (*A Commentary to Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"* [Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1962], 200). As for extrinsic importance, Kant is clear that the *Critique* will not generally include comparisons with competing views. He adds this warning to the B-edition: "Even less can one expect here a critique of the books and systems of pure reason ..." (B25).
10. The deflationary hypothesis is that Kant simply wanted to guard against readers thinking that the three transcendentals are three additional categories; thus, his purpose in writing §12 was merely to argue that the Table of Categories is complete. A small point is that if that had been Kant's controlling aim, it would have made sense for him to stick a note to this effect in the loose collection of addenda that is §11.
11. In this chapter the phrase "*x* explains *y*" should always be understood as shorthand for *partial* explanation. I would suggest that Kant takes full explanation to obtain only in cases of analytic judgment.
12. "Transcendental truth" occurs twice (A146/B185, A222/B269). For "transcendental unity of apperception," A107–8 is especially important. This chapter will not be able to pursue the question of how this latter *term* (as opposed to apperception itself) relates to *unum*. That would involve a full investigation of how Kant is using "transcendental" in 1781.
13. Some of these additional sources express broadly Baumgartian views. However, it is important to remember that the vast majority of this material might be nothing more than written records of Kant's attempts to teach a doctrine to which he himself does not subscribe. What makes it unusually difficult to disentangle Kant's teaching persona from his attempts to remake the doctrine is that there is no clean break, such as a time at which Kant stops reciting Baumgarten's position and devotes himself single-mindedly to working out his own. My interpretation will emphasize material that is unambiguously in Kant's own voice, especially §12.
14. Without background on one confusing point, it is nearly impossible to understand some of Kant's *Nachlaß* concerning Baumgarten's doctrine. Baumgarten uses the term "transcendental" to mean "concerning essence" (cf. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica = Metaphysik: historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, trans. and ed. Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011], §§73, 89, 98–99; and Sonia Carboncini, *Transzendente Wahrheit und Traum* [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991], 175–78). Sometimes Kant is parroting Baumgarten's position and uses the term in that sense (Ak 17:389 [R4025]; Ak 18:340–41 [R5738, R5741]). However, this does not match his critical-era understanding of transcendentality (A11–12/B25), and he leaves all traces of that sense out of §12.
15. Interpolation added to make clear that "general" modifies "rules" in the original. Guyer and Wood translate the passage, which includes only a pronoun, as "... our procedure with these concepts. ..." It is worth noting that Kant may instead intend "... with these objects ...," without this offending against his larger point that the transcendentals are not "predicates of *things*" (B114). On this alternative construal, Kant intends to say that in using the transcendentals we are considering our procedure in cognizing objects, though this consideration uses rules that abstract from that referential purport.
16. Though there is much to be learned from some of the existing secondary literature on §12, I have not found any that makes explanation central to the theory

that it is proposing. I recommend: Gudrun Schulz, *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Gerhard Schönrich, *Kategorien und transzendente Argumentation. Kant und die Idee einer transzendentalen Semiotik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 290–93; and most thoroughly, Paul Natterer, *Systematischer Kommentar zur "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 343–66. Natterer provides references to further secondary literature and to passages from the *Nachlaß* that I lack the space to treat.

17. For the suggestion that hypotheses have that form, see Ak 16:469 (R 2682). The important *Reflexion* 5560 (Ak 18:233) uses "ground or concept" to refer to a hypothesis.
18. Though a textual case will be made below, a substantive reason to think that Kant does not restrict the "derivations" to analytic entailments is that on his conception of logic all of these are trivial. I suspect that Kant considers analytic judgment to be a limit case in explanation, which passage D, accordingly, mentions in its first disjunct before moving on to the heart of the phenomenon ("or the criterion ...").
19. *Reflexion* 5560 treats immateriality as an example of T_1 in particular (Ak 18:233). The contrast of Tycho and Copernicus occurs in the service of an argument that "it is an essential requirement of a hypothesis that it be only one and that it not need any subsidiary hypotheses for its support" (Ak 9:85–86).
20. No doubt there is an important sense in which a subject's use of a concept to unify an intuitional manifold is an explanatory hypothesis, a sense that Kant tries to capture with his introduction of reflective judgment in the third *Critique* (cf. CJ 5:179). However, this is not the kind of explanatory hypothesis that figures in §12. A unified treatment of Kant's theory of explanation would cover the genus that includes both reflective judgment and discursive explanatory relations. I cannot pursue that project here, though it would be a fruitful way to approach Kant's relation to later German Idealism.
21. Kant's claim is that, ultimately, concepts have meaning only by virtue of being "this *one* consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation" (A103; cf. A220/B267, A239–40/B299). Admittedly, it is difficult to spell out this connection in the case of a concept such as <tragedy>. Accordingly, my sense is that Kant's choice of a fable as his example is at a minimum strange if he really just wished to illustrate synthetic unity. One of Kant's standard examples such as the concept of body (§19, B142) would have been more appropriate, as its connection to *intuitions* is more direct.
22. There are two different ways to conceive of unity. One is in contrast to a quantitative plurality, which consists in homogeneous units (cf. A142–43/B182). Another is in contrast to plurality that is not subject to that restriction. This is qualitative unity. Kant's texts make it natural enough to assume that there can only be one genus of the latter. However, the fact that both analytic and synthetic unity are qualitative shows this to be wrong. I will be arguing that there is at least one further species of qualitative unity.
23. Plugging in Kant's terminology, this can be restated as: "The *analytical* unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some *synthetic one*" (B133).
24. As one would expect, Kant associates T_3 with both necessity and the faculty of reason. Regarding all three, see Ak 18:340 (R5734), Ak 18:341 (R5739), and Ak 18:233 (R5560).

25. In *Reflexion* 5560 (Ak 18:233) Kant treats the ability of material things to affect immaterial things to be a subsidiary hypothesis alongside the original hypothesis of an immaterial soul. But why not simply make what is being treated as the hypothesis in the first place a conjunction of both? Then there would not be a “subsidiary hypothesis” weakening the explanatory power of the original hypothesis. I do not take this to be an argument against Kant’s model. Instead, it helps us to clarify what he has in mind.
26. That said, it is worth considering whether Kant is sometimes thinking of <I> as both an *unum* and a synthetic unity when he uses the phrase “synthetic unity of apperception” (as, e.g., at B136). In order to evaluate this conjecture, we would need to look quite specifically at the role that the latter concept is playing in the entire argument of the Transcendental Deduction.
27. Georg Friedrich Meier’s description in §422 of his *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*, the textbook for Kant’s logic lectures, uses precisely the same terms that figure in §12: “grounds” precede “consequences” in synthetic method; in analytic method the reverse is the case (reprinted in Ak 16:786). For an interpretation of the distinction as it figures in the Transcendental Deduction, see Melissa McBay Merritt, “Science and the Synthetic Method of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 59, no. 3 (March 2006): 517–39.
28. Kant explains this sense of apriority at the start of the B-edition Introduction. The inquiry in that example is grounded on, and thus relative to, the principle that bodies are heavy (B2). For an attempt to make this notion of apriority fruitful, cf. Houston Smit, “Kant on Apriority and the Spontaneity of Cognition,” in *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*, ed. Samuel Newlands and Larry Jorgensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 188–251. For an attempt to reconstruct the foundations of Kant’s moral philosophy using a conception of apriority that is relative to the inquiry in which a particular cognition is embedded, see Timothy Rosenkoetter, “Kant on Construction, Apriority, and the Moral Relevance of Universalization,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 6 (2011): 1143–74, esp. 1161–63.
29. I am assuming that a randomly drawn doodle does not have this property to the same degree as these geometrical objects. It is the ground of resolving few problems, perhaps only ones involving that very doodle. CJ §62 analyzes the circle’s property as an (i) objective, though (ii) merely formal, purposiveness. That is, (i) its purposiveness is not relative to any agent’s particular ends, and yet (ii) neither is the *object* properly judged as possible or impossible relative to this purposiveness. The same can be said of a fruitful hypothesis in the sense of *unum*: (i) its purposiveness is not relative to the goals of this or that epistemic agent, and yet (ii) this property concerns the cognition’s relation to other cognitions rather than whether it refers to an object.
30. Though the question of confirmation with respect to the categories is *the* question of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant does not clearly pose the parallel question with respect to pure apperception. His different handling of the two questions is almost certainly explained by the fact that <I> must always remain the “*merely subjective condition*” of cognition, so that we are not justified in forming the concept of an *object* that is the “thinking being in general” (A354). Without denying that this difference is significant, the case for requiring confirmation of the legitimacy of our use of <I> is perfectly straightforward: we can neither use <I> nor even form the concept without combining a given manifold, and yet “the

- combination (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses" (§15, B129).
31. For a fuller treatment of the role of transcendental truth and order in the first *Critique*, see Timothy Rosenkoetter, "Truth Criteria and the Very Project of a Transcendental Logic," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91, no. 2 (June 2009): 193–236. That article was able to ignore §12, since T_2 is simply a different concept from "transcendental truth" in the sense of order (cf. Ak 28:414, title). As noted at the close of the previous section, the fact that we are subjectively incapable of entertaining hypotheses that compete with pure apperception makes T_2 irrelevant to the apperception-hypothesis. Two further points that would benefit from more extended treatment can only be mentioned in this contest. First, ascriptions of <transcendental truth> in the sense of order, in contrast to T_2 , are not relative to a subject's epistemic situation. Second, T_2 is a scalar property, whereas a manifold either possesses order or lacks order.
 32. One example of this claim, albeit without any mention of transcendental truth, is to be found in Kant's explanation for why we must think the properties of weight and body as "in the object" (§19, B142). However, A201–2/B247 provides conclusive evidence. There Kant invokes a dream world, which is the Wolffian term for a world lacking transcendental truth. Kant explains that if I took an event not to be governed by causal laws, "I would have to hold it to be only a subjective play of my imaginings, but *if I still represented something objective I would have to call it a mere dream*" (italics added, translation emended). Cf. A112, A492/B520–21, and A549/B577.
 33. This skepticism would be warranted if the only viable interpretation were Natterer's proposal that the transcendentals are *applications* of the categories of quantity to quality, and thus *less* original than the categories (*Systematischer Kommentar zur "Kritik der reinen Vernunft,"* 352–53). It must be conceded that something of this sort is the most natural reading of two discrete passages in §12 (B114, B115). However, I do not believe that Kant's language forces that reading. Moreover, it cannot do justice to the surprising inner coherence of the taxonomy associated with Kant's distinction between quantitative and qualitative unity. The former category is ultimately explained by the contrast between the functions that enable us to judge "all F are G" as opposed to "some F are G." Notice that this contrast takes the homogeneous unit of an F for granted (see note 22). It is Fs that are being counted. In order for this to be intelligible, we must be able to grasp the analytic unity and synthetic unity that are constitutive of <F>. On the reading proposed here, the three transcendentals (and *unum* in particular) concern relations in which "all/some F are G" can stand to other contents, such as "all/some H are I," when both belong to a single inquiry. This is a qualitative unity because it cannot be explained reductively by recourse to the functions of quantity, just as was the case with analytic and synthetic unity. Once this is seen, Natterer's explanation for the qualitative nature of the transcendentals will appear, by contrast, to resort to brute stipulation.
 34. It can be helpful to consider that the term "discursive" originates from a Latin term meaning "gone hastily to and fro."
 35. Some inquiries have a level of *perfectum* sufficiently low to make it perverse to speak of them as "systems." It is clear that Kant could have held the same theory of *unum* and *verum* even if he had thought that the notion of a unique (and therefore necessary), fully perfect theory is misconceived. For instance, Kant might have believed that any given theory, once fully developed, will yield at least two complete

theories, such that it is *in principle* undecidable which possesses more perfection. These points would seem to indicate that further research should be directed in the first place to Kant's notion of inquiry, from which point we can ask how his conception of a system enriches that basic theory.

36. I would like to thank Thomas Land for many helpful conversations on the topic of this chapter.

4

Moral Goodness and Human Equality in Kant's Ethical Theory

Lara Denis

All human beings are equal to one another, and only he who is morally good has an inner worth superior to the rest.

— Immanuel Kant, *Moral Philosophy Collins* (LE 27:462)¹

A potential tension looms in Kant's ethical thought. According to one dominant strand of it, human beings are equals under and through the moral law. All share the dignity of humanity. All are ends in themselves. All are owed respect; none may be subject to others' arrogance or contempt. But Kant also says that human beings attain personal worth through fulfillment of the moral law. A morally good person has an inner worth lacking in others. Those whom we regard as morally good elicit our respect; we attribute dignity to them because of their morality. Assuming that some but not all people are morally good, some human beings are superior to others. This implication sits uneasily with human equality.

This chapter seeks to illuminate Kant's ethics by investigating the roots of this potential tension and (especially) strategies for diffusing it. Section 1 sketches Kant's account of moral goodness and his view that it gives a person inner worth. Section 2 outlines Kant's position that all human beings are ends in themselves and explains why an apparent implication of section one – the superiority of morally good human beings over others – might seem to conflict with their equality as such. Sections 3 and 4 explore two interpretive strategies for rendering consistent Kant's claims about human equality, moral goodness, and the superior inner worth attained through morality. I close by reflecting briefly on a few important aspects of Kant's ethical thought rendered salient by the foregoing exploration.

Moral goodness

For Kant, moral goodness is fundamentally a matter of a good will, which is characterized by a pure, stable disposition of obedience to the moral law. "Will

[*Wille*]” can refer inclusively to the whole faculty of desire in accordance with concepts or exclusively to its rational, legislative capacity (MM 6:213).² Also, part of the will in the inclusive sense is choice (*Willkür*), from which maxims (subjective principles of action) issue (MM 6:226).³ Autonomy is “the will’s property of being a law to itself” (G 4:447) through the legislation of pure practical reason (*Wille*) to choice (*Willkür*). A will (construed inclusively) is *free* if its choice can be determined by reason alone, independently of sensible incentives (see MM 6:213, 226). Kant labels the “distinctive constitution” of a will its “character” (G 4:393). In a *good* will, the incentive of morality takes precedence over that of self-love within its supreme maxim; in an evil will, the morality is subordinate to self-love (see Rel 6:36).⁴ Kant identifies the supreme maxim with the fundamental disposition of the agent, where a disposition (*Gesinnung*) is a “determining ground” for the agent’s adoption of maxims or a “subjective principle of maxims” (CPrR 5:125; Rel 6:27). The character of a morally good person is constituted by maxims firmly based in a pure, stable, disposition of obedience to the moral law, that is, in the disposition that characterizes a good will.

A good will of the sort that human beings can have differs from a holy will we might ascribe to God in that the agreement of human choice with the moral law is contingent rather than necessary (see G 4:414; CPrR 5:32). Every human being, even the best, has an imputable tendency to stray from the moral law, to subordinate the moral law to self-love; this is the radical evil in human nature (see Rel 6:32). Even the most depraved human being, however, is capable of being moved by the moral law. It is because we lack holy wills that the moral law is an imperative for us (see G 4:414). As a categorical imperative, the moral law commands us to strive for moral perfection, which consists not only in the fulfillment of all our duties, but also in the purity of our moral disposition (see MM 6:446–47). Fundamentally, the moral law calls us to overcome the radical evil in human nature and to make ourselves good.⁵ Thus we can conceive of a *human* good will as a will in revolution from evil to good.⁶

A human good will is manifested in virtue and virtues. Virtue consists in volitional conformity to the moral law and moral strength in acting on moral maxims, even in the face of temptation (see MM 6:396–97, 405).⁷ Although virtue is an ideal, it is one befitting the radical evil of human nature (MM 6:409). Kant defines virtue as “moral disposition in conflict” contrasting it with holiness, “possession of a complete purity of dispositions of the will” (CPrR 5:84). Though we must strive for holiness, we cannot expect to achieve it in full within any moment of our existence (CPrR 5:122–23; Rel 6:67).

Virtues are “genuine moral dispositions” (CPrR 5:153). As such, they express in distinctive ways the one moral disposition (obedience to the moral law) with which Kant associates virtue. Particular virtues partially constitute the moral perfection of human beings: “with regard to perfection as a moral end, it is

true that in its idea (objectively) there is only *one* virtue (as moral strength of one's maxims); but in fact (subjectively) there is a multitude of virtues, made up of several different qualities" (MM 6:447). We should expect variation in the virtues exhibited by human beings. Yet what fundamentally makes anyone good is the same in everyone: a good will. To make room for morality in a deterministic world, Kant holds that we may regard the entire phenomenal character of a human being, including all her spatially and temporally located efforts to cultivate virtue and the virtues, as the phenomenal expression of the agent's noumenal adoption of a fundamental maxim or disposition, upon which the moral quality of her will depends (see CPrR 5:97–100; Rel 6:46–48, 67–68).

According to Kant, the good is "a necessary object of the faculty of desire" (CPrR 5:58). We call "good" that which "is **esteemed, approved**, i.e., that on which [we set] an objective value"; "the good... is valid for every rational being in general" (CJ 5:210; see also CPrR 5:61). Kant describes a good will as good "absolutely and without limitation" (G 4:402). If we go by Kant's explanation of his use of "absolute" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, then in describing the goodness of a good will as "absolute," Kant means that it is good in every relation, in all respects, and without restriction (A324/B380–A326/B382).⁸ Additionally, the good will "has its full worth in itself" (G 4:394), independently of its usefulness or agreeableness (see G 4:396–97). Finally, the worth of a good will "surpasses all else" (G 4:403). Considered in itself, a good will is to be valued above all empirical objects of choice, as well as above all talents or other qualities a person might exhibit:

A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed... of the sum of all inclinations. (G 4:394; see also G 4:396, 401, 426; MM 6:397)

Production of a good will is the supreme vocation of reason (see G 4:397; CPrR 5:87). The worth of a good will must be estimated as a "dignity," elevated "infinitely above all price" (G 4:435). While a good will is neither the only thing intrinsically good, nor the complete good, it is the condition of the goodness of everything else, including happiness (see G 4:393).

In ascribing absolute, unconditioned, inner worth to a good will, we ascribe it not only to "the way of acting, the maxim of the will" but also "consequently" to "the acting person himself as a good... human being" (CPrR 5:60; see also G 4:401; CJ 5:208–9; Rel 6:36). Kant notes that we "represent a certain sublimity and *dignity* in the person who fulfills all his duties" (G 4:439–40).

When we perceive moral goodness in another human being, we feel respect for that person (see CPrR 5:77). A person gives himself worth – achieves “a greater inner worth of his person” (G 4:454) – through moral goodness (see G 4:398–99; CPrR 5:147–48; CJ 5:443). Happiness constitutes the worth of a person’s “condition,” moral goodness the worth of the “person” himself (CPrR 5:60) – or at least the “greatest worth of the person” (LE 29:599–600). Conversely, a person can deprive himself of worth through vice, particularly of the self-regarding variety. We “become worthless” and “lose all inner worth” by violating our strict duties to ourselves (LE 27:604); we become “an object of contempt” (LE 27:343; see also LE 27:341–42).

Kant is not committed to the position that everyone is morally good. Indeed, he suggests that there is reason to doubt this (see G 4:406–8). Yet he neither assumes that everyone is equally bad morally, nor thinks that we should assume so (see LE 27:351). We are all in a similar moral predicament as human moral agents: we all can be morally good and we all fall short of being as good as we ought to be (see LE 27:348–50, 609). Still, there is reason to believe that some people are morally better than others – specifically, that some people have a good will and others do not – and thus that some have an inner worth that others lack. His discussions of virtuous and vicious individuals do not seem purely hypothetical (see LE 27:463–65; MM 6:448). Although Kant is emphatic about the inscrutability of our fundamental disposition (see Rel 6:51), his accounts of moral self-examination and self-knowledge suggest that different people might properly arrive at different conclusions about their goodness and inner worth (see MM 6:441–42; Rel 6:68–69). Kant depicts the highest good as “happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy)” (CPrR 5:110–11). In discussions of the highest good (and elsewhere), he writes as though some people are worthier of happiness than others, which implies that some people are morally better than others, with a corresponding superiority of personal worth (see A808/B836, A812/B840; CPrR 5:123, 129–30; TP 8:280n; CJ 5:458; Rel 6:5–6; see also MM 6:481).

Human equality

According to the preceding section, Kant’s claims about moral goodness seem to imply that some people have greater inner worth than others. Kant is strongly and explicitly committed, however, to the equality of human beings. Kant’s egalitarianism is perhaps most associated with the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the formula of humanity, which commands: “*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*” (G 4:429). There is room for debate about how best to understand “humanity” here – for example, as the rational capacity to set ends or as the moral capacity Kant elsewhere calls

“personality” (see CPrR 5:87). Generally, however, commentators have taken humanity to be something attributable to all human beings, whether or not they are morally good.⁹

The formula of humanity, which refers to the matter (objects or ends) of maxims appears to be a less fundamental formulation of the categorical imperative than the formula of universal law, which commands: “*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*” (G 4:421). It is the formula of universal law that Kant most directly identifies with the supreme principle of morality and the principle of a (non-holy) good will, and which he derives from the very idea of a categorical imperative (G 4:402, 420–21; CPrR 5:34; MM 6:226; LE 27:495–96). Importantly, however, Kant regards the requirement to treat humanity as an end in itself as expressing – in a distinctive, intuitive, and compelling way – the same rational requirement as the formula of universal law (G 4:437). Within his review of the formulations late in the second section of the *Groundwork* Kant says this:

The principle, so act with reference to every rational being (yourself and others) that in your maxim it holds at the same time as an end in itself, is...at bottom the same as the basic principle, act on a maxim that at the same time contains in itself its own universal validity for every rational being. For, to say that in the use of means to any end I am to limit my maxim to the condition of its universal validity as a law for every subject is tantamount to saying that the subject of ends, that is, the rational being itself, must be made the basis of all maxims of actions, never merely as a means but as the supreme limiting condition in the use of all means, that is, always as at the same time as an end. (G 4:437–38)

This passage suggests that by acting only on universally valid maxims one will never use humanity merely as a means. It further suggests that the connection between the formulas of universal law and humanity is deeper than extensional equivalence: the latter principle is “at bottom the same” as the former.¹⁰

Kant attributes to humanity not only the status of an end in itself, but also absolute worth (G 4:428) and dignity (MM 6:462). Kant links dignity specifically with our moral capacity: “morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity” (G 4:435); “the dignity of humanity consists just in [its] capacity to give universal law” (G 4:440). Still, this dignity is independent of whether we actually are morally good. As an end in itself, each of us is owed respect, “understood as the *maxim* of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person, and so as respect in the practical sense” (MM 6:449). Even a vicious human being may not be treated with contempt: “To be *contemptuous* of others (*contemnere*), that is, to

deny them the respect owed to human beings in general, is in every case contrary to duty; for they are human beings" (MM 6:463).

Human beings can be equal in certain respects and unequal in others, or equal by some standards and by not others, or equal up to a certain point but not beyond it. Whether or not a tension is generated by Kant's claims about human equality and moral goodness depends on how these claims are best interpreted. *Prima facie*, there is reason for concern. Both sets of claims concern our standing or worth as human beings as determined by the moral law. Moreover, the standing or worth shared by all human beings does not seem minimal or basic, but lofty. Kant ascribes absolute worth, as well as dignity, not only to a good will, but also to the human being as an end in itself (see G 4:428; MM 6:434–35).¹¹ Assuming that all human beings are ends in themselves in virtue of humanity, and that only some human beings have a good will and the inner worth that comes with it, the question becomes how to avoid the tension between human equality and the superiority of those who are morally good.

The interpersonal incommensurability of inner worth

One way to avoid the tension is to block the implication from the inner worth of those who are morally good to their superiority over others. Following Allen Wood, one might argue that all human beings are equal to one another in absolute worth or dignity, and that all talk of higher or lower inner worth must be understood as strictly intrapersonal, having to do only with a person's rising or sinking estimation of herself in relation to the standard of the moral law as she conceives of it.¹²

According to Wood, there is no difference in worth across human beings or indeed across rational beings. All are of equal worth, and that worth is as high as it can be: "the worst rational being (in any respect you can possibly name) has the same dignity or absolute worth as the best rational being in that respect (or any other)."¹³ All human beings share the dignity of humanity, which Wood takes to be the power to set ends and to imply autonomy and transcendental freedom. Our ability to set ends puts us on par with all other rational beings. While it is our capacity for end-setting generally that makes us ends in ourselves, it is our capacity for morality (personality) that gives us dignity.¹⁴ Yet this capacity gives dignity equally to all human beings, even those who do little to realize it. There is no higher worth than the absolute worth or dignity shared by all human beings in virtue of their rational and moral capacities.

Wood asserts that by "inner" worth, Kant means "worth as measured solely by comparison to the person's own self-given moral law or idea of virtue."¹⁵ Kant holds that each person is to estimate her worth only in relation to the moral law, not in relation to other people (see G 4:436; LE 27:349, 609, 703).

Only the moral law or the idea of humanity can serve as the standard for self-estimation: “The one and only comparison allowable here is the relation of his conduct to the moral law, which in respect of its definition is identical with humanity and the Idea thereof” (LE 27:610). Crucially, Wood claims that there is no way to extrapolate from how one person rates in relation to the moral law to how she compares morally with others. Epistemologically, we cannot ascertain even our own moral worth with certainty, let alone that of others (LE 27:450–51; G 4:407). We are prone to flattering self-deception about our moral worth, and are all too happy to conclude the worst about others in order to think better of ourselves by contrast (see LE 27:418; MM 6:392–93).

Wood insists that the problem of interpersonal moral comparisons goes deeper than the problems of knowledge and self-deception. Such comparisons cannot be made because there is no basis for them: “there is no common measure in terms of which your virtuous character could be compared with my vicious one”; “the moral task of each person is utterly unique and incomparable to that of any other, so that each of us can be measured morally by our own ‘inner’ standard, but there exists no common or comparative standard” for moral estimation.¹⁶ The point is not that such comparisons are not “fair” to those who have particularly difficult temperaments or especially challenging life circumstances. The point is that they are not possible: “human dignity, properly understood, rules out the very idea of any comparison” regarding the worth of rational beings.¹⁷ There is no interpersonal superiority or inferiority based on moral goodness.

Wood’s interpretation has a number of strengths. Reading higher and lower moral worth as purely intrapersonal allows Wood to handle well some claims that might appear problematic for himself as well as for Kant. For example, when Kant talks about how the person who violates duties to herself loses all inner worth, surrenders her personality, and makes herself a thing (see LE 27:341, 346, 373, 604; MM 6:425, 429), Wood can understand these simply as claims about how the person fails to live up to her own moral standard. Wood thus blocks implications that the person actually loses the dignity of humanity or may be treated as a thing by others. Such implications would be at odds with Kant’s claims that even the worst human is not entirely worthless, devoid of the dignity of humanity, or without a right to others’ respect (see MM 6:462–64).

Wood’s position accommodates Kant’s comments about the respect we feel for upright and decent human beings (see G 4:401n; CPpR 5:76–77, 78). For, as Wood points out, Kant holds that the respect we feel for others whom we take to be good is, at bottom, respect for the moral law, of which they provide an example.¹⁸ Kant’s claim that we “represent a certain sublimity and *dignity* in the person who fulfills all his duties” presents little difficulty for Wood (G 4:440). We could explain these passages in a way similar to how Wood explains Kant’s

claims about feelings of respect: it is really to the moral law that we attribute this dignity. Alternatively, we could say that someone who appears to fulfill all her duties simply calls to our minds the dignity that all human beings have in virtue of their personality. So while feelings of respect and attributions of dignity are elicited only by those whom we take to be morally good, we could explain them in a manner consistent with Wood's approach.

Despite its strengths, I have qualms about Wood's approach – and thus about adopting it in order to avoid the potential conflict in Kant's ethical thought. As I explain in the remainder of this section, the view that the worth of individuals is interpersonally incommensurable is implausible within the context of some of Kant's own positions and discussions. Some of the interpretations that underlie the view are suspect. Finally, Kant's strong opposition to interpersonal moral comparisons, though consistent with Wood's view, is not especially supportive of it.

Wood recognizes that the denial of the differences in personal worth among human beings is at odds with common moral thought, but denies that it is in tension with aspects of Kant's own ethical thought.¹⁹ Kant's writings and lectures suggest otherwise, however. It is not unusual for Kant to speak or write in ways that imply that some people are morally better than others. In the *Religion*, for instance, Kant says that "even the best" people retain a propensity to evil and "even the worst" people retain a propensity to good (Rel 6:30, 36). Kant is talking about people who are *morally* best or worst; and an element of interpersonal moral comparison or ranking is implicit.

Kant's depictions of the highest good as including strict proportionality between individual human beings' virtue and their happiness strongly suggest differences in personal worth among human beings. The highest good is the ultimate object of pure practical reason, an object of collective moral striving and hope among all human beings (see CPrR 5:108, 119). Within his discussions of (and related to) the highest good, Kant appears to accept that there are differences in worth among human beings – differences that depend on moral goodness or lack of it – differences which God can intuit from his atemporal perspective (CPrR 5:123–24; Rel 6:67–68) and use in distributing happiness to individuals in proportion to their goodness.

Kant holds, "happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy) constitutes the *highest good* of a possible world" (CPrR 5:110–11). Kant writes and lectures as though different people are worthy of different degrees of happiness. For example, in the *Religion*, he says that the supreme lawgiver of the ethical community in which the highest good is to be realized must be thought of as "one who knows the heart, in order to penetrate to the most intimate parts of the dispositions of each and everyone and... give to each according to the worth of his actions. But this is the concept of God as a moral ruler of the world" (Rel 6:99;

see also A814/B843; LE 27:450–51, 549–50, 717–18; LDR 28:1073). In *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Kant describes the highest perfection of the world as obtaining where “everyone can participate in happiness only in the measure that he has made himself worthy of it” (LDR 28:1101). Similarly, in the “fragment of a moral catechism” in the Doctrine of Method of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant has the teacher ask the student whether, in distributing happiness among human beings, he “would first try to find out to what extent each was worthy” of it (MM 6:481). Here and elsewhere, Kant talks of some people making themselves “unworthy” to participate in the happiness of the highest good that others will enjoy (see A813/B841–A814/B842; MM 6:482). If some people are worthy of more happiness than others, that seems to imply interpersonal differences in inner worth, for differences in deserved happiness correlate with and rest on differences in inner worth.

Admittedly, the rational need for proportionality between virtue and happiness within the realization of the highest good does not seem to be *primarily* a need for equitable distribution of it across persons. Just as ethics attempts to answer the question, “What should I do?” religion tries to answer the question, “If I do what I should, what may I then hope?” (A805/B833; see also LM 28:301). What reason demands is that each person receive the happiness of which she has made herself worthy through her goodness; discrepancies between an *individual’s* virtue and her happiness are a source of moral distress (see A813/B841; CJ 5:458; LE 27:549–50, 29:612; LDR 28:1072, 1081). Still, we have reason to think that some people are better than others. And some of Kant’s expressions of the need to believe in God and immortality (as conditions of the real possibility of the highest good) include appeals to frustration about how happiness appears to be distributed among human beings within the sensible world. In his lectures on metaphysics, Kant says, “Were there no hope for a future life then the vicious, who by any means and intrigue attempted to put himself in possession of earthly happiness, would be the happiest” (LM 29:937). Depicting the bleak perspective of one who does not believe in God, Kant says, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:

the righteous ones... will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, which pays no attention to that, to all the evils of poverty, illnesses, and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth, and will always remain thus until one wide grave engulfs them all together (whether honest or dishonest, it makes no difference here)... (CJ 5:452)

Moreover, Kant sometimes talks about human beings within the highest good enjoying their “share” of the happiness that has been distributed in exact proportion to the moral worth of the person (see CPrR 5:130). Talk of “shares” in

a communal stock of happiness distributed in proportion to worthiness – or at least only to those who are not unworthy of it – is hard to make sense of without presupposing the possibility of interpersonally commensurable differences in inner worth.

A line from the Collins notes on Kant's early lectures on ethics appears to take for granted the possibility of interpersonally commensurable differences in inner worth: *Alle Menschen sind einander gleich, und nur der hat einen inner vorzüglichen Werth vor allen, der moralisch gut ist*, which may be translated as "All human beings are equal to one another, and only he who is morally good has an inner worth superior to the rest" (LE 27:462, translation modified). Perhaps surprisingly, Wood takes this sentence to support his reading – maybe because of the explicit statement of equality and the apparent tension between the claim of equality and claim of superiority, if the latter is construed interpersonally. Wood renders the statement: "All human beings are equal to one another, and only he who is good has a superior inner worth."²⁰ The *vor allen*, which one might take to suggest interpersonal comparison, does not seem to be captured by Wood's translation. Perhaps it is absorbed into "superior." Regardless of the best way to handle *vor allen*, however, the broader context appears to presuppose the possibility of interpersonally commensurable differences in inner worth. In the section from which this passage comes, Kant is discussing a portion of Alexander Baumgarten's *Ethica philosophica* that deals with duties to particular classes of human beings – including the learned and unlearned.²¹ Kant considers the view that, unlike other positions in life, which seem to reflect difference in external worth, the status of scholar is special in reflecting "a distinction of inner worth": "The scholar is the only one who contemplates the beauty that God has put into the world, and uses the later for the purpose that God had in making it" (LE 27:641, translation modified). Drawing on Rousseau, Kant rejects this view. Scholars, Kant says, "contribute something of value but do not themselves have any superior worth thereby. Why should not a citizen who is diligent and industrious in his calling, and otherwise does a good trade and keeps his house in order, have just as much worth as the scholar?" (LE 27:462). Kant does not deny the possibility that some beings could have an inner worth superior to others – which is what one would expect him to do if his view were the one Wood attributes to him. What he denies is that scholars, as such, have it: only human beings who are morally good have inner worth superior to the rest.²²

I have doubts about Wood's construal of absolute worth, dignity, and inner worth. Wood's understanding of absolute worth as "the highest degree of worth conceivable," which "cannot be exceeded by any other appraisal" seems to motivate as well as support his view that no rational being one can have higher worth than any other.²³ If everyone has the highest degree of worth conceivable, how could anyone have higher worth than anyone else? As noted

in section 1, however, Kant understands absolute worth as unrestricted, universally valid worth, which holds in every relation (see A325/B381–A326/B382). Furthermore, it might be specifically the humanity in each person to which we should attribute absolute worth; it is the humanity in each person which we are obliged to use always as an end, never merely as a means (see G 4:429; MM 6:435). Kant sometimes distinguishes between a human being and the humanity in his person (see MM 6:441). If the humanity in every person has universally valid, non-relative worth, that does not preclude some human beings attaining greater worth than others through moral goodness.

I disagree with Wood's identification of "human *dignity*" as "a value that cannot be surpassed or added to"²⁴ – an interpretation which, like the one about absolute worth, appears to preclude the superior worth of the morally good over others. Oliver Sensen has convincingly demonstrated that, for Kant, "dignity" does not name a value property, but rather signifies the elevation of something over something else.²⁵ According to Sensen, passages which appear to equate morality's dignity with its absolute worth are better understood as saying that morality is elevated above all else in that reason requires us to value only morality without limitation or condition.²⁶ I share Sensen's view that the dignity shared by all human beings is the elevation of human beings over other living things in virtue of freedom.²⁷ This shared elevation of all human beings is compatible with some human beings having an inner worth others lack.

I question Wood's definition of "inner worth" as "worth as measured solely by comparison to the person's own self-given moral law or idea of virtue."²⁸ It is true that we are supposed to try to ascertain our inner worth through comparison of ourselves as human beings with the moral law or the idea of humanity (see LE 27:609–10). Yet it would be wrong to identify an agent's inner worth simply with the outcome of her self-estimation (however flawed it might be) or to regard the proper standard for this estimation as variable from person to person. The inner worth at issue here is the moral worth of the agent, which is a matter of her moral goodness (see LE 27:357–58, 664–65). This is an objective matter. Neither the moral law nor the ideas of virtue, humanity, or moral perfection – ideas of reason (see G 4:409; Rel 6:63) – should be construed as variable from person to person. In the *Anthropology*, Kant says: "He who has character derives his conduct from a source that he has opened by himself. However, the rational human being must not be an *eccentric*; indeed, he never will be, since he relies on principles that are valid for everyone" (An 7:293). Moral judgments – be they straightforward practical judgments or judgments of appraisal – rely on universally valid principles, and make claims to universal validity (see LE 27:263; CPrR 5:61; CJ 5:208–10).

The diversity (or "uniqueness"²⁹) of individuals' moral struggles does not preclude commensurable moral differences among people, such that some

human beings are morally better than others, with personal worth superior to the rest. True, human beings differ with respect to their temperaments and circumstances; their specific duties vary; they face different challenges and temptations. Fundamentally, however, moral goodness consists in the same thing for everyone: a good will. Such a will can be expressed in innumerable ways in innumerable lives.

Finally, Kant's claims that we should not make interpersonal moral comparisons of worth do not support the view that such comparisons are impossible, that is, that there is no basis for such comparisons. We should indeed compare ourselves as human agents only with the moral law, or the idea of humanity in our own person (LE 27:610). Morally, there is no point and much danger in interpersonal moral comparisons. There is no point because it is irrelevant to our own inner worth and moral vocation whether we are morally better or worse than others (see LE 27:40). There is much danger for several reasons. If we take ourselves to be worse than others, we might despair for ourselves or resent others (see LE 27:359). Insofar as we take ourselves to be better than others, we might find it hard not only to treat them as ends in themselves, but also to remember that such relative superiority is not good enough: the moral law does not require us to be better than others, but to be purely and fully morally good. Furthermore, it is only through estimating ourselves in relation to the moral law that we foster the feelings and attitudes of proper self-esteem that are essential to moral motivation and morally good character (see CPrR 5:88, 161; MM 6:402–3, 420, 435–36, 441–42). Comparison with others is a pernicious distraction. All that is sufficient to explain why we should not make such comparisons. We need not appeal to an in-principle impossibility.

So I agree that an individual human being should estimate her worth not by other people but by the moral law, and that she should not attempt to assess how she compares with others by the standard of the moral law. But those points do not imply that there is no basis for interpersonally commensurable differences in inner worth. On the contrary, the moral law – the sole standard by which each human being is to appraise her worth – is an objective, universally valid standard. According to this standard, a human being has inner worth insofar as she is morally good. Those who are virtuous have an inner worth superior not only to the worth they would have if they were vicious, but also to that of other people who are vicious.

The independence of moral status from inner worth

It is possible to avoid the potential tension without denying commensurable interpersonal differences in inner worth. Here I offer an interpretation according to which the equality of human beings is compatible with, and not undermined by, the superior inner worth of those who are morally good. Both the equal standing of all human beings and the inner worth in virtue of which

the morally good are superior to others are determined by the moral law. The moral law requires us to regard all human beings equally as ends in themselves. It also requires us to be morally good, and provides a norm for moral appraisal – a standard which we should not attempt to use for purposes of interpersonal moral comparison, but which in principle allows for the commensurable differences in personal worth among different human beings.³⁰

Human equality depends on *freedom*; individual's inner worth depends on the *use of freedom*. By freedom, I mean independence of causal determination and the autonomy to which it points (see G 4:431–33, 447; MM 6:226–27). Freedom is that feature of human beings which marks them out as ends in themselves: “freedom and freedom alone warrants that we are ends in ourselves. Here we have an ability to act in accordance with our own will” (Ak 27:1322).³¹ Without the moral capacity, human beings would not be ends in themselves: “that he has reason does not at all raise him in worth above mere animality if reason is to serve him only for the sake of what instinct accomplishes for animals; reason would in that case be only a particular mode nature had used to equip the human being for the same end to which it has destined animals” (CPrR 5:61; see also LE 27:344; CPrR 5:62; MM 6:434). Freedom is a necessary condition of moral goodness and inner worth: “freedom itself...makes human beings capable of a moral and inner worth” (Ak 19:165 [R6801]); “[t]he free will and its constitution is alone capable of an inner goodness” (Ak 19:195 [R6890]); “[a]ll worthiness lies in the use of freedom” (Ak 19:110 [R6611]).

While Kant sometimes uses “humanity [*die Menschheit*]” and “human being [*der Mensch*]” interchangeably, he often distinguishes them, identifying the former with freedom (see LE 27:609; G 4:428–29; MM 6:434–35). In some passages, Kant writes as though the humanity “in” a person is the set of rational capacities which characterize him as free (see CJ 5:431; MM 6:387, 392). In others, “humanity” refers to the human being conceived purely in terms of his supersensible capacity for freedom; and “human being” to the embodied, sensibly affected agent (see LE 27:579, 593; MM 6:239, 379–80, 462). In some such cases, Kant presents humanity (as *homo noumenon*) as binding or coercing the human being (as *homo phenomenon*) to the performance of duties, especially (but not only) duties to oneself:³² “We conceive of the human being first of all as an ideal, as he ought to be and can be, merely according to reason, and call this Idea *homo noumenon*; this being is thought of in relation to another, as though the latter were restrained by him; this is the human being in the state of sensibility, who is called *homo phenomenon*. The latter is the person, and the former merely a personified Idea” (LE 27:593; see also LE 27:510, 579; MM 6:239, 295, 418).

The categorical imperative demands that we treat the humanity in every human being – and every human being in virtue of her humanity – as the supreme limiting condition on our use of means. This requirement is explicit

in the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the formula of humanity: “*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means*” (G 4:429). A passage from the *Critique of Practical Reason* makes explicit that it is our freedom which makes us ends in themselves and morally precludes our use merely as means:

In the whole of creation everything one wants and over which one has any power can also be used *merely as a means*; a human being alone, and with him every rational creature, is an *end in itself*: by virtue of the autonomy of his freedom he is the subject of the moral law, which is holy. Just because of this every will, even every person’s own will directed to himself, is restricted to the condition of agreement with the *autonomy* of the rational being, that is to say, such a being is not to be subjected to any purpose that is not possible in accordance with a law that could arise from the will of the affected subject himself; hence this subject is to be used never merely as a means but as at the same time an end. (CPrR 5:87)

The basis of our standing as subjects of a self-given moral law is thus identical with the basis of our moral claim to be treated as an end in itself: our freedom. In virtue of our freedom, all human beings are equally obliged to treat all rational beings as ends in themselves, and all human beings are equally entitled to this treatment from all rational beings.

Our most general, fundamental obligation is obedience to the moral law. Pure, complete volitional conformity to the moral law implies a good will. So a good will is an end the pursuit of which is implicit in the categorical imperative; it is unconditionally practically necessary (G 4:412). Like the requirement to treat every human being as an end in itself, the requirement to strive for a good will follows from the categorical imperative. We use our freedom properly – realizing our autonomy – only insofar as we are morally good, for we thereby will in conformity with the law we give ourselves purely out of respect for that law.

So the moral law, as a categorical imperative, determines both that all human beings are equal as ends in themselves, and that a good will is that which is to be pursued above all else. These are distinct but mutually compatible requirements. A good will follows the categorical imperative, and so treats all human beings as ends in themselves. Crucially, the requirement to treat a human being as an end in itself does not depend on the supposition that she is morally good, only that she is free. Freedom implies the capacity for morality, not moral goodness.

So far we are talking about the moral law as source of prescriptions about what to do. In this context, there is an asymmetry between respect for humanity

and pursuit of a good will. We must treat *every* human being as an end in itself, but strive for *only our own* good will. The moral law does not set forth a good will in others as something for us to bring about. For Kant, the good is that which is “practically necessary,” “a necessary object of the faculty of desire” (G 4:412; CPrR 5:58). Is it only one’s own properly constituted will that one can regard as good? If so, that would support Wood’s contention that differences in worth must be solely intrapersonal. It does not, however, follow from the fact that the good is that which is practically necessary or from the fact that reason does not direct us to bring about a certain volitional constitution in anyone but ourselves (or from their conjunction) that we cannot deem *good* wills with that constitution that are not ours. In regarding a certain volitional condition as good absolutely, without limit or condition, we regard it as a practically necessary object for everyone, not just for oneself. Furthermore, we can judge as good, and can value, a properly constituted will in other people without seeing it as something necessary for *us* to maintain or realize *in them*.

The moral law is a standard of appraisal as well as a guide to action. We can use it not only to make straightforwardly practical judgments about what we ought to do, but also to appraise the character – or the maxims constitutive thereof – in ourselves and (albeit in a more tentative and limited way) in others. Indeed, Kant holds that it can be instructive to think about what various actions suggest about the maxims and characters of other people (actual or hypothetical) (see CPrR 5:154–56; G 4:397–98). In the self-regarding case, we estimate our inner worth by “testing our action by its agreement with, or deviation from, what is said by the moral law, and by the extent to which it is undertaken, not merely in accordance with, but for the sake of the law alone” (LE 27:609). Judging ourselves as human beings against the standard of the idea of humanity (or the moral law [see LE 27:610]), we see that “the attainment of a total agreement, or the entire worth of humanity, is a thing that the human being is far removed from” (LE 27:609). Thus, we estimate our worth as low; a feeling of humility is bound up with this judgment (see LE 27:349, 358, 609). In the other-regarding case, too, we appeal to the moral law or idea of humanity for the standard against which to judge the human being. Here we experience approval (or esteem, admiration, or veneration) or disapproval (or disgust or contempt) depending on the degree of agreement or disagreement between what we take to be the agent’s maxim and what we take the moral law to require of someone in such a situation. A judgment of moral goodness consists in approval. Although a judgment of appraisal is distinguishable from a judgment about what to do, moral appraisals have significant practical relevance. In the self-regarding case, recognizing one’s distance from the worth of humanity may move one to strive harder for it. In the other-regarding case, admiration of moral goodness may inspire in the appraiser “a lively wish that he himself could be such a man” (CPrR 5:156; see also G 4:454).³³

There are significant differences between the practical respect owed to everyone in virtue of humanity and the respect which we feel for others in virtue of morality. The former is a maxim required by the moral law; the latter is a feeling that reflects the moral law as the norm of appraisal. It is a manifestation of our moral predisposition that we are subject to feelings of esteem for ourselves in consciousness of our freedom (in determination by the moral law), and feelings of contempt for ourselves through consciousness of our violation of it. The conduct of others also elicits a range of feelings. We feel respect for a person whose example presents the moral law in its purity before us; contempt for someone who degrades herself. Such degradation does not rob the agent of humanity in her own person or her standing as an end in itself. She is always owed (practical) respect, despite her failure to elicit (feelings of) respect through her conduct.

Although Kant writes as though the worth of humanity in our own person can be maintained or thrown away by human beings – particularly through the fulfillment or violation of duties to oneself (see LE 27:343–44) – the worth of humanity is not identical with the inner worth of a person.³⁴ Humanity and its worth must be attributed equally to even the most vicious of human beings, while inner worth is the worth a person gives to herself through morality (see LE 27:358, 27:664–65, 29:631; G 4:398–99; Rel 6:51). Inner worth is the worth of a good will, which, unlike humanity in our own person, is something for which we must strive. In discussing just self-estimation, Kant contrasts “the worth of humanity in our own person” with the “the worth of the human being in his person,” presenting the former as something for us (as human beings) to aspire to through morality (LE 27:609). A vicious person deprives herself of inner worth by failing to live up to the worth of humanity, but she nevertheless retains humanity in her person. She therefore can neither be judged completely worthless, nor denied respect owed to her in virtue of her humanity (see MM 6:462–63). One human being may have more or less inner worth than another, but the worth of humanity in every person is equal.

The case with dignity is similar, but not exactly the same. As Sensen argues, human dignity is a “two-fold notion” for Kant, involving the innate dignity of humanity (freedom), which all have, and its realization, which depends on individuals’ use of freedom:³⁵ “The dignity of human nature lies solely in freedom; through it we alone can become worthy of any good. But the dignity of a human being (worthiness) rests on the use of freedom, whereby he makes himself worthy of everything good” (Ak 19:181 [R6856]). The innate dignity of all human beings in virtue of their freedom is inseparable from an obligation of each individual human being not to waste it, but instead fully to realize her freedom and innate dignity through morality. Freedom elevates all human beings above other animals – and indeed above themselves considered merely as human animals. Those of us who allow our inclinations to rule us, however,

disregard our innate dignity, thereby degrading ourselves below those other animals (see LE 27:345). When we realize our freedom through morality, we elevate ourselves, as our nature as free beings enables and obliges us to do.³⁶ That through which we elevate ourselves – morality – is that through which we give ourselves inner worth.

I do not take Kant's two-fold conception of human dignity to commit him to regarding morally good human beings as elevated over others. In realizing their innate dignity, the morally good are living up to the elevated standing that all human beings share as rational beings, not ascending to an additional, higher tier of such beings. Still, even if those who realized their initial dignity could be described as raising themselves above not only animals, but also above all other human beings, it would not undermine the innate dignity we all share in virtue of our freedom. Nor would it undermine every human being's status as an end in itself, nor the requirement to respect humanity in every human being.

On the interpretation offered in this section, there is neither a conflict between the various pairs of contrasting positions about respect, worth, and dignity, nor a tension between human equality and the implication of the superiority of morally good human beings over others. No lack of inner worth or failure to realize one's dignity as a human being makes one cease to be an end in itself. Feelings of contempt or esteem for oneself or others may be warranted. But the obligation practically to respect ourselves and others as free human beings is unaltered by the goodness or badness of these individual persons. Whether or not a human being realizes her innate dignity through being morally good, she retains the dignity of a free being, an end in itself.

This interpretation does not deny the possibility of commensurable interpersonal differences in moral worth. Kant has principled objections to our making interpersonal comparisons. Kant's opposition seems to me to reflect his perfectionism no less than his egalitarianism. It is one's own will one must perfect; thinking about other people is a dangerous distraction. But I reject Wood's claim that there is no basis for interpersonal comparisons of worth within Kant's ethics: the moral law is the basis. Further, I suppose that God – belief in whom, as one who knows the dispositions of all human beings, Kant takes to be warranted – could make such comparisons. It seems better to avoid saddling Kant with the counterintuitive view that there are no interpersonally commensurable differences in moral worth, especially when Kant's own texts are more naturally read as allowing for them.

Conclusion

I have presented two strategies for avoiding the potential tension between Kant's commitment to human equality and the apparent implication of his view about the inner worth of moral goodness – namely, that some people are

superior to others. I have explained why I favor an approach that allows that morally good human beings are morally better than others, with inner worth superior to them. I wish to conclude by emphasizing a few points about Kant's ethics which emerged as significant from consideration of both approaches to avoiding the tension – and as points of agreement between them.

First, Kant's ethics is not concerned with interpersonal comparisons of inner worth. Indeed, it urges us to avoid them, and to concern ourselves only with our own standing in relation to the moral law. Second, our concern with our own morality should be primarily forward-looking – less about figuring out whether we are good and more about striving to comply purely and fully with the moral law. Reason's driving practical question is, "What should I do?" (A804/B832–A805/B833). Third, being morally good does not put one into a higher class of beings with respect to rights and duties than rational beings who are not morally good. The only moral status category to which any human being can belong is that of an end in itself. There is no elite, privileged subclass, reserved for the morally good.³⁷

Notes

1. Heath translation, modified. Throughout, I translate *Menschen* as "human beings."
2. For a detailed analysis, see Stephen Engstrom, "Reason, Desire, and the Will," in *Kant's "Metaphysics of Morals": A Critical Guide*, ed. Lara Denis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28–50, 43–50.
3. Wish is also part of *Wille*, taken inclusively.
4. Kant uses "good will" also to refer to the morally good predisposition and to the ideal will. See G 4:445; Rel 6:37, 44, 143.
5. On the difficulties involved in this notion, see Rel 6:66–77.
6. See Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 122–24.
7. See Lara Denis, "Kant's Conception of Virtue," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 505–37; and Lara Denis, "Virtue and Its Ends," in *Kant's 'Tugendlehre': A Comprehensive Commentary*, ed. Andreas Trampota, Oliver Sensen, and Jens Timmermann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 159–81.
8. Kant acknowledges there that philosophers often equate "absolute" with "internal," and that these attributions sometimes coincide.
9. See, for example, Christine M. Korsgaard, "Kant's Formula of Humanity," in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 106–32.
10. There is a much debate about how best to understand the relations among the several formulations of the categorical imperative. See, for instance, Paul Guyer, "The Possibility of the Categorical Imperative," in *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172–206; Onora O'Neill, "Universal Laws and Ends in Themselves," in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 126–44, esp. 141–42; Jens Timmermann, *Kant's "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals": A*

- Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 73–114; and Allen W. Wood, “The Supreme Principle of Morality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 342–80, esp. 347–61.
11. Some commentators have questioned the distinction between humanity and a good will, citing, among other things, attributions of value or standing – such as having absolute worth or being an end in itself – which seem like they should apply only to one thing and which appear to apply (if not explicitly, then by implication) both to a good will and to humanity. See, for example, Richard Dean, *The Value of Humanity in Kant’s Moral Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 35–42. I critically consider Dean’s identification of humanity with a good will in Lara Denis, “Humanity, Obligation, and the Good Will: An Argument against Dean’s Interpretation of Humanity,” *Kantian Review* 15, no. 1 (March 2010): 118–41.
 12. See Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 132–39; see also Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179–81.
 13. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 132.
 14. Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 88.
 15. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 134.
 16. *Ibid.*, 137.
 17. *Ibid.*, 138.
 18. See Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 136–37; and Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 29–30.
 19. See Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 181.
 20. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 134.
 21. See sections 400–25, included in Ak 27:845–51.
 22. I thank Oliver Sensen for conversation about this passage.
 23. Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 180.
 24. *Ibid.*, 180.
 25. See Oliver Sensen, *Kant on Human Dignity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 165–68.
 26. See G 4:434–35; and Sensen, *Human Dignity*, 185.
 27. See G 4:439; MM 6:420; and Sensen, *Human Dignity*, 165–68.
 28. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, 134.
 29. *Ibid.*, 137.
 30. I do not regard my approach as novel. Joshua Glasgow, for instance, argues for a distinction between the moral status Kant attributes to all human beings and the moral goodness he attributes to a good will in “Kant’s Conception of Humanity,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, no. 2 (April 2007): 291–308. Glasgow is not addressing the question of whether some people might have superior inner worth to others, but rather arguing that – contra Dean in *The Value of Humanity* – Kant’s value claims do not imply the identity of humanity and a good will.
 31. I draw here from *Kants Naturrecht Feyerabend*. The translation is from Frederick Rauscher, used by his permission.
 32. See Lara Denis, “Freedom, Primacy, and Perfect Duties to Oneself,” in *Kant’s “Metaphysics of Morals”: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lara Denis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 170–91.
 33. For related discussion, see Stephen Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge: A Study of the Categorical Imperative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 54–61.
 34. I discuss Kant’s dramatic claims about the loss of worth through duties to oneself in Denis, “Freedom, Primacy, and Perfect Duties to Oneself,” 187–90; and in Lara Denis, “Proper Self-Esteem and Duties to Oneself,” in *Kant’s “Lectures on Ethics”: A*

Critical Guide, ed. Lara Denis and Oliver Sensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), sect. 3.

35. Sensen, *Human Dignity*, 168–72.
36. As Sensen notes (*Human Dignity*, 170–72), Kant frequently explicates duties to oneself as duties not to waste or degrade the dignity of humanity in our own person, but rather to maintain or honor that dignity. See LE 27:343, 347; MM 6:420, 423, 429, 436; LP 9:489.
37. I thank Eric Wilson for his comments on the penultimate draft.

5

Kant and the Possibility of Transcendental Freedom

Benjamin Vilhauer

Ideas about freedom play important roles throughout Kant's texts: the spontaneity of the understanding in the construction of experience is central in Kant's epistemology and metaphysics, the "free play" of the imagination and understanding in judgments of beauty is a key idea in Kant's aesthetics, and the autonomy of practical reasoning is among the most fundamental ideas in Kant's ethics. In this chapter, however, I will mostly focus on what Kant calls "transcendental freedom," which Kant says "constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason" (CPrR 5:3). Transcendental freedom has important connections to autonomy in practical reasoning, and I will discuss these connections at various points. There may also be important connections between transcendental freedom and the various other kinds of freedom Kant discusses, but I will not address that here. I will argue that Kant's theory of transcendental freedom involves what we might call a "determinist libertarian" metaphysics of free will, which depends on the idea that human agents control some of the deterministic laws that govern their psychological states. I will go on to argue that, despite Kant's efforts in the *Critique of Practical Reason* to show that we know we are transcendently free, the best he can do is to show that it is possible that we are transcendently free, but that this is enough to preserve important aspects of Kantian ethics.

What is transcendental freedom?

Transcendental freedom is the sort of freedom traditionally referred to as "free will" – the sort which incompatibilists hold to be incompatible with determinism. (As these terms will be used here, "incompatibilism" is the view that free will is incompatible with determinism, "compatibilism" is the view that free will is compatible with determinism, and "libertarianism" is the view that incompatibilism is true and we have free will.) Kant describes transcendental freedom as a kind of causality "through which something

happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause, i.e., an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself" (A446/B474). It is "the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature" (A533/B561). Transcendental freedom also affords us alternative possibilities of action: when someone acts wrongly, we appeal to transcendental freedom to explain how we can regard reason as a cause that "regardless of all the empirical conditions...could have and ought to have determined the conduct of the person to be other than it is" (A555/B583). One of the reasons that transcendental freedom is important in Kant's philosophy is Kant's view that it is presupposed by morality: without it "no moral law is possible and no imputation in accordance with it" (CPrR 5:96). It is important to note at the outset of this chapter that not all of Kant's remarks on transcendental freedom are consistent, so any account inevitably involves some reconstruction. In this section I discuss points on which commentators agree, and in the next three sections I sketch different interpretations which diverge on points of controversy, in the course of arguing for my own preferred interpretation.

Kant clearly worries over the incompatibilist concern that there is a conflict between free will and determinism, and sounds very much like he rejects compatibilism altogether:

If I say of a human being who commits a theft that this deed is, in accordance with the natural law of causality, a necessary result of determining grounds in preceding time, then it was impossible that it could have been left undone; how then, can appraisal in accordance with the moral law...suppose that it could have been omitted because the law says that it ought to have been omitted? (CPrR 5:95)

Kant goes on to ask, "how can that man be called quite free...in regard to the same action in which...he is nevertheless subject to an unavoidable natural necessity?" (CPrR 5:95). In animated language, he declares that

It is a wretched subterfuge to seek to evade this by saying that the *kind* of determining grounds of his causality in accordance with natural law agrees with a *comparative* concept of freedom...according to which that is sometimes called a free effect, the determining natural ground of which lies *within* the acting being, e.g., that which a projectile accomplishes when it is in free motion, in which case one uses the word "freedom" because while it is in flight it is not impelled from without...in the same way the actions of the human being, although they are necessary by their determining grounds which preceded them in time, are yet called free because

the actions are caused from within, by representations produced by our own powers.... (CPrR 5:96)

Kant goes on to argue that

it does not matter whether the causality determined in accordance with a natural law is necessary through determining grounds lying *within* the subject or *outside* him...if...these determining representations have the ground of their existence in time and indeed in the *antecedent state*, and this in turn in a preceding state, and so forth, so that these determinations may be internal and they may have psychological instead of mechanical causality, that is, produce actions by means of representations and not by bodily movements: they are always *determining grounds*... and they therefore leave no *transcendental freedom*....if the freedom of our will were...psychological and comparative but not also transcendental...then it would at bottom be nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit, which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its movement of itself. (CPrR 5:96–97)

There is, however, debate about whether what Kant rejects here is compatibilism in general, or instead just some kinds of compatibilism.

Kant thinks that we can know determinism to be true, because of the arguments he presents in the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled the Second Analogy of Experience. There, he argues that we experience the world as objectively ordered in time, but this is only possible if the objects we experience are governed by deterministic laws, and he concludes that the objects we experience, including ourselves, are governed by deterministic laws:

All the actions of the human being in appearance are determined...and if we could investigate all the appearances of his power of choice down to their basis, then there would be no human action that we could not predict with certainty, and recognize as necessary given its preceding conditions. (A549/B577–A550/B578)

As we saw in the “turnspit” passage, Kant clearly thinks that such determinism stands in *prima facie* conflict with free will. But he also thinks that it is still possible that we have free will, and in some texts (the *Critique of Practical Reason* and later texts) he claims that we *know* we have free will.

Kant thinks that we can make room for free will alongside determinism by appealing to his doctrine of transcendental idealism. Kant draws a “transcendental distinction” between things as they appear, or “phenomena,” and things as they are in themselves, or “noumena.” He holds that we can know

determinism to be true of things as they appear, but not of things in themselves. When we think of agents as phenomena, we must regard them as deterministic, but when we think of agents as noumena, we need not. Kant explains this by distinguishing what he calls our empirical and intelligible characters:

for a subject of the world of sense we would first have an empirical character, through which its actions, as appearances, would stand through and through in connection with other appearances in accordance with constant natural laws, from which, as their conditions, they could be derived; and thus, in combination with these other appearances, they would constitute members of a single series of the natural order. Yet second, one would also have to allow this subject an intelligible character, through which it is indeed the cause of those actions as appearances, but which does not stand under any conditions of sensibility and is not itself appearance. The first one could call the character of such a thing in appearance, the second its character as thing in itself. (A539/B567)

But exactly *how* this appeal to the transcendental distinction serves to reconcile free will and determinism in Kant's theory of transcendental freedom is a matter of debate. I will sketch three positions in the debate in the next three sections. The compatibilist commentators I discuss think that transcendental freedom is best understood as a sophisticated form of compatibilistic freedom along the lines of Donald Davidson's anomalous monism. The deflationary commentators interpret Kant as offering a non-metaphysical theory of freedom, according to which it is a mistake to suppose that there is a unified metaphysics of causation which explains how free will and determinism fit together – instead, reason simply requires us to view ourselves in different ways when we reason theoretically (when we reason about what is the case) and when we reason practically (when we reason about what we ought to do). The libertarian commentators see Kant's theory of transcendental freedom as a metaphysical theory which holds that agents' intelligible character is in some sense ontologically prior to their empirical character, in such a way that the non-determinism of our intelligible character is a more fundamental fact about us than the determinism of our empirical character.

A compatibilist interpretation

There have been various compatibilist interpretations of transcendental freedom over the years, but here I will focus on an especially clear version first advanced by Ralf Meerbote and more recently developed in greater detail by Hud Hudson.¹ The guiding idea in this interpretation is that Kant's theory of freedom can be interpreted in terms of Davidson's influential doctrine of

“anomalous monism.”² Like Kant, Davidson analyzes agents in terms of two aspects which are distinct in one sense, but unified in another. Davidson draws his distinction not between intelligible and empirical characters, but instead between physical and mental events, which he holds to be token-identical but type-distinct. His ontology is monistic, so that all events are physical events – that is, every mental event is also a physical event. But explanations of mental events do not refer to physical types, and explanations of physical events do not refer to mental types. Physical events are covered by deterministic laws, which implies that mental events are too, via their token-identity with mental events. But events are only covered by laws insofar as they instantiate types contained in the laws, and on Davidson’s view, deterministic laws only contain physical types. This means that insofar as an event is individuated *as* a mental event, it is nominally independent of determinism. Davidson also thinks that an event counts as a cause only if it is covered by a deterministic law, so mental events are only causes by way of their identity with physical events. Davidson holds that this leaves room for everyday causal claims about mental states, like “my desire to listen to the radio caused me to turn on the radio.” But he holds that this claim can only be true if there is a deterministic law linking the intentionality-laden events of desiring to listen to the radio and turning on the radio *in terms of the physical types contained in their physical descriptions*.

The Meerbote-Hudson interpretation of Kant’s theory of free will holds that the non-determinism of mental events in anomalous monism is a good model for the non-determinism of the intelligible character in Kant’s theory of transcendental freedom. Hudson and Meerbote import Davidson’s view that we can make everyday causal claims about mental events, due to their token-identity with physical events. In this way, Davidson’s mental causation becomes Kant’s causality of the rational will.

One of the main goals of this interpretation is to provide a clear way of understanding the viewpoint we take in practical reasoning to be distinct from our viewpoint in theoretical reasoning, without having to appeal to a noumenal metaphysics, and it is a great success in this regard. But it does not fully capture Kant’s understanding of the relationship between the intelligible and empirical characters. One problem is that while the Hudson-Meerbote account grounds the causality of the will in physical causation, Kant sees the grounding relation going in the other direction:

if the effects are appearances, is it also necessary that the causality of their cause... must be solely empirical? Is it not rather possible that... this empirical causality itself, without the least interruption of its connection with natural causes, could nevertheless be an effect of a causality that is not empirical, but rather intelligible...? (A544/B572)

Another problem is the “freedom of a turnspit” passage (CPrR 5:95–97, quoted above), where Kant argues against what he takes to be Leibniz’s account of free will, but where his target is broad enough that it threatens to include all compatibilist accounts of free will. Hudson argues that Kant is objecting to kinds of compatibilism which claim that being free is just a matter of having one’s actions deterministically caused by representations internal to oneself, and since mental events are nominally non-deterministic on the Davidsonian interpretation, it avoids this objection. This may be right. But we must also attend to the concern Kant expresses at the beginning of the passage: if a theft is “a necessary result of determining grounds in preceding time, then it was impossible that it could have been left undone,” so how can we “suppose that it could have been omitted”? That is, if we suppose that an immoral action is deterministically caused, then how can we suppose that the agent could have done otherwise, as we must when we judge that the agent ought to have done otherwise? As we will see below, deflationary and libertarian interpreters can answer this question by holding that there is another perspective to be taken on our agency which is at least as fundamental as the physicalistic perspective. But anomalous monism does not seem to have an answer to this question, since it makes actions token-identical with physical events that are determined to happen precisely as they happen.

Hudson appeals to a different theoretical strategy to answer the question about alternative possibilities of action, one which goes back to Hume in its general form.³ The key idea in that strategy is most readily understood in terms popular in recent philosophy when put in the following way: deterministic agents are sometimes able to act differently than they actually act because they are able to do some things they do in “nearby” possible worlds (worlds which have histories or laws which are different in relatively minor ways from the actual world). On this view, even if some agent’s doing A is incompatible with facts about the past and/or the laws in the actual world, and thus causally impossible in the actual world, it can still be true that the agent can do A if the agent does A in a nearby possible world. It is important to emphasize that this view does not attribute to agents a causal power to change the past or the laws. According to Hudson, it

simply says that [the agent] could have done otherwise than perform [some action] at t, and if he had done otherwise, then either the past would have been different than it was or the laws would have been different than they are; [it] does not say that [the agent] has any causal power over the past or any causal power over the laws.⁴

Some of the libertarian commentators to be discussed below *do* think Kant’s theory of free will involves a kind of causal power over the laws, but by way

of a noumenal metaphysics which Hudson rejects. The account of alternative possibilities that Hudson adopts has at its core a willingness to see some actions that agents perform in other possible worlds as grounds for true claims about what actual agents are able to do, and while this may seem counterintuitive to philosophers with incompatibilistic intuitions, it is a time-honored compatibilist view defended by influential philosophers including David Lewis.⁵ It is unlikely that it would satisfy Kant, however. In the “freedom of a turnspit” passage, Kant seems quite clearly to assume that it is one’s account of the causal origins of agents’ actual actions which determines whether one’s theory can accommodate the ability to do otherwise, and if this is right, then references to causally inaccessible possible worlds would not seem to help.⁶

Deflationary interpretations

Deflationary interpreters of Kant’s theory of free will, including Henry Allison, Graham Bird, and Andrews Reath, seek to present an interpretation that is, as far as possible, non-metaphysical.⁷ (They do not typically adopt the “deflationary” label for their own views, but the term is in common usage, and it is helpful for picking out an important commitment shared by these commentators.) Their views are in a sense compatibilistic because they do not accept a metaphysics of noumena which stand behind the phenomena and undermine the significance of phenomenal determinism, as most libertarians do. This is a commitment that they share with Meerbote and Hudson. Deflationists hold that the only things in Kant’s ontology are deterministic empirical objects: Allison rejects “the ‘noumenalistic’ view that grants ontological priority to things as they are in themselves,”⁸ and he argues that “Kant’s transcendental distinction is primarily between two ways in which things (empirical objects) can be ‘considered’ at the metalevel of philosophical reflection.”⁹ Reath explains that “the thought of objects as they are in themselves is just the thought of ordinary objects apart from the conditions under which they appear to us.”¹⁰ On Bird’s account, “The realm of noumena is a necessary, unavoidable, conceptual shadow of our immanent experience...The central error associated with the recognition of such appeals to ultimate grounds of experience is that of misconstruing the concepts *as* designations of real things.”¹¹

Deflationists are in another sense libertarian, however, because they hold that when we reason practically and regard agents as free, we must regard them as libertarian-style first causes of their actions, in a way that is incompatible with the deterministic causation of phenomena. For example, Allison emphasizes the point that “transcendental freedom...is an explicitly...incompatibilist conception (requiring an independence of determination by all antecedent causes in the phenomenal world).”¹² This distinguishes their view from the Meerbote-Hudson view.

Deflationists' insistence that the only objects which exist are deterministic phenomena may seem puzzling alongside their endorsement of libertarian free will. Their approach is bound up with their critique of metaphysics. The Meerbote-Hudson view provides a unified metaphysics of causation by explaining the causal efficacy of the will by way of its token-identity with physical events. Deflationary commentators reject this. They think that Kant's critique of traditional metaphysics means that it is an illusion of reason to believe that there is any such unified metaphysics to be had, whether at the level of noumena or phenomena. On their view, Kant reconciles determinism and libertarian free will by distinguishing between theoretical and practical rationality and assigning them to different spaces of reason, as it were – distinct spheres of rational activity which do not come into conflict even though they sit cheek by jowl in everyday life. We simply use a different causal framework to think about human beings as agents than we use to think about them as deterministic objects. As Bird puts it, “the argument and acceptance of transcendental freedom do not establish that our practically free choices are *exempt* from causal influences but only that those causal influences can be practically disregarded.”¹³ Allison says that

by treating space, time, and the categories as epistemic rather than ontological conditions, transcendental idealism also opens up a “conceptual space” for the nonempirical thought [of] rational agents, as they may be apart from these conditions, that is, as they may be “in themselves.” ... For the most part, of course, this conceptual space remains vacant and the thought of things as they are in themselves therefore reduces to the empty thought of a merely transcendental object, a “something in general = x.” In the consciousness of our rational agency, however, we are directly aware of a capacity (to act on the basis of an ought) that...we cannot regard as empirically conditioned.... Consequently, in attributing the latter to ourselves and our agency, we do not merely prescind or abstract from the causal conditions of our actions, considered as occurrences in the phenomenal world; rather we regard these conditions as nonsufficient, that is, as “not so determining” as to exclude a “causality of our will” since we think of ourselves as initiating causal series through actions conceived as first beginnings.¹⁴

For philosophers trained in traditional metaphysical thought, the deflationists' perspective may seem strangely disjointed. How can we simply regard deterministic beings as non-deterministic when it suits us, and call this sound philosophy? But this approach becomes more comprehensible when we foreground Kant's idealism. On Kant's view, the deterministic order of the world that we experience is due to the human mind's spontaneous activity as it constructs

an organized whole out of the raw sensible content it passively receives. If the deterministic causal framework of appearances is merely something reason requires us to construct, rather than a mind-independent feature of reality, then it may seem more plausible to suppose that reason could require us to construct an alternative non-deterministic causal framework alongside it which includes free agents.

However, insofar as the deflationists' account depends on keeping the theoretical and practical spaces separate, it faces the textual challenge that Kant's own remarks link them, when he appeals to the idea that free will grounds the deterministic causation of phenomena. We saw an example of this from A544/B572 in the previous section, and here is another:

A rational being can now rightly say of every unlawful action he performed that he could have omitted it even though as appearance it is sufficiently determined in the past...for this action...belongs to a single phenomenon of his character...in accordance with which he imputes to himself, as a cause independent of all sensibility, the causality of those appearances. (CPrR 5:98)

It is not clear how we can make sense of these remarks without supposing that free will and phenomenal determinism fit together into a unified metaphysics of causation of the sort that deflationists reject.

Libertarian interpretations

Libertarian interpreters think that Kant reconciles determinism and free will by way of a metaphysics which makes the intelligible character of agents ontologically prior to their phenomenal character. On this view the existence of free will is a more fundamental metaphysical fact about agents than the determinism of the will's appearances. Meerbote and Hudson think that the will derives its causal efficacy from its identity with ontologically prior deterministic phenomenal events, and in this way they ontologically subordinate free will to deterministic causation. Deflationists think that we see agents as free by rationally believing that the deterministic causes of their actions are not deterministic, and they thereby refuse to ontologically subordinate either sort of causation to the other. Libertarians think the non-determinism of free will is a more fundamental reality which plays a role in shaping the deterministic course of the phenomenal causal series, so that we somehow create alternative possibilities of action within the deterministic causal series, and in this way they subordinate deterministic causation to free will.

The challenge for libertarians is to explain how there can be any room in the deterministic causal series for free will to play a role in shaping its course. After

all, once the deterministic laws are set, and all the facts about the world at any one point in time are determined, all the facts about the world at all points in time are determined, down to the last detail. How can free will get an oar in? The libertarian interpreters I discuss here argue that transcendental idealism makes noumenal wills responsible for the natural laws that govern them as phenomena.

But how can we make sense of this? God is often represented as designing the history of the world by choosing its deterministic laws and its starting point, and setting it into motion. That gives us one model of how an agent can shape the course of a deterministic causal series. But presumably Kant does not imagine each of us to be like God. What libertarians want Kant to be able to do is to secure for each agent control over her own actions in a way that conforms to our everyday intuitions about the scope of our free will. They do not want a metaphysics on which my control over my own actions also somehow implies control over the orbit of the earth, or perhaps even worse, control over the actions of other people.

Derk Pereboom offers the simplest and most elegant solution to this problem. He makes God a sort of coordinator of our noumenal wills:

God knows, eternally, what every possible libertarian free creature would choose in every possible circumstance, and with this knowledge, God is able to direct the course of history with precision, partly in virtue of creating just those free creatures whose choices fit a preconceived divine plan. ... God would reconcile noumenal transcendental freedom with phenomenal determinism by creating just those transcendently free beings the appearances of whose free choices conform to the deterministic laws that God intends for the phenomenal world.¹⁵

Pereboom's view raises some philosophical and textual puzzles, however. Kant has a lot to say about God and the will – for example, he thinks that it helps support our motivation to act morally to believe that God ensures that our happiness is proportional to our virtue in the long run (this is what Kant calls “the highest good”) – but he does not mention the sort of coordinator role Pereboom has in mind for God. It is also arguable that the preferred way to combine divine foreknowledge with free will is to detach God's knowledge of our future actions from the causation of our future actions as much as possible. Pereboom's solution may not entail that God causes our noumenal acts of will, but it does seem to entail that God causes our phenomenal actions. That is, if God chooses deterministic laws to which our free choices conform, that seems to imply that God chooses laws which (along with the facts about the world at any one point in time) entail that our empirical character is as it is. This alone raises at least some questions about God's culpability for our bad actions.

Further, if God causes phenomenal actions, then it is not clear that there is any role left for agents in causing phenomenal actions, and as we have seen in the last two sections, Kant emphasizes the idea that free agents somehow ground the deterministic causation of their phenomenal actions. Here is yet another example: “insofar as the acting person regards himself at the same time as noumenon... he can contain a determining ground of that causality in accordance with laws of nature which is itself free from all laws of nature” (CPrR 5:114). So, some of the most central texts in which Kant discusses transcendental freedom seem to weigh against Pereboom’s interpretation.

Eric Watkins, Robert Hanna, and I argue in different ways for interpretations on which individual noumenal agents control the laws of nature that govern those same agents as phenomena.¹⁶ This idea may initially seem absurd, since controlling the laws of nature is traditionally God’s precinct. But if we interpret transcendental idealism as asserting the ontological priority of noumena, this idea can be made intuitive.

Kant clearly holds that we cannot have theoretical knowledge of noumena, but this is often assumed to entail a more general exclusion of knowledge about noumena than is indicated in Kant’s texts. Theoretical knowledge is knowledge of determinations, that is, synthetic knowledge that particular predicates apply to things, and this is only possible with respect to objects in space and/or time. But we can know that noumena exist without synthetically knowing that any particular predicates apply to them if the existence of noumena is implied by basic features of transcendental idealism which we know *a priori*. Kant holds that the synthetic apriority of our knowledge of space and time implies that space and time are transcendently ideal, that is, that they are spontaneously constructed by the human mind. But we also know that this construction only produces a formal aspect of the world, an empty manifold of blank spatiotemporal extension. The specific content of empirical reality must be contributed by something independent of the human mind, and since space and time are mind-dependent, we must isolate, in transcendental reflection, non-spatiotemporal grounds of that specific content. These grounds are the noumena. Noumena explain the particular, contingent properties instantiated by empirical objects which cannot be derived from the formal constructive activity of the human mind. Noumena are needed in the same way to explain the particularity and contingency of causal laws. The formal constructive activity of the human mind establishes the objective temporal order of the world, and (as Kant explains in the Second Analogy) the mind does this by imposing the form of deterministic causation on phenomenal events. But this imposition only amounts to the abstract, general fact *that there are deterministic causal laws*. This formal construction does not explain why we have the particular causal laws we have, rather than some others. That is the role of noumena. This helps make sense of the idea of human responsibility for causal

laws. Human agents are noumena as well as phenomena, so we can think of them as responsible for some of the laws of nature. As I interpret Kant, his theory of free will turns on positing that the particular causal laws we noumenally contribute to empirical reality are just the laws that necessitate our phenomenal actions.

If this idea is to be plausible, it must be emphasized that the sense of “responsibility” according to which we are responsible for causal laws is a derivative one. Our free noumenal choices are choices of maxims, that is, choices of our principles of action, not choices of natural laws. Our choices of maxims appear in inner sense as phenomena of empirical psychology, necessitated by causal laws. The practical types and laws which inform our choice of maxims and the theoretical *a posteriori* types and laws under which these choices appear to us are entirely different, and as a consequence of our theoretical ignorance of noumena, we cannot know *why* they correlate as they do. But if we accept this interpretation, it becomes consistent to hold that, despite the fact of phenomenal determinism, our phenomenal actions could have been different, because they would have been determined by different causal laws if we had chosen differently.¹⁷

However, if the laws of nature are structured in such a way that the laws governing my phenomenal actions also govern indefinitely many other events that are not my phenomenal actions, then Pereboom’s model would be preferable, because this model would still leave a decidedly non-omniscient being like me in a godlike position. This would be the case if, for example, laws of nature were necessarily *repeatedly instantiated* (so that they always governed indefinitely many events) or *unified* (so that all particular natural laws were entailed by one general law, such as a law of physics). But according to Kant’s account of causation, we cannot know that laws of nature have either of these features. If Kant accepted Hume’s inductivism, he would have to accept that natural laws were necessarily repeatedly instantiated, since according to Hume, the very concept of causal law is abstracted from observations of repeated successions of event-types. But Kant rejects this view: according to the Second Analogy, our knowledge that all events are causally necessitated is a condition for the possibility of the experience of objective succession, so if we had to abstract the concept of causal law from the observation of events, we could never arrive at the concept of causal law in the first place. This means Kant has no reason to rule out laws that are instantiated only once. This point is also important for interpreting Kant’s account of empirical psychology in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. Kant thinks we can know there are laws of empirical psychology even though the absence of an enduring substrate in inner sense implies that we cannot repeat experiments on it (MFS 4:471), and if we cannot repeat experiments on it, we cannot know whether its laws are repeatedly instantiated.

Hanna and I both point out passages in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* which show that Kant rejects the view that laws are necessarily unified.¹⁸ In Section 4 of the first Introduction, Kant argues that the unity of natural laws is a regulative idea (an idea that guides us in thought), not a constitutive principle. The progress of natural science requires us to assume that there is a significant amount of unification among the laws of nature, but we cannot assume perfect unity. Hanna reads the *Critique of the Power of Judgment's* account of organisms as suggesting that single-instance natural laws are emergent features of the organisms that embody rational agents.¹⁹ As I see it, this would lead to excessive complexity in the material sciences, requiring an indefinite increase in the number of fundamental forces of matter (or more specifically, an indefinite increase in the number of “originally different” combinations of repulsive and attractive force that are exhibited in matter), and Kant thinks this runs counter to the methodology of the material sciences (see the “General Remark to Dynamics,” MFS 4:523–35). On my interpretation, single-instance laws are laws of empirical psychology, that is, they are instantiated in the phenomenal soul. Kant’s empirical dualism (e.g., A379) implies that laws governing the phenomenal soul and its interactions with the body are not laws of matter. So this interpretation avoids the problem of excessive complexity in the material sciences. We must still posit forces to explain such interactions, but we can suppose that they are non-physical forces. This is just what Kant appears to do:

We attribute to the soul a *vim locomotivam*, because real movements of the body arise whose causes lie in the soul’s representations, without thereby meaning to ascribe to the soul the only ways in which we are acquainted with moving forces (namely, through attraction, impact, repulsion, hence movement that always presupposes an extended being). ... (CJ 5:457)

Do we know that we are transcendently free?

Kant’s position on the epistemology of free will changes significantly at the time of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Prior to this, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, his claim is just that “nature at least does not conflict with causality through freedom” (A558/B586). He merely wants to show that free will is possible despite phenomenal determinism, and in only the thinnest sense of possibility – “logical” rather than “real” possibility, as he puts it. He says that the idea of free will may be “merely invented” (B573), and that what we seem to experience as freedom, when we find ourselves able to resist acting on impulses caused in us by sensation, may “with regard to higher and more remote efficient causes be nature” (A803/B831). In the *Groundwork*, he says that “freedom is only an *idea* of reason, the

objective reality of which is in itself doubtful” (G 4:455). I will refer to this view as “possibilism” about transcendental freedom.

Kant argues that possibilism is coupled with a practical requirement to believe in free will:

every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy. Now I assert that to every rational being having a will we must necessarily lend the idea of freedom also, under which alone he acts.... one cannot possibly think of a reason that would consciously receive direction from any other quarter with respect to its judgments, since the subject would then attribute the determination of his judgment not to his reason but to an impulse.... consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom.... (G 4:448)

Exactly how this argument is supposed to work is a matter of debate, but the position Kant takes here is clear enough: rational agents must believe they are free when they act, and all the laws bound up with freedom hold for rational beings in the same way they would hold if we could have theoretical knowledge that they were free. The claim about laws bound up with freedom is important – Kant thinks these laws include both everyday principles about taking the means to our ends, but also more abstract principles of moral reasoning. So part of what Kant is claiming is that beings who must regard themselves as free are subject to the very same moral laws as beings who are really free. I think that part of what animates Kant’s argument here is the idea that we cannot deliberate about what to do in cases where we seem to have alternative courses of action open to us unless we believe that we can control which of those alternative courses we take. This claim has definite appeal – it certainly seems accurate to the phenomenology of deliberation, in any case. Kant may not have established that it is a necessary truth about rational wills, but it may well be a contingent truth about human nature, as I take Galen Strawson to suggest.²⁰ Even if it is a necessary truth about rational wills, though, Kant does not seem to have ruled out skepticism about this practical belief in free will, and the bindingness of practical laws it implies, when we pause in our action and reflect theoretically. There is no inconsistency in raising what we might call the skeptical question: “Certainly, I must see myself as free when I act, but for all that I may not really be free, so can I really know that all the same moral rules apply?”²¹

In the preface of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant dramatically announces that now, in his new book, “transcendental freedom is...established...in

that absolute sense in which speculative reason needed it" (CPrR 5:3). In an important passage, Kant describes the moral law as a "fact of reason" from which we can deduce not just the possibility, but the actuality, of transcendental freedom:

the moral law is given, as it were, as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain....the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction, by any efforts of theoretical reason, speculative or empirically supported...and it is nevertheless firmly established of itself....But something different and quite paradoxical takes the place of this vainly sought deduction of the moral principle, namely that the moral principle, conversely itself serves as the principle of the deduction of an inscrutable faculty...which speculative reason had to assume as at least possible...namely the faculty of freedom, of which the moral law...proves not only the possibility but the reality in beings who cognize this law as binding upon them. (CPrR 5:47)

The claim at the core of this argument is more clearly displayed earlier in the book, where Kant asks us to imagine asking someone

whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of...immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy...he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life....He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he is aware that he ought to do it and cognizes freedom within him.... (CPrR 5:30)

In other words, he knows he can do it because he knows he ought to do it. Kant here implicitly asserts the famous "ought implies can" principle.

This claim to know that we are not just possibly but actually transcendently free is a surprising change in Kant's views, especially given the central role played by the idea of the limits on our knowledge of noumena in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It seems clear that part of what prompted Kant to advance this new view was concern about what we just called the skeptical question in connection with the *Groundwork* argument. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant seeks a sturdier foundation for morality by making it a fundamental fact, and deriving the actuality of free will from it. But this change in tactics cannot fully suppress the skeptical question. It still seems reasonable to ask whether morality can really be a fundamental fact in this way if it implies transcendental freedom, and knowing that we are transcendently free means knowing something that Kant took such pains to argue that we could not know, in the

Critique of Pure Reason. In other words, if “ought” implies “can,” doubts about “can” reasonably give rise to doubts about “ought.”²² For these reasons, it does not seem that Kant really garners any additional philosophical strength for his epistemology of free will with his strategy in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. If his possibilist strategy in the *Groundwork* is just as strong, and more consistent with the dominant themes of the critical philosophy, it makes sense to see that as his better strategy.

If this is right, then Kant’s theory of transcendental freedom leaves us with possibilism, and the skeptical question. Can we live with this? Is the mere possibility of free will enough to support morality?

Possibilism and the benefit of the doubt

To determine whether possibilism is enough to support morality, we must distinguish (at least) two roles played by appeals to free will in Kant’s ethics. One is to explain the “can” in the “ought implies can” principle, as discussed above. The other is to explain moral responsibility – Kant holds that we must think of people as transcendently free when we praise, blame, reward, or punish them for their actions. Kant’s *Groundwork* view is that possibilism is enough to support both these ways of appealing to free will. I think we can accept this view in regard to “ought implies can,” but only part of this view in regard to moral responsibility.²³

If it would be good for an agent to act in some way, then the claim that he ought to act in that way is not undermined by possibilism about free will. The claim that he ought to act in that way may be undermined by other considerations – for example, that there are other things that it would be better for him to do. But this would be determined by evaluating the particular actions at issue, not by evaluating the fact that “ought”-claims are at issue. Similarly, if it would be bad for an agent to act in some way, then the claim that he ought to act in that way can be rejected by evaluating the action it specifies – the fact that it is an “ought”-claim need not come into it.

When we turn to moral responsibility, we must distinguish “positive” ways of holding people morally responsible, such as reward and praise, from “negative” ways of holding them morally responsible. Possibilism is sufficient for some positive ways of holding people morally responsible, such as praise that benefits its recipient and harms no one else (for example, it does not indirectly shame others who are denied praise), and the sort of pep talks used to motivate young people that include the idea that they are free to be the architects of their own destinies. But seriously harmful blame or punishment cannot be supported with possibilism. Here are some examples to illustrate these claims.

Suppose that if I push button 1, I will prevent a person who is good by any ethical standard from receiving a painful and lethal electrical shock. Next,

suppose that if I push button 2, I will give a painful and lethal shock to someone accused of murder. Now consider the claim that I ought to push button 1, and the claim that I ought to push button 2. What I would do in pushing button 1 is something that is uncontroversially worth doing. Concern about whether there is free will is not relevant in this case for assessing the value of the action specified in the “ought”-claim. Instead, this is a concern relevant merely for the abstract normative structure of the “ought”-claim. In this context it is enough to be able to consistently suppose that I have free will to accept the “ought”-claim. So possibilism is adequate to support an “ought”-claim like this. Consider the fact that, for reasons that have nothing to do with free will, I am rarely, if ever, in a position to know that I can do something. Every action has conditions external to my will which I can rarely, if ever, know to obtain in advance of deciding to act. For example, button 1 might turn out to be jammed in such a way as to prevent me from pressing it when I actually try to press it. It seems clear that I do not have to know that all such inhibitors are absent to believe that I ought to press it. Why should things be different for conditions of my pressing the button which are internal to my will?

Now consider the claim that I ought to push button 2. It is of course much less clear that I ought to do so, even for someone like Kant who approaches the issue with retributivist assumptions. This claim has the same abstract normative structure as the claim that I ought to push button 1 – that is, both are imperatives which specify that an action is to be taken – but the specific actions they command are quite different. Concerns about whether we are free are relevant in claim 2 not just for its abstract normative structure, but also for assessing the value of the action it specifies, because we must appeal to free will to justify the attribution of moral responsibility to the accused murderer. There is the obvious issue of assessing the accusation – did the accused actually commit the murder? – and there is a strong moral intuition that we must apply a very high justificatory standard in assessing such claims when serious punishment is at issue, which is manifested in the “reasonable doubt” standard in criminal trials. I think that the same high justificatory standard should be applied to claims about free will in this context.²⁴ People can only deserve retribution if they are morally responsible for their wrongful actions, and moral responsibility implies free will. To be justified in imposing seriously harmful retribution on someone, possibilism is not enough.

It is not, however, always easy to distinguish “ought”-claims where free will is relevant only for their abstract normative structure from “ought”-claims where free will is relevant to both structure and also evaluation of the specified action. Kant holds that it is intrinsically valuable for us to treat each other as ends (which implies not treating each other as mere means). So the foregoing arguments suggest that possibilism is sufficient to support the claim that we ought to treat each other as ends. But this turns out to be too quick, because

Kant thinks treating people as ends sometimes requires holding them morally responsible in ways that include seriously harmful retribution. I think that it is true that it is intrinsically good to treat people as ends, and that possibilism is enough to support the claim that we ought to do this, but only if we reconstruct Kant's notion of treating people as ends so as to replace his retributive deontology with a non-retributive deontology.

Here is an example of what I mean. When Kant argues for the death penalty in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, his argument takes a turn which is peculiar for him, even though it is commonplace in the tradition of retributivism about punishment. That is, Kant bases his argument for the legitimacy of the death penalty on the claim that murderers deserve to die because of their actions, rather than the claim that we would rationally consent to be killed if we end up committing murder.²⁵ In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explicitly denies that, in the social contract, one has "consented to lose his life in case he murdered someone else" (MM 6:335). He goes on to argue that

Punishment...can never be inflicted as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society. It must always be inflicted on him only *because he has committed a crime*. For a human being can never be treated merely as a means to the purposes of another.... (MM 6:331)

In this passage Kant seems to be thinking that if we do not hold that criminals deserve punishment based on their actions, then the only other way to justify punishment is with a consequentialist appeal to the positive consequences of punishment for society, such as deterrence, which thereby treats the criminals to be punished as mere means to the end of a safer society. I think Kant is mistaken here. He is correct that consequentialist justifications treat criminals as mere means, but he is wrong to think that the only way to avoid treating criminals as mere means is to punish retributively.

I advocate an alternative justification that treats criminals as ends, but which appeals to the idea of rational consent to punishment rather than retributive desert. It does not justify the harsh punitive measures Kant himself prefers, but I think it hews closer to the dominant impulses of Kant's ethics. It is based on selecting principles of punishment in the Rawlsian original position.²⁶ Suppose that we had to choose institutions of punishment behind the veil of ignorance, assuming that we had an equal chance of finding ourselves among the punished or among those protected by the institution of punishment. It would be rational to choose to imprison violent criminals in benign prisons, by which I mean prisons much less harmful than contemporary prisons (or at least contemporary prisons in the United States). For people with normal social attachments, and a normal desire to be free from interference in the pursuit of their ends, prison would inevitably be harmful, even under benign conditions.

But it would make sense to risk that harm if it significantly diminished our chances of being murdered or seriously injured by a violent criminal.

I think it is a very good thing for Kantian ethics that this rational consent alternative to retributive justification is available, because the mere possibility of free will is simply not adequate to justify retribution, at least not seriously harmful retribution. As I mentioned above, we recognize that we must meet a very high burden of proof to justify harming people when we impose the “reasonable doubt” standard on arguments in criminal courts. Kant himself acknowledges a parallel standard when he argues that the priests of the inquisition could not have known that God wanted the inquisition’s victims to die, and that no evidentiary standard short of knowledge could justify anyone in imposing so severe a penalty (Rel 6:186–87).²⁷ It seems fair to ask Kantians to apply the same high standard to claims about free will when they appear in justifications of serious retributive harm. If we reconstruct Kant’s theory in this way, by substituting a non-retributive deontology for Kant’s own retributivism, then we can make do with the mere possibility of free will.

As I read Kant, he offers a terribly complicated metaphysics of free will which turns out not to be adequate to support his ethics in all the ways he wants. Does this mean that he fails? I do not think so. I think Kant is appropriately sensitive to the fact that there is no place for free will in the empirical causal networks of the world that we experience, and it is this that drives him to his transcendent metaphysics. Even if empirical causation is indeterministic, as some interpretations of quantum mechanics suggest, we face a version of the same problem that worried Kant. Indeterminism seems to amount to chance, and doing things by chance seems little better than doing things deterministically, as far as free will goes. So the philosophical value of an idea like transcendental freedom is just as great in the contemporary era as it was in Kant’s time. If it turns out that our grounds for believing in transcendental freedom are strong enough to support important elements of Kantian ethics, but not Kant’s retributivism, then this may look like a failure from Kant’s perspective, but it need not look that way to contemporary ethicists, who may find that a Kantian ethics which avoids Kant’s retributivism is preferable to Kant’s own ethics.

Notes

1. Ralf Meerbote, “Kant on the Nondeterminate Character of Human Actions,” in *Kant on Causality, Freedom, and Objectivity*, ed. W. L. Harper and Ralf Meerbote (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 138–63; and Hud Hudson, *Kant’s Compatibilism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
2. See, for example, Donald Davidson, “Mental Events,” in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 207–24.

3. See Section 5 of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
4. Hudson, *Kant's Compatibilism*, 94–95.
5. David Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" *Theoria* 47, no. 3 (Dec. 1981): 113–21.
6. I discuss the Meerbote-Hudson interpretation in more detail in Benjamin Vilhauer, "Can We Interpret Kant as a Compatibilist about Determinism and Moral Responsibility?" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (2004): 719–30. This section is based on that longer discussion.
7. I discuss Allison's interpretation in more detail in Benjamin Vilhauer, "Incompatibilism and Ontological Priority in Kant's Theory of Free Will," in *Rethinking Kant: Current Trends in North American Kantian Scholarship*, ed. Pablo Muchnik (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 28–47. I make some of the same points against deflationism there.
8. Henry Allison, *Idealism and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.
10. Andrews Reath, "Kant's Critical Account of Freedom," in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 276.
11. Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 706–7.
12. Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.
13. Bird, *Revolutionary Kant*, 710.
14. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 44–45.
15. Derk Pereboom, "Kant on Transcendental Freedom," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73, no. 3 (Nov. 2006): 557.
16. Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 301–61; Robert Hanna and Adrian Moore, "Reason, Freedom and Kant: An Exchange," *Kantian Review* 12, no. 1 (March 2007): 113–33; and Benjamin Vilhauer, "The Scope of Responsibility in Kant's Theory of Free Will," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 45–71.
17. This explanation is based on one in Vilhauer, "Can We Interpret Kant as a Compatibilist," and developed further in Vilhauer, "Scope of Responsibility." See also Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, 335, for a discussion of similar points.
18. This discussion is based on remarks I make in "Incompatibilism and Ontological Priority."
19. Hanna and Moore, "Reason, Freedom and Kant," 120–22.
20. Galen Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52–63.
21. I discuss related issues about "ought implies can" and free will skepticism in Benjamin Vilhauer, "Taking Free Will Skepticism Seriously," *Philosophical Quarterly* 62, no. 249 (Oct. 2012): 833–52. Even if we could know that determinism was true, and that we lacked transcendental freedom, we could still satisfy the "can" in "ought implies can" with an epistemic sense of "can." Our ability to predict particular human actions is very limited (and is likely to remain so indefinitely). This means that when I contemplate some future choice among alternatives, there will typically be multiple ways in which it is possible for me to act, *to the best of*

- my knowledge*, and it seems consistent for me to believe that I ought to do anything that it is possible for me to do to the best of my knowledge. However, I think it puts normative reasoning on a firmer footing if we can demonstrate that transcendental freedom is possible, and I think that it is a major achievement on Kant's part that he has done this.
22. If we follow Meerbote and Hudson or the deflationists, and suppose that Kant's theory of free will really does not rely on a causal role for ontologically prior noumena after all, then things may seem easier for Kant here: if thinking of ourselves as free is really just attributing special properties to deterministic empirical objects, then it may be a lot easier to know that those properties are actually instantiated. But anti-noumenalist approaches make it hard to understand why Kant ever denied knowledge of transcendental freedom; Kant's rejection of knowledge of transcendental freedom prior to the *Critique of Practical Reason* seems to favor libertarians.
 23. In "Kant on Transcendental Freedom," Pereboom also distinguishes these two roles, but I take his view to be that the mere possibility of transcendental freedom is not adequate to support either.
 24. I argue for this claim about high justificatory standards in more detail in Benjamin Vilhauer, "Free Will and Reasonable Doubt," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2009): 131–40; and Benjamin Vilhauer, "Taking Free Will Skepticism Seriously."
 25. For a helpful critique of this dimension of Kant's argument for the death penalty, see Matthew C. Altman, "Subjecting Ourselves to Capital Punishment," in *Kant and Applied Ethics: The Uses and Limits of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 117–38.
 26. I discuss this approach in more detail in Benjamin Vilhauer, "Punishment, Persons, and Free Will Skepticism," *Philosophical Studies* 62, no. 2 (Jan. 2013): 143–63.
 27. I also discuss this point in Benjamin Vilhauer, "The People Problem," in *Exploring the Illusion of Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Gregg Caruso (New York: Lexington, 2013), 141–60.

6

Why Should We Cultivate Taste? Answers from Kant's Early and Late Aesthetic Theory

Brian Watkins

Kant believes that taste is a talent for judging an object's beauty based on a distinctive feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Like any talent, we can cultivate taste through practice and education, or we can allow it to languish. Because we all have many talents and only so much time and energy, choosing to cultivate one will necessarily involve neglecting some others. Why then should we cultivate taste? Kant concludes his early work on taste, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, with the hope that "not all delicacy – judging with more or less taste what goes on outside us – should amount merely to fleeting and idle amusement" (OBS 2:255, my translation). In other words, judging on the basis of taste is not simply a pleasant diversion from more important concerns. We should cultivate our taste because it is a power of judgment we need to live well.

How does Kant justify this claim? His strategy changes dramatically in the twenty-seven years between the publication of the *Observations* in 1763 and his more substantive account of taste and beauty in the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment, the first part of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, published in 1790. I will first discuss Kant's position in the *Observations*. There, Kant claims that if our taste is good we will *desire* or *care for* the right kinds of things, that is, those things that will contribute to and facilitate our happiness. I will then show that Kant holds a different view in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, namely, that we should cultivate our taste so that we are *inspired* by the right kinds of examples. I will argue that, for this reason, Kant ultimately believes we need good taste to participate in the continued development of culture that he calls enlightenment.

Taste and happiness in the *Observations*

The *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* is not a book about beauty and sublimity – what these are and why they affect us in the way they

do; it is a book about our *feelings* for the beautiful and the sublime, the variety in which these can appear and, in part at least, why having such feelings should matter to us.¹ Kant's method is primarily descriptive, and the text thus reads more like his anthropological writings than the dense philosophical analysis of taste that he will undertake in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In the *Observations*, Kant characterizes the various forms of feeling for the beautiful and the sublime by reference to human temperaments, gender, and national character. For example, Kant claims that "women have a stronger innate feeling for everything that is beautiful, decorative and adorned" while men have a taste for "abstract speculation or knowledge, which is useful but dry" (OBS 2:229–30). And while the French prefer "fine jests, comedy, laughing satire, enamored dalliance, and the light and naturally flowing manner of writing," the English take pleasure in "thoughts with deep content, tragedy, [and] epic poetry" (OBS 2:244). The details of these descriptions are not so important for my purposes here; for better or worse, they mainly document the prejudices of Kant's time. However, Kant does have important things to say in the *Observations* about the cultivation of taste in general. Kant believes that taste can be cultivated along two axes, which I will call its *grade* and its *scope*. In what follows, I will discuss the reasons Kant provides for why and how we should cultivate taste along these lines.

Consider first the grade of taste, that is, the degree to which one's taste is correct. Kant is not, in the *Observations*, merely documenting the variety of feelings for the beautiful and sublime; he wants to specify the *standard* to which our feelings should conform.² Importantly, though, Kant does not identify this standard with any form in particular that the feeling for the beautiful and sublime may take. In other words, by distinguishing the taste of women from that of men and these from the tastes corresponding to the national characters, Kant does not mean to suggest that one taste is more cultivated than the others – so that, for example, the English taste is, in some sense, closer to the standard than the French. Instead, Kant believes that these forms of feeling are best understood as *variations* on what he might call the *natural* feeling for the beautiful and sublime.³ Thus, the standard of taste itself can take different forms; gender, national character, and other factors function as additional parameters that determine how the natural standard applies to a particular person. So, by the *grade* of one's taste I mean the degree to which one's taste approaches the natural standard, given one's gender, national character, and other relevant factors.

Taste that is opposed to what is natural – taste with a very low grade – is said by Kant to be *pervverted* (*verkehrt*). For example, Kant describes the taste for adventure, which involves a "pervverted conception of honor," as a taste that "distorts nature" (OBS 2:215, 222, 245). And the "Gothic," a "pervverted" taste for art, takes "any unnatural form other than the ancient simplicity of nature"

(OBS 2:255). The adventurous taste and the Gothic taste are both perverted because they prefer objects that, according to Kant, are actually not (naturally) beautiful or sublime at all. Another form of low-grade taste consists in deviation from the standard as defined by one's gender, national character, or other relevant qualities. For example, Kant describes a perverted form of the female taste, one that prefers studying topics such as Greek and mechanics (!) (OBS 2:229–30). This taste has a low grade not because it brings one to take pleasure in things that do not deserve it; after all, "abstract speculation or knowledge" is preferred by the natural male taste (OBS 2:230). Instead, this female taste is perverted because it expresses the natural feeling for the beautiful and sublime in an unnatural way, namely, by adopting the male perspective.⁴ Thus the grade of one's taste depends not only on whether one prefers what is naturally beautiful or sublime but also on whether one is the kind of person – given one's gender, national character, and other relevant factors – who should prefer those beautiful or sublime things.

Kant believes that low-grade taste can have adverse effects in many areas of life: "taste does not readily degenerate in one area without exhibiting distinct signs of its corruption in everything else that pertains to the finer feeling" (OBS 2:255). By way of example, he explains that the perverted taste characteristic of monks "made out of a great number of useful people numerous societies of industrious idlers, whose brooding way of life made them fit for concocting thousands of scholastic grotesqueries" (OBS 2:255). The perverted "adventurous taste" led to the Crusades and the "heroic fantasists, who called themselves knights and sought out adventures, tournaments, duels, and romantic actions" (OBS 2:255). And with respect to the perverted female taste discussed earlier, Kant explains that a preference for "laborious learning... may well make [a woman] into an object of a cold admiration, but at the same time... will weaken the charms by means of which she exercises her great power over the opposite sex" (OBS 2:229). Kant blames low-grade taste in these cases because he believes taste in general determines what we love and esteem.⁵ As such, taste amounts to a power of judgment with great influence over the direction of our lives. We must cultivate taste in its natural form, Kant thinks, so that we come to love and esteem those objects that best facilitate our natural purpose. While in many cases it may be unclear why we should conform to the natural standard of taste as determined by our gender, national character, and other factors, Kant believes that there is a "standpoint" from which these variations cohere into a "great portrait of human nature... a painting of magnificent expression, where in the midst of great variety unity shines forth, and the whole of moral nature displays beauty and dignity" (OBS 2:226–27). In other words, we need to cultivate high-grade taste so that we will flourish in the way nature intends, both as individuals and as a species.⁶

Kant realizes that cultivating one's taste involves more than improving its grade. We can also consider taste with respect to its *scope*: taste can be *coarse* and *simple*, or it can be *refined*. Someone with a coarse taste for physical beauty, for example, "is little troubled by the charms of demeanor, of the facial features, of the eyes, etc. in a woman" (OBS 2:235). Thus, coarse taste is easy to satisfy; when judging physical beauty, coarse taste will take equal pleasure in "all the members of a sex" (OBS 2:239). By contrast, refined taste can be so discerning that nothing meets its qualifications. As Kant puts it, a refined taste for physical beauty is "occupied only with an object that the enamored inclination creates in thought and adorns with all the noble and beautiful qualities that nature rarely unites in one person and even more rarely offers to one who can treasure her and who would perhaps be worthy of such a possession" (OBS 2:239). In short, while coarse taste prefers equally all members of a kind, refined taste is only satisfied with the *ideal*.

How should we cultivate taste with respect to its scope? While one might think that good taste should be refined, Kant explains that coarse taste is not to be "despised" (OBS 2:235). "For," as he goes on to say, "the greatest part of humanity follows by its means the great order of nature in a very simple and certain manner" (OBS 2:235).⁷ Here Kant has in mind the way that coarse taste can facilitate procreation, by making our preference in love easy to satisfy. But Kant also – and more interestingly – believes that natural taste in its simplicity should serve as the foundation for moral principles. He writes,

True virtue can only be grafted upon principles, and it will become the more sublime and noble the more general they are. These principles are not speculative rules, but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast. ... I believe I can bring all this together if I say it is the feeling of the beauty and the dignity of human nature. (OBS 2:217)

Here Kant describes a taste that is both natural (since it "lives in every human breast") and simple (since it prefers human nature in general). Simplicity is the crucial characteristic. Kant would surely agree that whatever we find beautiful and sublime demands our care, since the beautiful and sublime inspire love and esteem. If we find human nature in general to be beautiful and sublime – if our taste for others is simple – then, it follows, we should care for everyone. In Kant's words, a simple taste for other people is the "ground of universal affection ... [and] universal respect" (OBS 2:217). To the extent that we feel the beauty and dignity of human nature, we will be motivated to treat others with characteristically moral concern; moral principles are just our way of articulating the practical consequences of this attitude. So, we must cultivate a simple, natural taste to develop the insight and the motivation required for true virtue.⁸

In contrast with his praise of coarse and simple taste, Kant warns that refined taste can be dangerous:

An extremely refined taste certainly seems to remove the wildness from an impetuous inclination and, by limiting it to only a very few objects, to make it modest and decorous; but it commonly fails to attain the great final aim of nature, and since it demands or expects more than the latter commonly accomplishes, it very rarely makes the person of such delicate sentiment happy. (OBS 2:238)

Thus refined taste can actually frustrate at least some of our natural purposes – here Kant is again thinking of procreation – by making us dissatisfied with most of the available options. In general, Kant claims that “we have cause to be cautious in the refinement of [taste], unless we want to bring upon ourselves much discontent and a source of evils through excessive sensitivity” (OBS 2:239). Refined taste is dangerous because a preference for the ideal will never be satisfied with whatever we actually experience.

Nevertheless, Kant acknowledges that by narrowing the scope of taste we develop a desire for perfection that can be worthwhile. So, he suggests that we refine taste in some ways and simplify it in others:

I would recommend to nobler souls that they refine their feeling as much as they can with regard to those qualities that pertain to themselves or those actions that they themselves perform, but that with regard to what they enjoy or expect from others they should preserve their taste in its simplicity: if only I understood how it is possible to bring this off. But if they were to succeed, then they would make others happy and also be happy themselves. (OBS 2:239)

In other words, Kant believes that we should balance our taste for the ideal with a coarse or simple taste that accepts and appreciates things as they are. On the one hand, we should judge others with a taste that is coarse or simple, as this serves the “great order of nature” both in the sense of facilitating the survival of the human species and bringing us to adopt the attitude toward others that is the proper foundation for true virtue. On the other hand, we should evaluate ourselves with a refined taste. Kant’s thought seems to be that any disappointment we experience due to our less-than-ideal selves will provide us with the insight and motivation we need to perfect our qualities and capacities.

So good taste has a high grade and a scope that is properly calibrated for the object to be judged, and only if our taste is good will we come to find beautiful and sublime those objects that we should. This is important, Kant thinks,

because these are the objects that will command our love and esteem. In turn, these emotions work, along with other forces, to shape the choices we make. For this reason, Kant believes that the feeling for the beautiful and sublime can direct our erotic desires, determine the moral principles we adopt, and shape our conception of the projects and ideals we should pursue. By cultivating taste toward its natural form while simplifying our taste toward others and refining our taste toward ourselves, we will learn to desire and care for those things that will harmonize with and facilitate our purpose as part of the great order of nature. Those who succeed, Kant thinks, will “make others happy and also be happy themselves” (OBS 2:239).

Changes in Kant’s views on taste

During the nearly twenty-seven years between the publication of the *Observations* and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant’s views on taste changed in significant ways – not to mention his views on morality, metaphysics, and epistemology. To begin with, while Kant believes in the *Observations* that there is a standard of taste to which we should attempt to conform, he no doubt also holds that any attempt to justify this belief can appeal only to experience.⁹ In December 1787, however, Kant writes in a letter to Reinhold that he has discovered an *a priori* principle of taste (C 10:513–16). In the first part of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant argues that this *a priori* principle explains how it is possible for us to make judgments of taste that are “standard” in the sense that everyone should agree with them. In addition, the discovery of an *a priori* principle of taste prompts Kant to revise his view in the *Observations* that the standard of taste can be expressed in different ways based on gender and national character. Kant now believes that when we judge the beautiful as we should – on the basis of the *a priori* principle of taste – we judge with a “universal voice” (CJ 5:216). The *a priori* principle of taste specifies how *everyone* should feel pleasure and displeasure when it comes to judging the beautiful.

Even if it is possible to make standard judgments about the beautiful, Kant realizes that, in actual practice, the judgment of taste “has unavoidable difficulties” and “can easily be deceptive” (CJ 5:290–91). If we are to allow our feeling of pleasure and displeasure to be governed by the *a priori* principle of taste, we must cultivate our feeling for the beautiful.¹⁰ For this reason, Kant recommends that artists practice (*üben*) and correct (*berichtigen*) their taste by studying “various example of art or nature” (CJ 5:312). To illustrate this point, he describes a young poet who will change the way he feels about his (presumably bad) poem “only ... when his power of judgment has been made more acute by practice” (CJ 5:282). In general, Kant thinks of taste as a talent, which, like all talents, will decay without proper exercise.¹¹ As he explains,

among all the faculties and talents, taste is precisely the one which, because its judgment is not determinable by means of concepts and precepts, is most in need of the examples of what in the progress of culture has longest enjoyed approval if it is not quickly to fall back into barbarism and sink back into the crudity of its first attempts. (CJ 5:283)

So, even if some of his thoughts on the standard of taste change in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant maintains his view from the *Observations* that taste requires cultivation if we are to judge in conformity with that standard.

But why is it important for us to learn to make universally valid judgments about what everyone should find beautiful? As we have seen, Kant explains why we should cultivate taste in the *Observations*, but other changes in his views on morality and taste since that work undermine the reasons he gives there. Consider Kant's claim that we must cultivate a taste for the beauty and dignity of human nature if we are to have the attitude toward others – a feeling of universal affection and universal respect – that can serve as the proper basis for moral principles. Soon after writing the *Observations*, Kant begins to abandon this view, and his "critical" moral theory locates the ground of morality not in a feeling but in autonomy, even if, as we will see, he still believes that beauty and sublimity are connected with morality in important ways.¹²

While this change in Kant's moral theory undermines one *particular* reason why we should cultivate taste – that doing so is a necessary condition for true virtue – perhaps a properly revised version of his broader point in the *Observations* could still hold, namely, that we must cultivate taste if we are to love and esteem those things that will put us in a position to be (truly) happy. However, with his claim in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that "*taste is the faculty for judging an object...through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest,*" Kant signals a change in his theory of taste that marks a decisive break with his position in the *Observations* (CJ 5:211). By an *interest* Kant means, basically, a desire for the existence of something, which can be determined by sensible inclination or by reason.¹³ For example, the pleasure I take in a piece of chocolate cake is connected with interest because it, the pleasure, gives rise to a desire for more chocolate cake in the future. The pleasure we take in the useful and the good is likewise connected with interest because we feel this pleasure when our desire for the existence of such objects is satisfied (see CJ 5:204–9, esp. 5:207).¹⁴ So if, as Kant claims, taste is a feeling devoid of all interest, then "one must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing [judged on this basis], but must be entirely indifferent in this respect" (CJ 5:205). And yet, in the *Observations*, Kant clearly believes taste is or at least gives rise to a concern with the existence of what is judged beautiful or sublime. There he claims that coarse and simple taste not only directs erotic desire but also provides a ground for the moral principles

that govern how we act toward others; neither of these explanations would make sense if our feeling for the beautiful and sublime were indifferent to the existence of the objects judged. Moreover, Kant claims that taste in its refined form is concerned with the ideal, which again, for Kant, must be or at least involve a desire for the existence of the ideal, since he also believes that having such taste can lead one to be disappointed with everything else. In general, with his claim that taste is devoid of all interest, Kant severs the connection between the feeling for the beautiful and sublime and the emotions of love and esteem.¹⁵ But if he no longer believes that taste is directly connected with the faculty of desire in this way, then a new account is required to explain why we should be concerned with taste at all.¹⁶

Kant pursues several strategies in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to justify the importance of taste. I will begin by briefly mentioning three. First, Kant suggests that we should develop taste as a way of furthering our natural inclination to sociability (CJ 5:296–97). This follows from the fact that beautiful objects allow us to share even our feelings with others – at least those others who also have good taste (CJ 5:297). Second – and more importantly (CJ 5:297–98) – Kant believes that cultivating taste “as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap... [by] teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects of the senses even without any sensible charm” (CJ 5:354). In other words, Kant holds that we should develop taste so that we will become more receptive to the sensibility characteristic of virtue.¹⁷ Third, as Paul Guyer has argued, Kant thinks that judging on the basis of taste, that is, judging on the basis of a feeling devoid of all interest, is analogous in certain ways to acting out of respect for the moral law.¹⁸ As such, judging the beautiful provides us with a symbolic experience of freedom. Guyer then argues on Kant’s behalf that we can demand everyone develop taste since: (1) we demand that everyone be moral; (2) “knowledge of the nature of morality is a condition of the possibility of compliance with the demands of morality itself”; and (3) only by judging that an object is beautiful do we have an experience that provides us, by way of analogy, with the knowledge we need.¹⁹

If these were Kant’s only reasons to explain why we should cultivate taste, something significant would have been lost along with the other changes in his aesthetic theory. In the *Observations*, Kant finds good taste important because it brings us to love and esteem certain objects, namely, those that we should love and esteem if we are to be (truly) happy. But none of the reasons for cultivating taste described so far from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* make any reference to the beautiful object itself. Cultivating taste satisfies our inclination to sociability because when we judge with good taste we can share even our feelings with others; cultivating taste facilitates moral education by requiring us to develop feelings that ease the transition to virtue; and, if Guyer is correct, judging with good taste *in general* provides us with an experience of freedom that is necessary for

morality. These reasons for cultivating taste share the assumption that good taste is valuable simply for the subjective experience of judging on the basis of a feeling devoid of all interest. What Kant saw in the *Observations* – and what these reasons fail to touch on – is that good taste is important because without it we would fail to experience certain objects (those that really are beautiful) in the way that we should. In fact, however, Kant does not change his mind on this point, and in the remainder of this chapter I will discuss another of Kant’s reasons for cultivating taste that has him following a strategy similar to that of the *Observations*. As I will show, Kant thinks that we must cultivate our taste because only then will we be *inspired* by the right objects, those that inspire us to think for ourselves about our highest ideals. On this basis, we can see that good taste is necessary for the process of cultural development that Kant calls enlightenment.

Beauty is an example that should be followed

I begin with Kant’s account of how particular beautiful objects can be meaningful.²⁰ Kant touches on this issue when he explains why artists must develop their taste:

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, is the discipline (or corrective) of genius, clipping its wings and making it well behaved or polished; but at the same time it gives genius guidance as to where and how far it should extend itself if it is to remain purposive; and by introducing clarity and order into the abundance of thoughts it makes the ideas tenable, capable of an enduring and universal approval, and fit for being *followed* [*Nachfolge*] by others and an ever advancing culture. (CJ 5:319, translation modified, emphasis added)

Two things are accomplished in this passage. First, Kant provides a general reason why artists should be concerned with cultivating taste. By claiming that taste makes genius “well behaved” or “polished,” Kant means that taste approves only those expressions of genius that anyone can find beautiful, those artworks that are “capable of an enduring and universal approval” (CJ 5:319). It follows that artists need good taste to verify that their ideas are communicable to others through their work.²¹ In addition, Kant introduces a term to describe precisely how the ideas expressed in a beautiful artwork are to be communicated. A beautiful object should serve as a particular kind of example, one that can be *followed* by the culture at large, and artists need good taste to verify that their work is fit for this purpose. But what does it mean to *follow* the example set by a beautiful object?

To answer this question, it is helpful to contrast following with imitation (*Nachahmung*).²² To imitate an example is to do one’s best to copy it. As such,

the example itself sets the standard that we aim to achieve; we have learned to imitate an example when we can reproduce that standard. By contrast, to follow an example is to be inspired by that example to pursue some ideal. Although the example must itself fall short of this ideal in various ways, it nevertheless provides us with insight that we can use to gain a better sense for how we might go on ourselves to aim at the same ideal. For example, Kant thinks moral actions should be followed and not imitated (CPrR 5:84–85). If we want to learn from a courageous action – like saving someone drowning in a lake – we miss the point if we go about looking for other drowning people to save. Instead, we should follow this example, that is, use it to gain a better sense for what might be involved in living a life that exemplifies the ideal of courage.

By imitating an example we learn to copy something else; by following an example we are inspired to *think for ourselves* about how we might aim better at some ideal. To illustrate this point, Kant discusses how genius artists learn from each other's work:

the product of a genius (in respect of that in which is to be ascribed to genius, not to possible learning or schooling) is an example, not for imitation [*Nachahmung*] (for then that which is genius in it and constitutes the spirit of the work would be lost), but for following [*Nachfolge*] by another genius, who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality, to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule, by which the talent shows itself as exemplary. (CJ 5:318, translation modified)

Here the artist's "feeling of his own originality" refers to the power within himself to produce forms and ideas. By following the example of another genius, the artist becomes better acquainted with his ability to think for himself; he learns to govern himself by "principles in [himself]" and thereby create something original (CJ 5:283).

One might think, upon hearing this account, that Kant believes each artist learns to be more himself – more idiosyncratic – from following the work of others. However, Kant holds that "*following* [*Nachfolge*], by reference to a precedent, ... means no more than to draw on the *same sources* from which [the predecessor] himself drew, and to learn from one's predecessor only how to go about doing so" (CJ 5:283, translation modified, latter emphasis added). In other words, following an example involves learning to think on the basis of a source of insight that we have in common with others.²³ Although Kant does not name this source here, it seems natural to suppose that he thinks following an example encourages us to "take [our] own, often better, course" by reacquainting us with our power of reason (CJ 5:283, translation modified).

For Kant, reason is not simply a capacity to determine the best means to achieve our ends – as Hume would have it. Reason is also a source of ideas that determine the ends we should set for ourselves. These ideas of reason specify ways of organizing or systematizing the rules of the understanding, conceived broadly as the set of our empirical concepts, laws, and maxims.²⁴ For example, the idea of God specifies a single supreme author of the world and, as such, suggests that all empirical concepts and laws of nature should form a system that “sprouted from the intention of a highest reason” (A686/B714). Because we can never experience this system in its complete form for ourselves, Kant thinks we must have ultimately obtained the idea of such a system from our power of reason. All ideas of reason – and for my purposes here we should think especially of moral perfection and ideas of particular virtues and vices – specify ways of organizing our judgments about the world and our decisions regarding how to act into a system that we can only ever strive to achieve.²⁵

Of course, other conventionalized representations of God, moral perfection, virtues, vices, and so on compete for our attention with ideas of reason. Consequently, we need examples that we can follow to draw our attention back to ideas of reason and prompt us to consider what it means to live in light of them. Kant thinks beautiful objects can provide such examples because they “at least strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas)” (CJ 5:314). For example, fine art can present “rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, ... death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc.” (CJ 5:314). And natural beauty, too, can strive to represent ideas of reason; as an example, Kant describes how “the white color of the lily seems to dispose the mind to ideas of innocence” (CJ 5:302). By striving to represent rational ideas, beautiful objects draw our attention to ideas of reason within; in turn, we are prompted to explore the significance of these ideas for ourselves, to consider how they require us to reorganize our understanding of the world and our conduct within it. In one striking passage, Kant explains how a beautiful representation inspires him to put himself “in the place of a virtuous person,” imagining all the things that such a person might be called on to do and how they would respond (CJ 5:316). In general, a beautiful object is meaningful insofar as it provides an example we can follow, an example which inspires us to imagine what it is like to govern ourselves by reason.

Good taste in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

With this account of beauty in hand, we are now in a position to understand Kant’s account of taste in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Recall that Kant abandons his view from the *Observations* that taste determines what we love

and esteem because he comes to believe that taste is a basis for judging that should be devoid of all interest. In the third *Critique*, Kant thinks of taste as the power of judgment that determines which examples we find inspiring. If our taste is good, we will be inspired by those objects that really are beautiful, those that better acquaint us with ideas of reason, those that are fit to be *followed* by everyone.²⁶ In this section, I will consider why Kant thinks that good taste is necessary for this judgment. Why does Kant think that we must judge on the basis of a feeling devoid of interest if we are to determine which objects are fit to be followed?

To answer this question, it is helpful to contrast good taste with its cruder forms. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant describes two kinds of crude taste. On the one hand, crude taste can be *shallow*. The person with shallow taste mistakenly judges some objects beautiful that those with good taste would find formulaic, conventional, derivative, or simply boring. To provide an example of shallow taste, Kant describes William Marsden's judgment that a pepper garden is beautiful. As Kant explains, if Marsden were only to spend one day with his garden he would discover that it would "no longer entertain him, but would rather impose upon the imagination a burdensome constraint" (CJ 5:243). Marsden takes pleasure in the pepper garden because it is something "regular," in contrast with the "wild" and "irregular" forms found in the surrounding jungle (CJ 5:243). This indicates that Marsden's taste is not devoid of interest, that is, not indifferent to the existence of the object he judges beautiful. For his pleasure is connected with the fact that there is something – the object judged – that satisfies certain rules he already has in mind. In general, shallow taste is crude because it prefers the existence of what is comforting and familiar.

By contrast, good taste avoids "regularity that comes across as constraint" (CJ 5:242). It prefers instead those objects that challenge our current conceptions and expectations. When we reflect upon such objects, our powers of understanding and imagination are put into what Kant calls a "free play" since "no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition" (CJ 5:217). Beautiful objects "occasion much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it" (CJ 5:314). While shallow taste prefers those objects that reinforce current ways of thinking, good taste finds inspiring those examples that prompt us to develop new lines of thought.

The other form of crude taste takes Kant's recommendation to avoid regularity too far. *Pretentious* taste prefers, in Kant's words, "original nonsense," that is, art that challenges expectations and breaks rules only for the sake of being different (CJ 5:308). Kant describes the flickering flames of a fire or the ripples in a brook as natural correlates of original but nonsensical art; they do sustain the free play of the understanding and the imagination, but only by providing

an opportunity to produce “fantasies with which the mind entertains itself while it is being continuously aroused by the manifold which strikes the eye” (CJ 5:243–44). Someone with pretentious taste prefers those artworks that are original nonsense because they, like flames and ripples, never resolve into any determinate sense and thus present a challenge that sustains the imagination and the understanding in their free play. Pretentious taste is crude because it implies an interest in the object, a desire for its continued existence. To have pretentious taste is to mistake nonsense for depth, to be inspired by obscurity, and, as such, to *need* such objects as a stimulus for the free play of the understanding and the imagination.

Someone with good taste judges on the basis of a feeling that is devoid of all interest. Unlike those with shallow taste, the person with good taste is not satisfied with what is familiar but seeks out what is original (CJ 5:242–43). As such, the person with good taste will be better positioned to judge what is fit to be followed since such examples inspire us to break out of our current way of thinking with the hope that, by paying better attention to an idea of reason within, we can adopt our own, even better, course. Unlike those with pretentious taste, the person with good taste develops no desire for the continued existence of those objects that inspire thought. Good taste prefers those objects that inspire us to think not by being obscure themselves but by reacquainting us with a source within – our power of reason – on the basis of which we can continue to think for ourselves. Furthermore, by maintaining complete indifference to the existence of a beautiful object, the person with good taste will see this example for what it is: one attempt to represent an idea of reason, with its own limitations that must ultimately be overcome. So, only people with good taste will experience those examples that are fit to be followed in just the right way.

Taste and enlightenment

It is tempting to explain the value of having good taste – considered as a capacity to judge which objects are fit to be followed by everyone – in terms of its moral purpose. With good taste we can be inspired by beautiful representations of moral actions to consider anew reason’s ideal of moral perfection and what it might mean to live up to it. While this is true, I argue that Kant’s ambitions for the significance of beauty are broader. We need good taste to participate in the ongoing project of cultural development that he calls enlightenment.

In his chapter “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” published in 1784 in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, Kant defines enlightenment as

the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another.

This minority is *self-incurred* when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. (WE 8:35)

In short, enlightenment involves learning to think for oneself. This is accomplished, Kant thinks, through “freedom to make public use of one’s reason in all matters” (WE 8:36). In other words, we come to be enlightened to the extent that we learn to rely on our own power of reason to understand the world and decide how to act. As such, enlightenment is encouraged and facilitated by following those examples that inspire us to gain a better acquaintance with ideas of reason.

By cultivating taste, we learn to experience beautiful objects – those examples that are fit to be followed – in the right way, that is, as examples that inspire us to think for ourselves. The two forms of crude taste each prevent us from achieving this goal. To have shallow taste is to find beautiful what is familiar – it is to be inspired only by what we already understand. So the person with shallow taste will find those examples that are fit to be followed unpleasant and even threatening. If we have shallow taste we like only those objects that reinforce our current way of understanding the world and deciding how to act; shallow taste gives us no chance to improve. On the other hand, pretentious taste makes us dependent on certain objects as a stimulus for thought. Someone with pretentious taste will experience examples fit to be followed in the wrong way, namely, by developing a desire for their continued existence. As such, pretentious taste limits our thought to the objects we encounter, rendering us unable to think for ourselves beyond what we can gather from them. Only by developing good taste will we experience those objects that are fit to be followed in the way that unlocks their potential to provide us with the insight to become better acquainted with ideas of reason.

This suggests that good taste plays an important role in enlightenment. When Kant wrote “What Is Enlightenment?” six years before the publication of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he argued only that enlightenment requires the free use of one’s reason “*as a scholar before the entire public world of readers*” (WE 8:37). This can give the impression that enlightenment is a purely discursive affair, a conversation carried on through chapters published in journals like the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. But given what Kant says about beauty and taste in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, we should expand this conception. Beautiful art can play an important role in the conversation that takes place among those interested in enlightenment by inspiring thought about ideas of reason and how we should govern ourselves in light of them. For example, Kant thinks that fine art can provide us with representations of moral ideas, which can inspire us to reconsider our values and how they inform our way of understanding the world and our actions. And some beautiful artworks can provide symbolic

“cognition” of God; such representations could inspire the “better insight” Kant refers to in “What Is Enlightenment?” when discussing the motivation for change within ecclesiastical institutions (WE 8:39). We need to develop our taste to participate in the public conversation necessary for enlightenment, because otherwise we may ignore or fail fully to appreciate the distinctive contributions made by beautiful nature and fine art, that is, those contributions that come in figurative form, through vision, metaphor, music, and poetry.

This claim can be broadened. Kant’s work in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* suggests that enlightenment is never merely an intellectual process. I have spoken so far as if taste allows us to identify and appreciate *certain* examples placed before the public world of readers for the sake of enlightenment – namely, beautiful nature and fine art. But it seems like Kant must admit that *any* example that works in some way to bring us toward a better acquaintance with ideas of reason is beautiful.²⁷ The best contributions to the public world of readers will not merely settle an argument or expose a prejudice or show why someone’s views are wrong. If these contributions are meant to promote enlightenment, then they must inspire us to think for ourselves. But as Kant’s discussion of taste in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* shows, for something to have this effect, we must like it with a pleasure devoid of all interest, which is just to say that we must find it beautiful. Our feeling of pleasure in such cases just is the inspiration to adopt our own and even better course based on a better acquaintance with ideas of reason. Thus, we need good taste so that we respond in the way we should to *all* (valid) contributions to the conversation among the public world of readers, *all* efforts to promote enlightenment.

In “What Is Enlightenment?” Kant claims that enlightenment is “almost inevitable” so long as the public is granted freedom in the use of reason (WE 8:36). “There will always be a few independent thinkers,” Kant says, “who, after having themselves cast off the yoke of minority, will disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one’s own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for himself” (WE 8:36). But most people will either dismiss such independent thinkers, threatened by the challenge they pose to the received modes of understanding, or grow dependent upon them for further insight. This is because most people have crude taste – either shallow or pretentious. Kant’s work in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* shows that enlightenment is “almost inevitable” only if we have first cultivated our taste.

Notes

1. Throughout this chapter I will focus primarily on what Kant has to say about the beautiful and why we should cultivate our taste for it. For the record, Kant also believes we should do our best to be sensitive to the sublime, but I cannot treat that topic fully here. In the *Observations*, Kant typically refers to “the feeling for the beautiful and sublime,” so I will retain that terminology.

2. In this project, Kant was following many other writers of the eighteenth century, most notably Edmund Burke, whose *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was published in 1757.
3. One exception comes in Kant's discussion of the four temperaments and the tastes that correspond to them. It is fairly clear that Kant wants to rank these in order: the melancholic temperament has the best taste, while the sanguine and choleric are each slightly worse, and the phlegmatic has no taste at all. See OBS 2:219–24.
4. Kant says that women with this kind of perverted taste “might as well also wear a beard; for that might perhaps better express the mien of depth for which they strive” (OBS 2:230). Kant offers one explanation for how this perversion comes about: unscrupulous men mislead women into adopting this taste so that they, the men, can demonstrate their “natural” superiority in the area of the sciences, that is, by bringing women to prefer topics and activities for which they are thought to be “naturally” unsuited (OBS 2:230).
5. Kant writes, “sublime qualities inspire esteem, but beautiful ones inspire love” (OBS 2:211).
6. Alix Cohen makes a related point, showing that Kant thinks, in the *Observations*, that sympathy and honor ensure the survival of the human species. See Alix Cohen, “Kant’s ‘Curious Catalogue of Human Frailties’ and the Great Portrait of Nature,” in *Kant’s “Observations” and “Remarks”: A Critical Guide*, ed. Susan Meld Shell and Richard Velkley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 144–62.
7. However, Kant admits that coarse taste does “degenerate into dissoluteness more readily than any other” (OBS 2:235n).
8. Interestingly, Kant shares his worry that he has not yet cultivated his own taste enough in this direction: “If I observe alternately the noble and the weak sides of human beings, I reprove myself that I am not able to adopt that standpoint from which these contrasts can nevertheless exhibit the great portrait of human nature in its entirety in a moving form” (OBS 2:226). Kant uses this confession to reiterate the fact that simple, natural taste would have us appreciate humans for being human, regardless of their respective moral qualities, good or bad. For more on Kant's views on morality in the *Observations* and how they anticipate and differ from his mature views, see Patrick Frierson, “Two Concepts of Universality in Kant's Moral Theory,” and Paul Guyer, “Freedom as the Foundation of Morality: Kant's Early Efforts,” in *Kant's “Observations” and “Remarks”: A Critical Guide*, 57–76 and 77–98, respectively.
9. On this point, see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 16–19. Kant seems to have believed that there were no *a priori* principles of taste even up to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, published in 1781. There, he maintains that “the putative rules or criteria [of taste] are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as *a priori* rules according to which our judgment of taste must be directed, rather the latter constitutes the genuine touchstone of the correctness of the former” (A21n/B35n). To be clear, although Kant comes to believe in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that we can justify judgments of taste by reference to an *a priori* principle, he also claims that this principle is accessible only through feeling. So, Kant would still consider what passed for “rules or criteria of taste” in the aesthetics textbooks of the time as nothing more than empirical generalizations, which in the best case could be based on universally valid judgments of taste. See, for example, Kant's dismissal of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's and Charles Batteux's attempts to “prove” the beauty of an object (CJ 5:284).

10. In addition, the difficulty Kant associates with judgments of taste derives in part from the fact that he thinks that there are various sources of pleasure and displeasure – the agreeable, the beautiful, and the useful or good – any of which can be easily confused with another. So, in part, cultivating taste involves learning to distinguish a liking for the beautiful from any other sorts of pleasure.
11. We cultivate taste through practice at judging the beautiful. In the “Methodology concerning Taste,” Kant writes, “The propaedeutic for all beautiful art, so far as it is aimed at the highest degree of its perfection, seems to lie not in precepts, but in the culture of the mental powers through those prior forms of knowledge that are called *humaniora*,” that is, those beautiful objects that have stood the test of time (CJ 5:355). Compare this with Kant’s similar description in the *Critique of Pure Reason* of the cultivation of judgment in general through practice with examples (B172–74).
12. On the development of Kant’s moral theory from its early stages in the *Observations* and other texts of that time to its mature form, see, in addition to the chapters by Frierson and Guyer mentioned earlier, Corey Dyck, “Chimerical Ethics and Flattering Moralists: Baumgarten’s Influence on Kant’s Moral Theory in the *Observations and Remarks*,” in *Kant’s “Observations” and “Remarks”: A Critical Guide*, 38–56.
13. For a more detailed analysis of Kant’s claim that taste must be devoid of all interest, see Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 167–206; and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 48–130.
14. Just to be clear, Kant seems to think that the pleasure we take in the morally good results from satisfying an end set by reason.
15. Indeed, Kant makes this point explicit, writing that “agreeable is that which everyone calls what gratifies him; beautiful, what merely pleases him; good, what is esteemed, approved, i.e., that on which he sets an objective value” (CJ 5:210).
16. Kant does acknowledge that we have some interest in the existence of beautiful objects. In society we have an empirical interest for the beautiful, and natural beauty gives rise to an intellectual interest. But these interests arise independently of that feeling on the basis of which we judge an object beautiful. For more on the form our interest in the beautiful should take, see §41 and §42 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (CJ 5:296–303).
17. This point has been discussed in detail by many commentators. See, for example, Klaus Düsing, “Beauty as the Transition from Nature to Freedom in Kant’s Critique of Judgment,” *Noûs* 24, no. 1 (March 1990): 84. G. Felicitas Munzel also discusses the relationship between aesthetic and moral education. See G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant’s Conception of Moral Character: The “Critical” Link of Morality, Anthropology, and Reflective Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 296–313. Salim Kemal also provides a detailed discussion of the role that fine art in particular plays in facilitating our transition to morality. He explains that the purpose of developing one’s taste is to establish a unity or balance between reason and feeling in an individual human for the sake of attaining the highest good. See Salim Kemal, *Kant and Fine Art: An Essay on Kant and the Philosophy of Fine Art and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 84–98. See also Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 34–35.
18. Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 107.
19. *Ibid.*, 110.
20. In his discussion of the “intellectual interest” we can take in the beautiful, Kant explains that the *existence* of natural beauty is meaningful to us because it suggests

that the world is made in such a way as to harmonize with our highest purposes (CJ 5:301). Here, I am concerned with the significance that we find in particular beautiful objects, not the existence of natural beauty in general. Guyer briefly discusses Kant's account of the significance belonging to particular beautiful objects in Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 38–39, 157–60.

21. See CJ 5:312, where Kant explicitly states that artists must cultivate their taste.
22. For a detailed discussion of the development of these and other terms in Kant's thought, see Martin Gammon, "'Exemplary Originality': Kant on Genius and Imitation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 563–92.
23. By contrast, merely asserting one's own prejudices could be called "thinking for oneself," but this is surely not what Kant has in mind by following an example.
24. For Kant's discussion of the regulative use of ideas of pure reason, see A642/B670–A704/B732.
25. On virtue as an idea of reason, see A569/B597–A570/B598.
26. Compare this with Kant's description of taste as "an ability to estimate the degree to which an object makes sense of moral ideas [*ein Beurtheilungsvermögen der Versinnlichung sittlicher Ideen*]" (CJ 5:356, my translation). By referencing moral ideas in particular, his description is, I take it, more specific than it needs to be.
27. For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that we can reflect on morally good actions – which are examples we should follow – in a way that "gives to virtue or the cast of mind according to moral laws a form of beauty" (CPrR 5:161).

7

Transcendental Idealism as the Backdrop for Kant's Theory of Religion

Stephen R. Palmquist

The partially hidden influence of transcendental idealism on Kant's *Religion*

Recent work on Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*¹ frequently begins by calling attention to the many unresolved interpretive problems that plague the careful reader of this influential yet perplexing book.² Because the characteristic features of transcendental idealism do not play an obviously constitutive role in the exposition of Kant's arguments in this text, for many years most Kant scholars simply passed it over as an optional appendix to his ethics, if not an outright aberration.³ A central focus of the so-called "affirmative" trend in interpreting *Religion* that has come to the fore over the past twenty years⁴ has therefore been to argue that these conundrums in Kant's text are largely resolvable. The present chapter will draw from that recent literature an account of how four key components of Kant's argument in *Religion*, often regarded as either incoherent or mistaken, actually make good sense if they are read against the backdrop of his transcendental idealism.

Part of the responsibility for the aforementioned tendencies, both that most twentieth-century Kant-scholars treated *Religion* as if it were irrelevant to the central concerns of critical philosophy and that more recent interpreters focus so much attention on its apparently contradictory claims, rests squarely with Kant. For in the prefaces to the book's two editions Kant confesses motivations that would have pulled him in two conflicting directions as he contemplated what to write. In the first (1793) preface, he expresses the hope that this book might eventually come to be used as a "guideline" (presumably, therefore, as a *textbook*) for courses on philosophy of religion that theology students would be required to take before concluding their studies (Rel 6:10). In the second preface, by contrast, he responds to an anonymous reviewer of the first edition⁵ by claiming that the book was *not* (as the reviewer had claimed) meant to be comprehensible only to those who are adept in the intricacies of the critical

system. The essential points defended in *Religion* are “readily understandable,” Kant claims, because they are “contained, even if in different words, in the most popular instruction for children or in sermons” (Rel 6:14). Although this passage suggests he attempted to write the book *without* depending on the framework provided by his critical philosophy, Kant admits that some occasional references to his technical terminology were necessary, though “only because of the school” (i.e., to please scholars). As an example, he cites the distinction between virtue considered as an action’s phenomenal “legality” (i.e., as a “duty-tempered” skill) and virtue considered as noumenal “morality” (i.e., “as a steadfast conviction”⁶) (Rel 6:14). Keeping in mind Kant’s self-confessed twofold concern, pleasing the schools and making his theory comprehensible to the general reader, I shall devote the remainder of this section to a broad overview of the key features of Kant’s transcendental idealism. This will set the context for my attempt, in the remaining sections of this chapter, to highlight the deep dependence of Kant’s key arguments in *Religion* on the transcendental backdrop provided by the critical philosophy.

In Kant’s hands the term “idealism” takes on a unique connotation that is bound to be misunderstood by anyone who assumes he is following in the footsteps of Berkeley or Descartes.⁷ For Berkeley, like Plato before him, idealism entails the belief that objects in the empirical world are not real but are merely illusions created by the human mind; the true reality of anything we identify as an object is *mental*. By contrast, Kant’s idealism is thoroughly *perspectival*: “The *transcendental* idealist,” he insists, “can be an empirical *realist*” (A370, emphasis added) – this being the only *genuine* type of realist, at that. Calling something “transcendental,” in other words, signifies for Kant a concern to identify a set of *boundary-conditions* that define necessary and universal features of a *perspective*; and this perspective is what *makes* an object “real,” whenever it meets the conditions so defined. Thus, when Kant says in the first *Critique* that space and time “exist ... only in us” (A42/B59), he does not mean that the entire spatiotemporal world is actually a figment of our imagination and that only ideas actually exist, perhaps in a transcendent “world of forms” (as in Plato’s idealism). What he means is that space and time serve as the *perspectival boundary-conditions* that must be presupposed as having a determining role in the formation of anything we are to call an “object” – *as far as our empirical knowledge of the world* is concerned.

Any doubt that Kant’s understanding of transcendental idealism is thoroughly *perspectival* is laid to rest in the second *Critique*, when he takes the (for some, unexpected) step of reversing many of the claims he had established in the first *Critique*. He insists, for example, that when practical reason (rather than theoretical reason) defines the philosopher’s subject matter, one must first examine the principles (as known directly to reason, through our awareness of the moral law), then proceed to examine their logical form, and only

after that consider the role that any aesthetic/feeling-based “input” might play (see CPrR 5:16). The topics of the three chapters of the second *Critique*'s Analytic must therefore follow the reverse order of the Aesthetic, Analytic of Concepts, and Analytic of Principles in the first *Critique*. But more importantly for our purposes, Kant also insists in the second *Critique* that the *problem* transcendental idealism creates for our theoretical knowledge of the ideas of reason (God, freedom, and immortality – whose realization constitutes the whole aim of metaphysics, according to Kant) is *solved* by reason's ability to adopt the practical standpoint. Thus, immediately after claiming (CPrR 5:132–33) that the practical postulates of immortality, freedom (as a *transcendent* cause of actions), and God fill the gaps of theoretical ignorance left by the first *Critique*'s conclusions (as set out in the sections called the Paralogisms, the Antinomy, and the Ideal), Kant asks: “is our cognition really extended in this way by pure practical reason, and is what was *transcendent* for speculative reason *immanent* in practical reason?” (CPrR 5:133). Anyone who mistakenly takes Kant's transcendental idealism to imply that our metaphysical ignorance is absolute and insurmountable would surely expect a negative answer, given Kant's wording of this question. Yet Kant surprises such readers by answering: “Certainly, but *only for practical purposes*” (CPrR 5:134).

What Kant is claiming here, regarding the cognitive status of immortality, noumenal freedom, and God, is directly parallel to his claims in the first *Critique* regarding the reality of empirical objects. Even though a correct understanding of the boundary-conditions of human knowledge (i.e., an awareness of the fact that spatiotemporality is a mental condition that we place onto the empirical objects we come to know) requires us to accept that space and time are merely *in us* (and thus have no *empirical* reality in themselves), the very same fact enables us to affirm, without any fear of being outsmarted by the skeptic, that the *objects* of our knowledge are undoubtedly real and, imbedded as they are in the objective reality of space and time, really do exist *outside of us*. The same perspectival duality applies to the second *Critique*: even though a correct understanding of the boundary-conditions of human morality (i.e., an awareness of the fact that ethical obligation has its proper source in a mental condition that we place onto the practical choices we make) requires us to accept that incentives to action must be entirely *in us* (i.e., *autonomous*) in order for the resulting action to be genuinely moral, nevertheless this same fact enables us to affirm, without any fear of being outsmarted by the atheist, that the objects of metaphysics (God, freedom, and immortality) are *realities* that we can stake our lives on, in spite of our theoretical ignorance of their precise mode of existence. Even though “no human understanding will ever fathom” their theoretical possibility, practical reason assures us that “no sophistry will ever wrest from even the commonest human being the conviction that they are not true concepts” (CPrR 5:133–34, translation modified). In other

words, as Kant goes on to explain, the application of transcendental idealism to morality – the recognition that pure moral principles serve as *boundary-conditions* for all our practical choices – provides “objective reality” to the three ideas of reason (i.e., it assures us that the objects that such ideas point to are *possible*), even though “speculative reason... could not assure” this result for them (CPrR 5:134).

Theoretical reason alone is incapable of even *thinking* the reality of God, freedom, and immortality, because from that standpoint intuition is required in order for something to be declared real; but from the practical standpoint, these same objects acquire “significance” (CPrR 5:136) – that is, reference to a real object – enabling us to apply the categories to them in producing genuine cognition, though only for practical purposes. This argument, elaborated in §VII of the second *Critique's* Dialectic, shows that Kant intends his moral philosophy to be part and parcel of his transcendental idealism. Indeed, he had already clarified this point toward the beginning of the Dialectic, by arguing that “the antinomy of practical reason” can be resolved in precisely the same way as “the antinomy of pure speculative reason” – namely, through an appeal to the distinction between “appearance” and “noumenon,” this being the key perspectival distinction that underpins his transcendental idealism (CPrR 5:114–15). Likewise, Kant appeals to the crucial role this distinction plays in the argument of the second *Critique* (CPrR 5:104–6): without it, Kant’s unshakable faith in freedom would crumble.

Kant wrote the second *Critique* in 1788, shortly after publishing the second edition of the first *Critique* in 1787; so in concluding this initial overview of transcendental idealism, it is relevant to recall that the second preface to the first *Critique* introduces a new metaphor that explicitly focuses on the perspectival character of transcendental idealism. His revolutionary approach to philosophy, Kant there claims, is based on a Copernican “hypothesis” (Bxxii, note), which he initially describes as follows:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try [*versuchen*] whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition. ... (Bxvi)

The fundamental hypothesis that guides transcendental idealism, therefore, is that the philosopher’s task is to locate *a priori* boundary-conditions that the mind places onto empirical objects in order to make them knowable. With this basic definition in mind, let us examine in the remainder of this chapter how four of Kant’s central arguments in *Religion* are bound to seem perplexing (if

not utterly incoherent) until we read them against the backdrop of this perspectival distinction between empirical knowledge and the transcendently ideal conditions that we must presuppose in order to explain the possibility of the former. As we shall see, Kant's arguments turn out to carry considerable force once we interpret them in this light.

Evil as the transcendental problem that religion solves

Perspectival distinctions abound in the text of Kant's *Religion*. One need go no further than the first paragraph to find a prime example: Kant's opening claim, that we can cognize our moral duty without making any reference to God ("the idea of another being above [us]") or happiness ("an incentive other than the [moral] law itself"), gives many readers the impression that Kant is reducing religion to morality, especially when he goes on to conclude that "on its own behalf morality in no way needs religion" (Rel 6:3). Interpreting this claim against the backdrop of the transcendental ideality of space and time in the first *Critique* and of the moral law in the second *Critique*, however, enables us to recognize that Kant's point is actually perspectival: from the transcendental perspective, morality is justifiable independently of all empirical religious traditions, even though it may well turn out (as the careful reader of *Religion* eventually discovers) that from the empirical perspective religion provides a necessary means of *propagating* morality universally. Indeed, precisely this dual perspective ends up being the focus of the second half of the first preface, where Kant contrasts "philosophical theology" (i.e., theology that takes morality as its core concern) with "biblical theology" (i.e., theology that takes some scripture-based empirical religion as its core concern) (Rel 6:9). There Kant argues not that philosophical theologians have *no need* of biblical theologians, nor (certainly!) vice versa, but rather that these two distinct types of theologian should "be at one," as far as their ultimate aims are concerned (Rel 6:10).

Any doubt that Kant's justification for this claim rests squarely on his transcendental idealism is dispelled in the second preface, where Kant distinguishes even more explicitly between the same two perspectives by comparing their respective concerns to two "concentric" circles, whose relation gives rise to the two "experiments" (or "attempts [*Versuchen*]") that Kant conducts throughout the pages of *Religion* (Rel 6:12). The first experiment (i.e., the attempt to identify a system of "religion within the bounds of bare reason") corresponds to the task of proving the transcendental ideality of space and time in the first *Critique* and the pure ideality of the moral law in the second *Critique*. Likewise, the second experiment (i.e., the attempt to ascertain whether or not the empirical elements of a particular historical religious tradition – and here Kant takes Christianity as his test case – succeed in preserving moral religion as their

rational core) corresponds to the first *Critique's* task of showing that empirical objects really do exist in time and space and to the second *Critique's* task of showing that moral judgments really do need to exhibit respect for the moral law in order to be called "good." This much, however, is not the source of significant controversy among interpreters of Kant's *Religion*: no commentators, prior to a recent (and fairly minor) debate,⁸ have regarded Kant's distinctions between philosophical and biblical theology or the first and second experiments as the source of apparently self-contradictory perplexities.

When we come to Kant's arguments in the First Piece,⁹ this situation changes dramatically: his account of human nature, as consisting of a threefold "predisposition [*Anlage*]" that is inevitably corrupted by a "propensity to evil [*Hang zum Böse*]," has been the source of countless expressions of frustration (Rel 6:26–32).¹⁰ Among the various inconsistencies that commentators claim to detect in Kant's argument, by far the most intractable has been the fact that he claims that an *a priori* proof of the propensity to evil is required, yet he never seems to provide such a proof in the text. As I have previously proposed a detailed solution to this problem (see note 10), I shall not rehearse my full argument at this point. Instead, I shall focus my overview on how and why this problem persists only as long as interpreters fail to read *Religion* against the backdrop of Kant's transcendental idealism.

When we *do* acknowledge this backdrop, Kant's repeated references to the "possibility" of evil immediately stand out as the central focus of his argument, for Kant's special form of "transcendental argument" always functions as an attempt to identify the necessary conditions for the *possibility* of experience (or of whatever subject matter may be under investigation) – these being the *boundary-conditions* that make empirical knowledge (or moral action, etc.) what it is. Read in this light, the First Piece is not Kant's attempt to demonstrate that human beings *really are* (empirically) evil. Even his impressive list of the "long melancholy litany of charges against humanity" (Rel 6:33), which so many readers mistakenly take as Kant's excuse for *not* providing the required *a priori* proof, is not intended to *demonstrate* that human beings are evil (any more than the arguments in the first *Critique* demonstrate that human beings *have* knowledge, or those in the second *Critique*, that we *are* morally good). Kant's list of evils does suggest, of course, that he never seriously doubted the empirical reality of evil. However, as a transcendental idealist, his core (philosophical) question is not "Are the empirical choices made by human beings evil?" but rather, "What must hold true for our minds (i.e., what must we presuppose as transcendently ideal) *if* empirical evil is to be possible at all?" This, I have argued, is the focus of Kant's arguments for the propensity to evil in the First Piece. The basic steps of his argument are difficult to detect because they are so obvious, being "hidden" in the very headings of the subsections of the First Piece. In a nutshell, his argument is that any being with a predisposition to

good (Section I) would need to *presuppose* the existence of a propensity to evil in order to explain how any evil action (or choice)¹¹ would be *possible* (Section II); we *do* observe evil actions (or choices) in the world (Section III); so human beings must possess this propensity that therefore makes them radically evil (Section IV).

Once we recognize the perspectival focus of Kant's theory of the propensity to evil, whereby his only defense is a *transcendental* argument that focuses on the *ideality* of this principle (i.e., its status as a boundary-condition for religious experience – a component of our *noumenal* character that must be *presupposed* if we are to understand how evil is possible and how religion arises therefrom), all of Kant's (apparently conflicting) statements about the need for an *a priori* (or "formal") proof can be rendered self-consistent. Thus, as he states in the opening section of the First Piece:

In order to call a human being evil...one would have to be able to infer *a priori* from a few consciously evil actions, [or] indeed from a single one, an evil maxim lying at their basis, and from it again a basis, itself in turn a maxim [and] lying in the subject universally, of all particular morally evil maxims. (Rel 6:20)

A priori inferences that lead to a universal conclusion are the task of Kant's transcendental arguments. When he goes on to say, while introducing the examples he lists in Section III (entitled "The Human Being is Evil by Nature"), that "we can spare ourselves the formal proof" (Rel 6:32–33), he is not announcing that he has *given up* the task of providing the required proof. Rather, his point is the same as the equivalent step in his other transcendental arguments: just as even Hume did not doubt that "we have experience" of empirical objects – the only question being to identify what that experience actually *is* – so also nobody seriously doubts that human beings sometimes commit evil acts.

The confirmation of the empirical reality of the subject matter under consideration is an *uncontroversial* step in Kant's transcendental arguments; so his point in Section III of the First Piece is only that this premise of his argument is secure, as the examples he provides poignantly illustrate. That is, *from the empirical perspective*, nobody seriously doubts the reality of evil. (Precisely the same thing can be said about the spatiotemporal nature of empirical objects and about the moral status of human choices: ordinary, non-philosophical persons feel no need whatsoever to provide formal proofs of the reality of what they can see before their own eyes.) Thus, after completing his list of illustrations, Kant goes on to insist that, "even if the existence of this propensity to evil can be established through experiential proofs," this still leaves open the question of "the actual make-up of that propensity and the basis of" the empirical opposition to the moral law that the examples illustrate (Rel 6:35).

In other words, just because this force within us, opposing our good predisposition, is “real in time” (i.e., *empirically* real), this alone does not determine whether the *status* of our propensity is empirical or transcendental. For the latter status to be established, the propensity to evil “must be cognized *a priori* from the concept of evil, as far as it is possible according to laws of freedom” – a task whose “development” Kant says he will now proceed to clarify (Rel 6:35).

Once Kant has restated his theory, in an attempt to clarify what he means by “the propensity to evil,” Section III ends with a footnote (attached to a paraphrase of Romans 3:9–12, affirming the universality of sin) that begins:

The actual proof of this judgment of condemnation pronounced by [the court of] morally sentencing reason is contained not in this section but in the previous one. This section contains only the confirmation of the judgment through experience; but experience can never uncover the root of evil in the supreme maxim of free volition in reference to the law, the root which, as an *intelligible deed*, precedes all experience. (Rel 6:39n)

This passage unambiguously confirms that Kant does think he has provided the required proof. Yet it will surprise anyone who reads the previously quoted statement as indicating that, at the midpoint of Section III (Rel 6:35), the proof had not yet been presented. This, however, is not what Kant wrote in that earlier passage. Rather, he stated that, having *confirmed* the reality of evil by reference to various examples that illustrate the transcendental condition under consideration in the First Piece, he would complete Section III by clarifying the apriority of the proved concept. What he now explains, as a postscript to the completed argument, is that, with Section I having provided the argument’s necessary precondition, the predisposition to good, Section II argued that human beings *can* be evil only if our nature has a necessary and universal propensity *to* such evil (i.e., only if this propensity serves as a transcendental boundary-condition for evil), and Section III then confirmed the empirical reality of that otherwise merely hypothetical situation by showing how obvious it is that evil really exists. The conclusion of the overall argument, therefore, must be that the propensity to evil is not *itself* an empirically real constituent of our nature, but is a *transcendentally ideal* boundary-condition that makes evil actions *possible*. Indeed, this is precisely what we find in Section IV (minus the baggage of the transcendental-empirical distinction): Kant explains the implications of his argument for the proper interpretation of the Christian doctrine of original sin, this being his first major application of the second experiment in *Religion*.¹²

Once we recognize that Kant’s whole argument in the First Piece is a (partially hidden) application of transcendental idealism to the question of why human beings are religious, the various confusing features of Kant’s exposition

fall into place. By contrast, if an interpreter takes Kant's attempt to prove that a propensity to evil exists in human nature to be equivalent to proving the *empirical reality* of the Christian doctrine of original sin (a theological concept that belongs to Kant's second experiment), then perplexity abounds.¹³ If the backdrop for this claim is Kant's assumption that all genuine philosophy takes the form of a system of perspectives, whereby some transcendently ideal features always serve as (mentally imposed) boundary-conditions for whatever empirically real features may be under consideration, then his claim makes good sense. For, having completed his (first experiment) argument that human beings possess an evil propensity only insofar as we find it necessary to *pre-suppose* such a transcendental feature as present at the ideal boundary of our character, he naturally goes on to *criticize* the Christian doctrine of original sin. His criticism, like the foregoing argument itself, is two-sided: *if* Christians interpret the doctrine of original sin as a *transcendentally ideal* feature of human nature, then the doctrine is fully in conformity with the religion of bare reason; however, if Christians interpret the doctrine to mean that *original sin* is *empirically real* in a form that can be *inherited* from one human being (such as Adam) to the next, then this doctrine is "a contradiction" and not worthy of serious consideration by any theologically-minded philosopher (Rel 6:40).

Two perspectives on conversion: Kant's ethics of grace

Next to Kant's theory of evil, the aspect of *Religion* that interpreters have most often regarded as a perplexing source of apparently self-contradictory claims is his theory of the "change of heart" that converts a person's moral character from evil to good. Kant develops his theory primarily in Part One of the Second Piece, after having offered a lengthy preview in the General Comment to the First Piece. Much debate has focused on whether Kant leaves any room for *grace* in his philosophical theology, and if so, whether his theory makes sense or is merely a poorly digested jumble of unorganized assertions. Many interpreters have taken it as granted that Kant's philosophy in general, and his philosophy of religion in particular, leave no room for grace – or at least, no grace that bears any resemblance to the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement. Yet, as we shall see, once we read *Religion* against the backdrop of transcendental idealism, a revitalized theory of grace turns out to be Kant's second major application of his second experiment.

The first of several ambiguities that plague the interpreter of Kant's theory of conversion and grace is that at times he appears to affirm the possibility (if not even perhaps the necessity) of divine assistance, in order to explain how we can counteract the apparently insurmountable influence of radical evil and enter once again upon the path of goodness, while at other times he writes as if everything depends on human effort alone. Those who highlight

the latter tendency typically interpret Kant as a moral reductionist, who lacks any serious belief in religion as anything other than morality in disguise, while those who highlight the former tendency, adopting an “affirmative approach” to interpreting Kant’s theory of religion (see note 4), typically see him as seeking not to destroy but to reform empirical religious traditions.¹⁴ This interpretive conflict parallels the debate over whether the Kant of the first *Critique* is best regarded as the “all-destroyer” of metaphysics¹⁵ or as attempting to set metaphysics on its true and proper path. Whereas very few serious Kant scholars nowadays adopt the former position with respect to Kant’s views on metaphysics (i.e., his transcendental idealism is now widely recognized as an attempt to *reform* metaphysics, not to destroy it), the reductionist interpretation of Kant’s theory of religion still attracts considerable support. What we find, when we come to consider Kant’s theory of conversion and grace, is that the only way to make sense of the fact that two such varied interpretations are still prevalent (especially for such a significant figure as Kant) is to interpret his intentions as perspectival.

As I have argued elsewhere in greater detail, Kant’s theory of grace is so frequently misunderstood because readers expect him to be providing a *theology* of grace – that is, a concrete explanation of *how* divine assistance happens (if it happens) or of why it does *not* happen (if it does not). Reductionist interpreters rightly recognize that to provide such a theology would be to overstep the epistemological boundary-conditions set by the first *Critique*, where Kant argued that metaphysics can say nothing positive about ideas of reason that have no intuitive content – God, freedom, and immortality being the three key metaphysical examples. They therefore simply assume that, whatever Kant may be aiming to do in *Religion*, he *cannot* be telling us that a real God who exists outside of human beings actually *assists* us to become good. That is, there is no room in Kant’s philosophy for a *theology* of grace *as such*. To this extent, reductionist interpreters are certainly correct. However, what Kant actually presents in *Religion*, especially in the Second Piece and the main portion of the General Comment to the First Piece,¹⁶ is what I call an *ethics of grace*.¹⁷ Because his focus here (and throughout *Religion*) is (admittedly) on ethics, the reductionist interpretation has a *prima facie* plausibility. However, the *aim* of Kant’s ethical focus is not to pontificate on how unenlightened it is to believe in divine assistance (and all the baggage that typically comes with it – different for each empirical religious tradition); rather, his focus is to guide those who *do* hold to such an empirical belief (i.e., any religious believer who already believes God has provided some form of supernatural assistance) to *interpret* their belief in a way that enables them to maintain an ethically good lifestyle. The danger of affirming a positive theology of grace is that it has a tendency to make people *morally lazy*: if God has saved me by providing what I lack, then why should I even *try* to do what I obviously cannot do under my own power? In the process

of explaining how it is possible to believe in divine grace without thereby making oneself morally lazy, Kant offers some valuable theological reflections on the nature of conversion and grace. But his theory focuses on what Kant refers to in the first *Critique* as “a noumenon in the **negative** sense,” as distinguished from “the noumenon in a **positive** sense” (B307): that is, grace can be properly understood only when we interpret it against the backdrop of the limitations of human knowledge that come along with an affirmation of transcendental idealism.

According to Kant’s theoretical philosophy, the essence of human nature (and of each individual human being), like the true reality of God, lies hidden in the transcendent realm that is somehow mysteriously grounded in what he infamously calls “the thing in itself.”¹⁸ The distinction between the thing in itself and things as they appear to us, together with the corresponding (though not identical) distinction between phenomena and noumena, forms the backbone of Kant’s transcendental idealism. Or, to be more precise, the former distinction defines the basic framework for transcendental idealism (i.e., the status of “objects” within the human mind), while the latter defines the corresponding framework for empirical realism (i.e., the status of determinate objects that we can come to know as, presumably, existing outside the mind [see note 18]). Kant’s position, carried over from the first *Critique* directly into *Religion*, is that, whereas the transcendent (noumenal) realm (grounded in the thing in itself) is theoretically unknowable for human beings, we must (primarily for moral reasons, but also for reasons relating to the integrity of scientific knowledge) *believe* that this transcendent realm is thoroughly intertwined with the empirical (phenomenal) realm (consisting of things as they appear to our minds). Again, this is the essence of transcendental idealism, and any reader of *Religion* who does not accept this as Kant’s presupposition is bound to find the text filled with irresolvable perplexities.

The perplexities become more tolerable once we realize that Kant’s theory of the role of grace in conversion defends two distinct (yet compatible) perspectives on one and the same subject matter. The focal question of *Religion*’s Second Piece is: How is it *possible* for a radically evil human being to become good? From the transcendental perspective, Kant argues that the only way to conceive of this possibility is to presuppose that a *revolution* has taken place in the deepest part of our moral character, our *Gesinnung* – a technical term that is difficult if not impossible to translate into a single English word, though I have argued that “conviction” is the best alternative (see note 6). To be evil, for Kant, is to have freely chosen to adopt, as our deepest *conviction* regarding how we ought to make moral choices, the principle that our own interests (i.e., the fulfillment of any personal goal that we believe will make us *happy*) are more important than obeying the moral law; if the two happen to agree, our *actions* will turn out to be “legally” good, even though our *character* remains

evil. Only if we experience a radical conversion in the depths of our heart, so that our conviction prioritizes the moral principle even if doing good will require us to sacrifice our own happiness, can we think of ourselves as genuinely "good." The *problem* that (in concert with the presence of the propensity to evil) gives rise to the need for empirical religion is that *our convictions are largely inscrutable to us* (see, e.g., Rel 6:20, 51); we can to some extent guess what they are and *hope* that our deepest conviction is consistent with "the good principle," but only God would be in a position to know for certain. The key to Kant's ethics of grace, therefore, is to insist that *if* one believes that God has assisted in this revolution of the heart coming about, then this belief must be held as an expression of *hope*, not as a dogmatic claim to know the mind of God. In other words, Kant does not deny the possibility of divine assistance; he merely insists that *if* God assists us, the philosophical status of such assistance must be *transcendentally ideal* – that is, an assistance that occurs through the cooperation of our own mental presuppositions. That such assistance (namely, *some* form of grace) must be *possible*, he further argues, is assured, since there is no other way to conceive of how evil human beings can become good, as the moral law requires.

The second major feature of Kant's theory of conversion is that, because of our theoretical ignorance of our own (noumenal) character, we must look to our *actions* as (hopefully) accurate expressions of our deepest conviction; for the only option we have for gauging the morality of our character is to infer it from any *evidence* we can detect of reformation in our moral development over a lengthy period of time. Having started out under the influence of radical evil, our actions (taken as a whole) can never be perfect, so the most we can expect from this *empirical* perspective on our moral status is *gradual reform*. Kant insists that from *this* perspective, each person is individually responsible for his or her own moral reformation. This guards against any temptation we may have (due to the residual influence of the propensity to evil even on a converted person's moral conviction) to believe that the goodness of our *actions* is irrelevant to the goodness of our *character*. However, anyone who reads *Religion* against the backdrop of transcendental idealism must recognize that our own moral efforts represent only one side of the coin – and *not* the side that Kant is most interested in, as a philosopher. From the empirical perspective, a religious tradition is healthy only if it succeeds in motivating its members to continue striving to be good, despite the inevitable failures that we human beings will encounter along the way. Yet if an empirical religious tradition keeps moral religion (i.e., the religion of the first experiment) at its core, then the doctrine of grace provided by it (not by Kant himself!) can complement and even fulfill the purposes of rational religion.

What is often ignored by interpreters who focus only on the ethical/empirical side of Kant's ethics of grace is that his central argument in the Second Piece

also has a transcendental side: given our radically evil starting point, the transcendental (grace-oriented) aspect of Kant's argument ensures that we must appeal to *some belief* that will empower us to do what would otherwise be (or at least seem) impossible: obey the moral law. Subsection A of Part One (of the Second Piece) thus introduces an "ideal of moral perfection" that he calls "the archetype of the moral conviction in all its integrity" (Rel 6:61), using language borrowed from the New Testament to describe it as a foreign influence that "has *come down* to us from heaven," as a "divine decree" – a "word" that bids us "*Become!*" (Rel 6:60). "Practical faith" in this idea is the second transcendental condition that makes empirical religion possible. Without it, we could not even conceive of how gradual reform could take place; but *with* it (as Kant goes on to argue in Subsection B) we must be careful to remember that our observation of gradual reform is our only available *evidence* that the noumenal revolution has actually occurred – that is, that God's grace has actually empowered us to become good. In other words, we can never actually *know* if God has assisted us; but we *can* know that our belief has motivated us to improve.

Kant argues that "the objective reality" of this archetype hinges on each person making himself or herself an *empirical example* of the transcendental goodness it conveys (Rel 6:62–66). For this reason, we cannot depend on the example of some great moral hero to save us vicariously; indeed, we could only recognize the goodness in a person such as Jesus or the Buddha because this archetype serves as the necessary condition that shapes our understanding of goodness. Kant's position, then, is not that Jesus or the Buddha are not *perfect*, or in some sense even *divine*,¹⁹ but that perfection is a transcendental ideal that *everyone* must emulate; insofar as Christians and Buddhists see their figureheads as accomplishing the goal, they merely confirm that the change of heart is *empirically real* – that is, that converted religious believers are justified in hoping that their good actions are expressions of a good conviction – not that no further moral effort is needed.

Subsection C then examines three "difficulties" that threaten the objective reality of the archetype, if they cannot be resolved. Without going through the details of each problem here, it will suffice to note that in each case Kant's solution is perspectival, relying (at least implicitly) on the phenomenon-noumenon distinction and the crucial assumption of all critical philosophy, that what is empirically real must be grounded in something transcendently ideal. Thus, Kant solves the problem of explaining how God can save a person who still does some evil deeds (for he fully accepts that even a good-hearted person sometimes slips back into evil) by affirming that God judges the (noumenal) conviction (which, when committed to the archetype, is perfect), not the always imperfect (phenomenal) deeds; he solves the problem of whether we can ever be certain that our heart has actually changed by observing that

although the noumenal character of our conviction bars us from absolute certainty, the phenomenal character of our deeds does provide us with evidence, so our improvement provides *grounds* for hope; and he solves the problem of how pre-conversion evil can be forgiven by appealing to a special form of suffering that occurs *during* the change of heart, thus providing a *bridge* between the phenomenal and the noumenal.

Kant supplements his solution to the third difficulty with some very suggestive allusions to vicarious atonement. While he does not affirm this Christian doctrine literally, neither does he dogmatically deny it. Rather, he treats it as a profound *symbol* of what must occur in everyone's experience, in order for conversion to occur: the "new human being" must *suffer on behalf of* the "old human being" (Rel 6:74; see also Rel 6:66), and in so doing atonement for pre-conversion sin becomes *possible* without violating God's justice. (Kant makes no claim that such atonement actually *occurs*; confirming *that* is the task of biblical theologians.) Such "suffering" is a form of noumenal causality that makes no sense outside the framework of transcendental idealism: a person's *moral principle* has changed, and this "change of mentality" (Rel 6:73–74) *causes* the converted person to make choices that the "old man" would have regarded as painful in the extreme; yet the "new man" welcomes them as opportunities for further and further gradual reform. If we take this as a second application of Kant's second experiment (as Kant does in Part Two of the Second Piece), his point is quite consistent with many traditional forms of biblical theology: from God's point of view what atones for our pre-conversion sin is our faith in Jesus' saving work (cf. our moral conviction); yet the genuineness of each Christian's faith can be confirmed only if he or she actually lives like a "little Christ" (cf. pursues a reformed lifestyle).

Kant's Copernican hypothesis as applied to religious service in a church

The payoff of the foregoing account of Kant's theory of religion, confirming its (mostly hidden) dependence on his transcendental idealism, comes when we consider its implications for a distinction that appears in various forms throughout *Religion* but becomes the focal point only in the Fourth Piece, in the form of a distinction between two types of religious service. His first reference to this distinction comes in the General Comment to the First Piece, where he says: "All religions... can be divided into [the religion] of the *pursuit of favor* (of bare ceremonial worship) and the *moral religion*, i.e., the religion of the *good lifestyle*" (Rel 6:51). Kant's comments on this distinction, both here and in the various other contexts where he mentions it, leave little doubt that he regards the latter as the true core of all religion (and thus, the topic of the first experiment), while the former is the false approach to being religious – that

is, it refers to any version of the second experiment that exposes an empirical religious tradition that *fails* to preserve moral religion as its core. Kant's chief task in *Religion* is to set out the principles for reforming the first type of religion so that it includes the second. However, to draw from this fact the inference that Kant sees ceremonial worship and all other manifestations of empirical religious practices as irrelevant to, if not subversive of, true religion is a grave error – one that has been made so often by commentators precisely because the backdrop of transcendental idealism, with its thoroughly perspectival implications, tends to be neglected.

That *true* (philosophically well-grounded) religion must have a *moral* core does not render the nonmoral aspects of religion necessarily false or harmful; this would be like claiming that the transcendental ideality of space and time in Kant's theoretical philosophy proves that empirical objects are not *really* spatiotemporal. Just as the first *Critique* reaches the opposite conclusion for empirical objects, so also the goal of *Religion* is to pave the way for an *authentic* understanding of religious dogma and ritual, rather than to decry all empirical religion as worthless superstition and “delirium [*Schwärmerei*].” Indeed, the institution in *Religion* that plays a role corresponding to that of science in the first *Critique* is probably the single most neglected technical term in Kant's entire *corpus*: the *church*.

Religion's Third Piece is best known as the locus for Kant's introduction of the “ethical community,” as the only ultimate means for humanity to overcome the influence of radical evil. What is rarely recognized is that Kant portrays this community as (implicitly) transcendently ideal; it is, at best, an unreachable goal that we must do our best to approximate in our limited, humanly constructed communities. The bulk of Kant's argument in the Third Piece therefore focuses not on the ethical community as such, but on its empirical instantiation, in the *religious* form of a “church” – that is, a “people of God” that unites itself under a common belief in a transcendent lawgiver whose laws are *moral* (Rel 6:98–100) and thus internally manifested to “all well-meaning” people (Rel 6:152). The four basic (categorially organized) principles that Kant lists (“universality,” “integrity [*Lauterkeit*],” “freedom,” and “unchangeableness”) are explicitly identified as principles of *church governance* (Rel 6:101–2); as such, they correspond directly to the principles of pure understanding that govern scientific knowledge in the first *Critique's* Analytic of Principles. Far from being vague and undetermined, as some commentators have alleged,²⁰ the “form and structure” of the church (Rel 6:94) is worked out in considerable detail in the second half of *Religion*, through a series of *applications* that show how the four basic principles serve to guide those who are charged with the organization of actual (empirical) religious communities. And with each application, Kant's distinction between the two approaches to being religious becomes more and more well-refined.

After §IV of Division One of the Third Piece introduces the four principles, the three concluding subsections elaborate on the church's universality, integrity, and freedom, respectively: §V clarifies how "pure religious faith" constitutes the "one true religion" even though it *always* starts out as one of the *many* types of "church faith," based on some revealed scripture (Rel 6:107); §VI clarifies how a true church can preserve its integrity only by focusing its scriptural interpretation primarily on finding a moral meaning in the text (Rel 6:110–11); and §VII clarifies how "sanctifying faith" must *start* from the principle of free volition (Rel 6:115–19), grounding the "kingdom of God" on the hope that "equality arises from true freedom" (Rel 6:122). Finally, Division Two concludes the Third Piece by elaborating on the principle of unchangeableness, appealing to Judaism and Christianity, considered not so much as historical religious traditions but as ideal *types* of religion, to illustrate the difference between a religion that grounds obedience in *changeable* outward observances and one that grounds obedience in *unchangeable* inward conviction.

In conclusion, I shall clarify and confirm the potentially contentious claim made earlier in this chapter, that Kant grants that empirical religion may be a *necessary* means of propagating morality universally. Demonstrating this claim is one of the main tasks of the Fourth Piece. Thus, the untitled introductory section to Part One acknowledges two ways of defining religion: (1) "according to its first origin and its intrinsic possibility," as either "natural" or "revealed" (cf. the transcendental perspective); and (2) according to what "makes it capable of *external communication*," as either "natural" or "scholarly" (cf. the empirical perspective) (Rel 6:155). Here, as previously hinted (cf. Rel 6:84–85), he argues that even though a divine revelation is not necessary as a *rational* condition of salvation for human beings, it may be *historically* necessary in order to *awaken* people from their ignorant adherence to a nonmoral religion. He then goes on to present a summary of Jesus' basic message in the Gospels, arguing that it can be regarded as "a complete religion," given its deep resonance with the religion of bare reason (Rel 6:162). He states that such "a pure *rational faith*" can *also* be regarded "as a *revelation faith*" (Rel 6:163–64), even though it is of course impossible (given the limits of knowledge established in the first *Critique*) to know for certain if it was literally revealed from a divine source.

In the Fourth Piece Kant also distinguishes between direct and indirect service of God in a way that parallels the first *Critique's* refusal to reject God, freedom, and immortality, even though the limits it establishes for human knowledge cast into question the very *possibility* of ever locating objects that would correspond to these ideas. At most, from the standpoint of theoretical reason, an affirmation of God (like freedom and immortality) can only be hypothetical. While the second *Critique's* confirmation of these ideas as objectively real retains a *theoretically* hypothetical status, the same ideas are now also regarded as *practically* "constitutive" (see CPrR 5:135). Likewise, in *Religion's* Fourth Piece

we discover that real, empirical religion can serve the highly relevant practical function of *motivating* people to propagate moral convictions to others.²¹ Kant cites the Christian rituals of prayer, baptism, churchgoing, and communion as specific examples of how the perspectival methodology of critical philosophy can revolutionize the way we think about religion. Countless readers have mistaken Kant's comments on these topics (especially in the General Comment to the Fourth Piece) for an out-and-out rejection of all ritual. Yet once we read the text against the backdrop of Kant's distinction between transcendental idealism and empirical realism, a whole new (and more affirmative) picture arises. The (in itself transcendentially ideal) *spirit* of prayer is what determines whether any verbal expression of (empirical) prayer is efficacious and thus worth preserving.²² Churchgoing does not please God in itself, but is interpreted as a helpful means of spreading the moral fruits of love to the community. Baptism is no longer a tool for the church magically to control who is and is not admitted into heaven, but becomes a meaningful confirmation of its *duty* to instruct newcomers in morality. And the communion service is not a mechanical transmission of grace to any recipient, but a profound symbol of the unity and equality of all community members. Once we recognize that Kant's aim is not to destroy religion but to revitalize it by applying the insights gained from his transcendental idealism, even his approach to ritual can be acknowledged as constituting a *Copernican revolution in religion*.

Notes

1. For a defense of this translation of the title of Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793–94), see my "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" *Kant-Studien* 83, no. 2 (1992): 129–48; revised and reprinted as Chapter 4 of my book, *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); hereafter abbreviated KCR. Werner Pluhar subsequently adopted this title for his translation of Kant's book (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009). All quotations from Kant's *Religion* are my own, taken from my forthcoming *A Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's "Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason"* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2014), which includes a new translation that relies heavily upon Pluhar's.
2. The most prolific interpreter whose work focuses on these interpretive tensions is Gordon E. Michalson, Jr. See, for example, his book *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 8–9, 28, where he refers to various "wobbles" that plague Kant's exposition. On the influence that Kant's transcendental idealism had on the whole subsequent development of German Idealism, with special reference to theology, see Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2012).
3. Goethe, one of the first contemporaries to respond to Kant's *Religion*, famously claimed that in this book Kant had "slobbered on his philosophical cloak" by treating the doctrine of original sin so seriously. For a detailed response to such caricatures, see my article, "Kant's 'Appropriation' of Lampe's God," *Harvard Theological*

- Review 85, no. 1 (Jan. 1992): 85–108; revised and republished as Chapter 4 in KCR; see especially KCR 129n.
4. For a lively discussion of one such “affirmative” interpretation of Kant, see the symposium published in *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (April 2012), focusing on the book by Nathan Jacobs and Chris L. Firestone, *In Defense of Kant's “Religion”* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008); hereafter abbreviated IDKR. The problem that surfaced in that discussion is that affirmative interpreters themselves seem to disagree quite strongly on which aspects of Kant's theory are coherent, *and* on whether affirming the coherence of the theory commits one to affirming it as a viable approach to *religion*. The authors make clear in their chapters that they do not *accept* Kantian religion, but seek only to affirm that the theory makes sense. Michalson's contribution to the symposium, by contrast, affirms that, just because Kant's argument is filled with “wobbles,” this does not make it unworthy of acceptance! Rather, he portrays such tensions as interesting traces of two incommensurable historical movements that were influencing Kant as he wrote *Religion*, with his attempts to unite them being as plausible as any union could be.
 5. For details of this review and the inadequacies of Kant's response to it, see my article (coauthored with Steven Otterman), “The Implied Standpoint of Kant's *Religion*: An Assessment of Kant's Reply to (and an English Translation of) an Early Book Review of *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*,” *Kantian Review* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 2013): 73–97. Kant claims to “dispose of” the reviewer's criticism in a few sentences (Rel 6:13), not admitting that the reviewer actually raises five substantive criticisms of *Religion*, some of which Kant himself responds to in new footnotes that he added to the second edition, while others he simply ignored – to his own peril, since these same perplexities continue to be raised by interpreters today.
 6. Throughout this chapter (as in my *Commentary*), I translate Kant's technical term, *Gesinnung*, as “conviction.” The traditional translation of Kant's *Gesinnung* is “disposition,” but Pluhar's translations all use “attitude.” In “What Is a Kantian *Gesinnung*? On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*” (*Kantian Review*, forthcoming), I argue that (at least in its religious contexts) “conviction” fits the *volitional* emphasis that Kant gives this word far more appropriately than does the more metaphysical “disposition” or the more psychological “attitude.”
 7. Following the publication of the first edition of the first *Critique*, Kant was accused of defending a position close to that of Berkeley. In response, he added the new Refutation of Idealism section to the second edition (B274–79). As that section clarifies, Kant's special form of “idealism” rejects Berkeley's idealism (as well as Descartes's), inasmuch as Kant does *not* allow (much less require) us to consider *empirical* objects as ideal.
 8. That my claims in this paragraph are not wholly uncontroversial is demonstrated by the aforementioned symposium on IDKR (see note 4). IDKR 114–19 identifies and locates Kant's second experiment *solely* in the fourth main part of *Religion*. My article, “Cross-Examination of *In Defense of Kant's ‘Religion,’*” *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 2 (April 2012): 170–80, argues against such an interpretation, defending the position I develop more fully in KCR (especially chs. 7–8). Unfortunately, the authors' responses (published later in the same issue) merely sidestep the core problems with their position, choosing instead to attack several alleged “fallacies” that they read into my article. They never address the substance of my criticism, which centers on the fact that IDKR fails to consider the most viable alternative to its own position: the two experiments do not consist (as they claim) merely of the main

philosophical arguments of *Religion* (in the first three parts of the book), and an *illustration* (in the fourth part), respectively; rather, as a metaphor for Kant's core philosophical strategy of viewing transcendental idealism and empirical realism as two perspectives on one and the same subject matter, the two experiments permeate the entire book. The debate is minor because it hinges on whether or not KCR actually defended such a position: although my symposium article points directly to the lengthy account of the two experiments in KCR, the authors' *only* substantive response was that their (2008) book was justified in neglecting the alternative presented in my (2000) book because my account of the two experiments *had not yet been published* prior to the appearance of IDKR.

9. I follow Pluhar in translating *Stück* (the word Kant uses to mark the heading of each major division in *Religion*) literally as "Piece" (as when it refers to an chapter or journal article), rather than loosely as "Book" (as in Greene and Hudson's 1934 translation) or "Part" (as in di Giovanni's 1998 translation for the *Cambridge Edition*).
10. For a summary of some of these claims regarding the incoherence of Kant's argument in the First Piece, see my article, "Kant's Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance," *Journal of Religion* 90, no. 4 (Oct. 2010): 530–53. Much of my exposition in this section is a summary of this article.
11. Kant's official moral theory relates primarily to choices and only secondarily (if at all) to phenomenal actions. However, the careful reader of *Religion* quickly detects that here Kant repeatedly reverses this previous tendency, viewing choices as beyond the reach of human observation and therefore treating evil as something that we can primarily (and in some contexts, *only*) detect by observing peoples' actions.
12. I argue this point in detail in KCR, ch. 7, pt. 2 – a point Firestone and Jacobs totally ignore, both in IDKR and in their follow-up attempt to defend their claim that the second experiment operates *only* in the Fourth Piece (cf. note 8, above).
13. Firestone and Jacobs call this theory of the relation between Kant's two experiments the "*Religion-as-Translation thesis*" (IDKR 69–81). It is the view that the first experiment just *is* Kant's moral philosophy, while the second experiment is Kant's attempt to translate the key theories of Christian theology into the terms of his moral philosophy (IDKR 104). They take John E. Hare's book, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), as a key example of this approach. As such, it is not surprising that Hare ends up regarding some of Kant's main arguments as a "failure" (*The Moral Gap*, 60–62).
14. For the fullest account of the distinction between traditional and affirmative interpretations of Kant, see Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist, "Editors' Introduction," in *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1–39. For some important qualifications on the use of the term "affirmative," see my article, "To Tell the Truth on Kant and Christianity: Will the Real Affirmative Interpreter Please Stand Up?" *Faith and Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (July 2012): 340–46. See also KCR, ch. 6, and note 1, above.
15. The tradition of interpreting Kant's critical philosophy as destroying the possibility of metaphysics (and so also, theology) can be traced back to Moses Mendelssohn's early response to the first *Critique*. But the most frequently quoted source is Heinrich Heine, who referred to Kant as "the arch-destroyer in the realm of thought," who

- put forward “destructive, world-annihilating thoughts” (*Religion and Philosophy in Germany* [1834], trans. John Snodgrass [Boston: Beacon, 1959], 109). I provide a detailed account of and response to this tradition in KCR, ch. 1.
16. In the first edition of *Religion*, the first Piece had no General Comment; the material renamed under this heading in the second edition was called section “V” in the first edition. The second edition added a lengthy paragraph introducing four “parerga” and relating them to the General Comments of each Piece. The portion of text I am referring to here is part that is *common* to both editions. Technically, the first parergon refers only to the newly added portion of the first General Comment; the foregoing portion (the former §5) constitutes Kant’s *solution* to the parergon.
 17. For a fuller version of the argument presented in this section, see my article, “Kant’s Ethics of Grace: Perspectival Solutions to the Moral Difficulties with Divine Assistance,” *Journal of Religion* 90, no. 4 (Oct. 2010): 530–53.
 18. Kant’s theory of the thing in itself is notorious for its interpretive difficulties, not the least of which is that he portrays it as the ultimate source of everything real, yet also insists it is by definition unknowable. I propose solutions to several of the most intractable of these difficulties in my first two published articles: “Faith as Kant’s Key to the Justification of Transcendental Reflection,” *Heythrop Journal* 25, no. 4 (Oct. 1984): 442–55; and “The Radical Unknowability of Kant’s ‘Thing in Itself,’” *Cogito* 3, no. 2 (March 1985): 101–15. Another nest of problems concerns how “thing in itself” relates to the various terms Kant employs for the object of knowledge at various stages in its determination. For solutions to these problems, see my “Six Perspectives on the Object in Kant’s Theory of Knowledge,” *Dialectica* 40, no. 2 (1986): 121–51, where I argue that “thing in itself” and “noumenon” are *not* mere synonyms, as many interpreters take them to be. Revised versions of these three articles became Chapter 5, appendix 5, and Chapter 6, respectively, of my book, *Kant’s System of Perspectives: An Architectonic Interpretation of the Critical Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993).
 19. Contrary to the common assumption that Kant dogmatically denies Jesus’ divinity, I argue in “Could Kant’s Jesus Be God?” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (Dec. 2012): 421–37, that his official position is agnostic, yet includes an explanation of how one must *interpret* Jesus’ divinity, in order for such a belief to be consistent with the religion of bare reason.
 20. See, for example, Philip J. Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reason: Kant’s Critique, Radical Evil, and the Destiny of Humankind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), who claims that Kant fails to specify “the concrete means” for establishing the social authority of reason (e.g., 9, 60). Surprisingly, however, Rossi uses the term “church” only occasionally, preferring the non-religious term “ethical commonwealth.” For an analysis of one of the key arguments in the Third Piece that requires the latter to be conceived *only* in religious terms, see my article, “Kant’s Religious Argument for the Existence of God – The Ultimate Dependence of Human Destiny on Divine Assistance,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 3–22.
 21. Along these lines, I attempt in Chapter 9 of KCR to develop a biblical theology that puts worship at the core of historical faith *even though* from the philosopher’s transcendental perspective such aprioritization seems upside-down. Kant makes clear in his 1798 work, *Conflict of the Faculties*, however, that philosophers and theologians *ought* to work with opposing principles and that a healthy conflict

between these two types of scholars is therefore not only inevitable but potentially fruitful for both camps. Theologians, with their special access to (alleged) divine revelation, can contribute *insight* and *power*, while philosophers must focus their efforts on the guiding light of reason.

22. For a more detailed account of Kant's philosophy of prayer along these lines, see my article, "Kant's Critical Hermeneutic of Prayer," *Journal of Religion* 77, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 584–604; revised and reprinted as appendix 8 of KCR.

8

Kant's Political Philosophy

Allen Wood

As a political philosopher, Kant belongs to the modern world and the Age of Enlightenment. Ancient political philosophy was often oriented to the community in a broad sense. The state – its laws, authority, and political rule – were seen as tools for sustaining a sense of community, educating the citizens in virtuous behavior, cultivating a shared tradition and sense of values. Such a conception is not unknown in the modern world, of course. It had some appeal to Rousseau, appealed even more to the German Romantics, and (though in a spirit more modern than Romantic) it underlies Hegel's concept of the state as the rational expression of ethical life. Utilitarian political theories can also take this form. For many moderns, however – including Kant – the political state is viewed chiefly, even exclusively, as a coercive institution whose sole ultimate aim is maintaining the peace and security of a population, and protecting the rights of citizens.

An externally coercive political order may be recognized as a necessary condition for the further development of human community and human capacities, but this modern tradition does not view these higher ethical ends as the proper standards of legitimation for the political state. An important part of the modern tradition rests the legitimacy of the political state solely on its coercive protection of the rightful freedom of individuals. Kant belongs to this tradition, as do Locke, Fichte, and even the main line of reasoning in Rousseau. Higher or more general ethical aims are to be pursued not coercively through laws and the state, but freely, through public discourse, education, art, philosophy, and religion. The state's only job is to guard the conditions of individual freedom.

Kant holds that there is only one right belonging innately to each human being simply in virtue of humanity or rational nature: the right of *external freedom*, "independence from being constrained by another's choice" (MM 6:237). This concept of freedom considers an individual free *not* in virtue of what the individual *can do* (sometimes called "positive freedom") or in virtue

of the *absence of external obstacles* (sometimes called “negative freedom”), but instead because it is this individual, and no one else, who chooses what he or she does or tries to do, whether or not the chosen action is successful or is frustrated by external obstacles. This is an essentially social or interpersonal concept of freedom. External freedom is being able to govern yourself, not having your actions dictated or constrained through the choice of some other person.

Right and ethics

Recht is a German word which has an equivalent in all the European languages that belong to territories once governed by Roman law. These are words such as *ius*, *droit*, *diritto*, *derecho*, *prawo*, *jog*. None of these words has a precise equivalent in English, so we must conscript the English word “right,” as I have already been doing, pressing it into service to mean the same thing. “Right” in this sense refers to a system of public laws, considered collectively, and also to their rational foundation – to what gives them their rational authority to command (for example, *natural law* or *natural right*, as contrasted with the *positive laws* promulgated by particular states). Particular laws (legal statutes) are referred to in these languages by a different word: *Gesetz*, *lex*, *loi*, *legge*, *ley*, *ustawa*, *törvény*. When it is used as a count noun, *Recht*, *ius*, and so on can also refer to the claims people have under the law, or under natural law: what in English we call their “rights.” Kant’s philosophy of right, therefore, is also his philosophy of law. His concept of right is based on the philosophical thesis that what gives law and the state their authority is solely the way they protect the *external freedom* of individuals, independence of constraint by others.

This raises the question: On what is based the innate right to external freedom? In Kant’s view, its basis is this: We human beings must pursue our ends and our good through our own *actions* (these are not taken care of automatically, by nature, God, or some other agent). It belongs to the very concept of *action*, as Kant understands it, that it is something in our power that we choose as a *means* to some *end* that we have set (G 4:427). Irrespective of any particular end, therefore, we necessarily will to have the external freedom to choose *our actions* as means to *our ends*, rather than having them chosen for us by others, as a means to *their ends*. Because claims of right are independent of all particular ends, they cannot be based on welfare, happiness, virtue, or self-perfection. External freedom is therefore not a good, chosen because it *benefits* individuals. For it is only if we are free to choose our actions to serve *our ends*, rather than having them chosen for us by others to serve *their ends*, that any question can arise whether we are promoting our welfare or happiness (the sum-total of the ends of inclination that we might choose to set). This is why Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* puts the *Doctrine of Right* (*Rechtslehre*) before the *Doctrine of Virtue* (*Tugendlehre*).

The right of governing yourself, rather than being governed by others, belongs innately to every human being who has attained the rational capacities of adulthood (*Mündigkeit*). Children are *unmündig* – etymologically, *incapable of speaking* for themselves; but it means that they are incapable of acting rationally for their own ends. Children may be constrained by others for their own good, or as part of their education – the acquisition of the capacities for self-government. The freedom of a human adult to govern him- or herself, however, may never be infringed for the sake of any end. It may not be infringed for the sake of the traditions or the values of the community, or for the sake of cultivating virtue, and not for the sake of human happiness – not even for the sake of the happiness of the individual whose right is in question (and even *especially* not for this). Instead, the justification of any coercion exercised on any human being must always be the protection of rightful external freedom – precisely the freedom which coercion itself threatens.

Nevertheless, external coercion can be justified. In fact, it must occur simply for the protection of external freedom itself. The only way for any individual to be completely independent of constraint by the choice of others would be for that individual to exercise absolute coercive power over all others, so that they had no freedom at all. Therefore, no one's external freedom can be absolute or unlimited. Every human being, however, has precisely the same original right to freedom as every other. Each person's external freedom, therefore, must be coercively limited in order that there may be rightful freedom for everyone else. *The principle of right* merely specifies what rightful freedom consists in: "Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law'" (MM 6:230). Rightful freedom means: everyone must be externally free to perform all actions that are right, but coercively prevented from performing all actions that are not right.

Kant's system of practical philosophy – the "metaphysics of morals [*Metaphysik der Sitten*]" – consists of two fundamental divisions: (1) right (*Recht*) and (2) ethics (or virtue) (*Ethik, Tugend*). In the interpretation of Kant, it is controversial how these two parts form a single whole. One reading argues that right is grounded on ethics, or on a substantive moral principle (a categorical imperative) that is common to both right and ethics. If my argument above is correct, however, then this interpretation must be wrong. It will be argued here, therefore, that right and ethics have *separate* foundations, yet also that they are unified in *morals*.

Right is concerned solely with the coercive protection of external freedom – independence of constraint by the choice of another. External freedom may never be rightfully limited for the sake of any end; it may be limited only to protect the rightful external freedom of others – external freedom according

to universal law. Ethics, however, and the categorical imperative of morality, are essentially grounded on ends – fundamentally, on the end of humanity or rational nature as an existent or self-sufficient end in itself (G 4:429), but then also on ends to be effected that are based on this, specifically the ends of one's own perfection (both natural and moral) and the happiness of others (MM 6:385–88; cf. G 4:423–24, 430).

The rational *legislation* of right therefore differs from that of ethics. Ethics, the moral imperative, is solely about the way rational beings ought to constrain their own actions inwardly through the thought of duty. But no ethical duties may be enforced by external coercion. Duties of right, however, are all in principle coercively enforceable (though we will see in the section on “The Powers of the State” that some cannot be coercively enforced, because no one may be in a position rightfully to enforce them). Thus Kant says that with ethical obligations “the law makes duty the incentive,” while the legislation of right “does not include the incentive of duty in the law and so admits an incentive other than the idea of duty itself” (MM 6:218–19). The incentive pertaining to the legislation of right is not the pure rational incentive of duty, but rather the incentives provided by external coercion through a public authority.

Can there be categorical imperatives of right? A categorical imperative is by its concept a rational principle that commands from the motive of duty, independently of any *pre-given* end (G 4:420). But it also belongs to the concept of a categorical imperative that it commands us to set certain ends; if there were no ends that are at the same time duties, then a categorical imperative would be impossible (MM 6:385). Rightful freedom, however, may be infringed only for the protection of rightful freedom itself according to universal law, with authoritative external coercion as its incentive. From this it apparently follows that categorical imperatives can belong only to ethics, never to right.

This last statement must be qualified, however, on account of the way in which right and ethics do constitute a single whole, called “morals [*Sitten*].” Pure or strict right, to be sure, does not concern anyone's obligation or duty; it concerns only the way that their external freedom may be coercively limited in order to protect the rightful external freedom of others, according to universal law: “strict right, namely that which is not mingled with anything ethical, requires only external grounds for determining choice. ...if [the concept of right] is to remain pure, this consciousness [of duty as a ground for determining choice] may not and cannot be appealed to as an incentive” (MM 6:232). But there can nevertheless be *duties of right*, because right *borrow*s from ethics the concept of duty or obligation, and with it also the concept of a right, corresponding to the concept of a duty: “we know our own freedom ... only through the *moral imperative*, which is a proposition commanding duty, from which the capacity for putting others under obligation, that is, the concept of a right, can afterwards be explicated” (MM 6:239). “Afterwards” here means: *After pure or*

strict right has already been grounded independently of the moral imperative, solely on the conditions of external freedom under universal law.

Right borrows the concepts of duty and obligation from ethics, but right does not depend on the moral principle, or categorical imperative, that grounds ethical duties. Political philosophy is not for Kant, as it is for many other moral philosophers, merely an application of ethical values and principles to the conditions that make political life necessary.¹ There are, however, two possible ways in which we may think of duties of right as categorical imperatives.² The first is that we can regard duties of right, as duties, as indirectly ethical, because there can be an ethical incentive for complying with them even in cases where external coercion fails (MM 6:221). The second is that we may think of a categorical imperative not only as an imperative carrying with it a special ethical incentive, but rather as consisting in any command whose authentic incentive is connected directly with the command itself, rather than arising from some independent end or incentive. In the case of right, this incentive is that of the coercive power of the authority that commands the right (as we shall see, that is the authority of the political state and the laws governing it). In this way, commands of right are not reduced to mere counsels of instrumental or prudential reason – as if the legislating authority were thought of merely as a threat to people's happiness or other ends, which they must somehow evade. On the contrary, the coercive power of the state is a special kind of authority, distinct from the ethical authority of the moral law, but commanding unconditionally that we restrict our actions to those that are right.

The fundamental principle of right does not in fact directly command us at all (categorically, hypothetically, or in any other way). It says only: "Any action is *right* if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law, or if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law" (MM 6:230). This does not tell us to perform actions that are right, or limit our actions to these, but only tells us which actions count as "right." If, as Kant says, there is in addition to "the principle of right" also a "law of right" commanding us to perform only actions that are right (MM 6:230–31), then this law "does not at all expect, far less demand, that I *myself should* limit my freedom to those conditions just for the sake of this obligation; instead, reason says only that freedom *is* limited to those conditions in conformity with the idea of it and that it may also be limited through deeds [*tätlich*] by others; and it says this as a postulate that is incapable of further proof" (MM 6:231, translation modified).

Just as right is independent of ethics, so it is equally independent of the empirical circumstances of human life that might seem to make political institutions necessary. As we will see in the section on "The Political State in History," Kant's theory of right, especially as it issues in his political philosophy, is related to his theory of the historical development of the economic

stages of social life. Kant's fundamental theory of right, however, is grounded *a priori*: "however well disposed and law-abiding human beings might be, it still lies a priori in the rational idea of a condition (one that is not rightful) that before a public lawful condition is established individual human beings, peoples and states can never be secure against violence from one another" (MM 6:312). The claims of right arise solely from a conceptual point about external freedom as the absence of constraint by another's choice. The point is that it is not a sufficient condition for you to be free from constraint by my choice that I happen to choose not to exercise constraint over you. Rather, in order to be free from my constraint, you must be *protected* from it – I must have been rendered *unable* to constrain you. If I retain the power to prevent you from taking a certain action that is right – compatible with everyone's freedom according to universal law – but merely choose not to exercise that power, then you are still not free from my constraint. In order to be free, in Kant's sense, I must be coercively prevented from preventing your rightful action. It follows that a state of nature (*Naturzustand*), in which there is no coercive authority with the power to prevent actions that are not right, is already a state of injustice, in which no one truly has rightful freedom. Kant's argument for the necessity of a *condition of right* (*Rechtzustand*) is based solely on this conceptual point about rightful freedom.

Private right

The concept of a *condition of right* leads, according to Kant's argument, to that of a political state, and to certain ends essential to right – those of establishing, preserving, and perfecting a condition of right. Right, even though it is not based on any end, does *give rise to ends* – the end of establishing, preserving, and perfecting a condition of right, and then also various political ends serviceable to these, which we will consider below, when we address "The Powers of the State." Before we can follow this line of argument, however, we must see what a condition of right requires, by taking a closer look at what is required by the concept of rightful action.

Human beings are subject to the wrongful coercive force of others because they are embodied beings, and this makes it possible for others to interfere with their rightful choices through the coercive power they can exercise on their bodies – either forcibly preventing them from taking rightful actions or threatening them with harm if they take these actions. But human actions also involve planning and control over parts of the earth's surface, and over objects located on it. In order to exercise rightful freedom, it must be determined for different individuals over which portions of the earth and which objects they may exercise rightful control, and their capacity to control these external regions and objects must be protected from interference by others.

This consideration grounds what Kant calls the concept of “what is externally mine or yours,” or the concept of rightful possession (MM 6:245–49). When it is determined and protected within a condition of right, Kant considers this rightful possession to be someone’s property (MM 6:259, 262). Our rightful possession of things begins with the exercise of physical control of them through our bodies. But Kant does not think that our bodies themselves are our property. I am my own master (*sui iuris*), but not my owner or proprietor (*sui dominus*), because I do not have the right to dispose of my own body or personality, either through suicide or through selling myself into servitude (MM 6:270; cf. MM 6:283, 324, 442; TP 8:292–96). Rightful possession thus refers only to objects external to the bodies of the persons who possess them. When someone can wrong me (violate my rightful freedom) only through seizing an external object by wrongfully interfering directly with my body (for example, by prying it out of my hand), then I am said to have *physical* (or *phenomenal*) possession of that object. In order for persons to have sufficient control over the surface of the earth (and the objects on it) to exercise their rightful freedom, they must control objects not directly in their physical possession, and it must also be possible for someone to wrong me by interfering with such an object. Over such an object I have what Kant calls *intelligible* possession (*possessio noumenon*) (MM 6:253).³ Kant holds it to be a necessary “postulate of practical reason with regard to rights” that such intelligible possession of objects is possible (MM 6:252).

As we will presently see, Kant thinks that the concepts of rightful possession and property, and the civil society and political state needed to protect them, come to be effective in human affairs only with the advent of agriculture (MM 6:250–51, 262–63; cf. CB 8:118–20; Aix). This reflects the influence of Adam Ferguson’s history of political economy, which sees the stages of human economic activity as proceeding from the hunter-gatherer, to the pastoral-nomadic, to the agricultural, and finally to the commercial stage.⁴ Thus as a matter of history, Kant thinks that the concept of rightful possession was devised by people only with the introduction of agriculture. But it is *not* Kant’s view that the concept of right applies only empirically and only to post-agricultural society. On the contrary, he holds that it is binding *a priori* as a matter of practical reason (of right). Thus Kant thinks that when Europeans encounter pastoral nomadic peoples, they must as a matter of right apply the concept of property to them, treating the territory these people occupy as their collective property, and that they must respect the property rights of these peoples, and they must not treat the lands occupied by these peoples as ownerless territories, regarding their human inhabitants as nothing, or as wholly lacking in human rights (MM 6:265–66; cf. PP 8:358–60).

The coercive protection of right, therefore, requires not only the protection of the rights of persons (their freedom from wrongful constraint exercised

by others over their own bodies and actions), but also the protection of their rightful possession of land and other objects. In a state of nature, however – that is, in the absence of any authority with the power to determine and enforce rightful possession – such possession can be only *provisional*. This is because claims of rightful possession, in order to be valid, can never rest (as in Locke’s theory, for instance) on some relation of the possessor to the thing (for example, the relation of having labored on it) but only on the omnilateral consent of all that it should be the rightful possession of a certain person.

Kant agrees with Locke that I may take rightful possession of an object, or of a portion of the earth’s surface, only if I do not wrong anyone else in so doing. Locke thinks that this condition can be met – according to what has come to be called “the Lockean proviso” – if in this seizure of land or objects (through labor) I leave “as much and as good for others.”⁵ Many have questioned on empirical grounds whether this Lockean condition can ever be met, since the land and objects we appropriate are likely to be better than any we leave behind for others to appropriate. Kant’s objection to the Lockean proviso is more fundamental, conceptual rather than empirical. Kant argues that the relevant condition cannot concern the *interests* of others, but whether their *freedom* is infringed. It cannot be whether my possession harms them, but whether they *consent* to that possession – if not directly, then through an authority empowered to give the consent of all (MM 6:256–57). Rightful possession, therefore, can become *peremptory* possession only if there is such an authority empowered to give omnilateral consent.

Kant develops an extensive theory of private right, based on the rightful claims that persons have not only over their own actions and material possessions, but also over a number of other matters as well: the contractual performances of others (MM 6:271–76), the monetary value of their possessions (MM 6:286–89), their expressions in the form of published words (MM 6:289–91), their public good name and reputation (even after death) (MM 6:295–96), and even over the status (though not the person) of others (as spouses, parents or children, and servants) in the context of the family (MM 6:276–82). These are not for Kant (as they are for Locke) rights that could be determined and enforced in a state of nature, so that the political state is merely a device for protecting them against certain “inconveniences” in the non-political condition. On the contrary, the foundation of Kant’s political philosophy is the *a priori* truth that the rights of persons become *peremptory* – determinate, valid and rightfully enforceable – only in a condition of right.

The political state in history

As a matter of history, Kant thinks that political states come into being when the productive surplus of an agricultural society permits the formation of

towns, the development of practical arts, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of some powerful person (a military despot) who is capable of protecting the property rights of agriculturalists and at the same time of extracting from them (in the form of taxes or tribute) a large enough proportion of their productive surplus to support his army and sustain his power (CB 8:119). The Prussian absolute monarchy under which Kant lived was still all too close to such a state of affairs. But the function of the political state in the eyes of reason is quite different: this function is the protection of right – of the external freedom of all according to universal law. The situation seems paradoxical: the state in its historical origin appears to be just the opposite of what the state ought to be.

If this is a paradox, at least it is not an anomaly. For, Kant observes, “in human affairs...almost everything is paradoxical” (WE 8:41). Morality, Kant thinks, has its historical beginning in the rule of custom, where people conform to accepted mores or standards of respectability, in order to avoid being despised by others and to gain prestige that gives them a status higher than others (CB 8:113). But the vocation of morality in human life is to insure autonomy of the will according to a moral law that is universally valid and treats all as having equal dignity. Religion begins with a superstitious belief that supernatural powers can be placated by groveling displays of worship and the conformity to morally indifferent statutory services commanded by a priestly hierarchy. But its rational aim is to create an ethical community which struggles against the human propensity to evil by promoting the free obedience to moral laws (Rel 6:95–102). So for Kant the paradox holds generally that the human task is to place the aims of reason into social forms that began as the very opposite of what reason wills them to be. Or, as Nietzsche expressed the same idea, with his typical rhetorical bluntness: “All good things were formerly bad things.”⁶ The sense of paradox might even dissipate if we came to accept the Kantian principle of natural teleology that these examples illustrate: “*Nature has willed that the human being should produce everything that goes beyond the mechanical arrangement of his animal existence entirely out of himself, and participate in no other happiness or perfection than that which he has procured for himself free from instinct though his own reason*” (IUH 8:19).

Kant's theory of human history, as presented in the brief but important chapter *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), proposes to understand the empirical history of our species by seeing by what process human beings do, or at least can, procure for themselves the happiness and perfection of which their nature makes them capable. Further, it uses as a guiding principle, or “idea” (in Kant's technical sense of that term), the mechanisms by which nature promotes human efforts. The starting place is the heuristic principle of biology that for every species nature provides for the complete development of all the capacities or “predispositions” that

belong to the nature of that species (IUH 8:18). The human species, however, is a rational species, and that means it has the capacity to invent or endlessly augment those predispositions. So what nature must provide, in this case, is a way for this development of predispositions to be open-ended or indefinite in extent. In the case of other animals, the predispositions of the species manifest themselves in the life-processes of each single specimen (or in the case of reproduction, of a pair). But because human predispositions are endlessly self-developing, the process takes the form of a history of the species, in which new predispositions are developed and then handed down through the generations. Human capacities, however, prominently include ways of dealing with the natural world, making it serve human ends. Kant's theory thus assumes, in effect, the most fundamental principle of Marx's historical materialism: namely, that the human species in history manifests an open-ended tendency to develop new capacities (or "productive forces") in its dealings with nature.

Kant maintains that nature provides a mechanism by which human beings are incited to develop their predispositions. This mechanism is competition, antagonism, or what Kant calls (borrowing the phrase from Montaigne) "unsociable sociability" (IUH 8:20–22).⁷ Human beings strive for superiority over other human beings, through the acquisition of power, wealth, and honor. In the process they develop the capacities of the species, which they pass on to the next generation. At a certain point, however – and this turns out to be the point at which human beings have invented agriculture, and used the productive surplus to found urban centers, where the development of practical arts further increase this surplus – the tendency to antagonism threatens to block the further development of human predispositions. People lose their incentive to strive and accumulate if social antagonism threatens their secure possession of what they have accumulated. This creates the need for them to devise a power that will protect both their personal security and their property. In this way, the power of the military despots who ruled over nascent civil society came to be invested with the function of establishing some semblance of a condition of right. It began the process through which people are motivated to perfect the condition of right, by improving the political constitution through which coercive power is administered (IUH 8:22–23).

Kant also thinks that this ongoing process of perfecting civil constitutions is now threatened by a new kind of antagonism – that between different states, which devote so much of their resources to war, and even more for the eternal preparedness for war, that the process of perfecting civil constitutions, and thereby promoting the further development of human predispositions, once again threatens to come to a standstill. So just as devising a condition of right was necessary to promote the development of human predispositions, so it is

now necessary for people to find a way for states themselves to be subjected to principles of right, through which their competing claims can be justly adjudicated without war or constant preparation for war (IUH 8:23–26).⁸ In this way, as Kant argues in *Idea for a Universal History*, practical reason, and human efforts toward achieving a condition of right, converge with the historical process through which nature provides for the endless development of human predispositions (IUH 8:27–31).

Public right

The historical process just described, I repeat with emphasis, is *not* for Kant the rational foundation of a condition of right. That foundation instead is *a priori*, depending solely on the concept of rightful external freedom, and the requirements of private right (most basically, that of rightful possession) that can be developed out of it. Kant's theory of the rightful powers of the state, and of the rights and duties of citizens, is grounded on the conditions for the possibility of such a condition of right.

"A state (*civitas*)," Kant says, "is a union of a multitude of human beings under laws of right" (MM 6:313). Such a body, he argues, "contains three authorities within it...: the *sovereign authority* (sovereignty) in the person of the legislator; the *executive authority* in the person of the ruler (in conformity to law); and the *judicial authority* (to award to each what is his in accordance with the law) in the person of the judge" (MM 6:313). Kant compares this *trias politica* to the major, minor, and conclusion of a syllogism. But we might perhaps sooner think of it, once again, as an application of Kant's theory of rational action. An action requires certain principles, which are applied through judgment to circumstances, resulting in the performance of a particular deed. In a state, the legislative function is that which adopts the principles, the judicial function is that which applies them to the particular case, and the executive function is that which carries out the particular action required by them.

Kant appears to agree with Rousseau that the legislative and executive functions in a state must be separated.⁹ However, Kant favors (as Rousseau does not¹⁰) a representative legislature, having the power to appoint or remove the holder of executive power (MM 8:313–15, 317, 340; TP 8:299–300; PP 8:349–50, 352). Kant also allows, however, that in some constitutions (less than ideal ones) the sovereign (or legislator) can be the same as the ruler (MM 8:317). This obviously was the case in the despotic monarchy under which Kant lived. Judges may be appointed by the ruler, but neither the ruler nor the legislature should act directly as judge (MM 8:317).

As we have seen, "right" refers both to the rational foundation of a body of laws and to the body of laws collectively by which a state is governed. "Public

right," Kant says, "is therefore a system of laws for a people, that is, a multitude of human beings... which, because they affect one another, need a rightful condition under a will uniting them, [that is,] a constitution" (MM 8:311). The basis of a state, therefore, is a common or *general will*, expressed in the body of laws governing the state (MM 6:256, 263; TP 8:291–92). The general will is constituted by that unity (unanimity) among the wills of all citizens that must be assumed if a rightful condition is to exist. This assumption is necessary because it is the first function of the state to give unilateral consent to each person's rightful possession of what is his or hers (MM 6:263). If there could be no unity or unanimity among the wills of the multitude forming a state, then it would follow immediately that there could be no condition of right at all, and all possession, all use of force, even the very existence of people alongside one another and interacting with one another, would necessarily be wrongful. No rightful freedom could exist for anyone.

This requirement of a *general will* finds another expression in the idea of the *original contract*. Kant does not hold that the state is founded on an actual contract between its members. For him the original contract is instead an *idea* (a pure concept of reason) that can be used in judging the legitimacy of the powers of the state and their exercise: "The act by which a people forms itself into a state is the *original contract*. Properly speaking, the original contract is only the idea of this act, in terms of which alone we can think of the legitimacy of a state" (MM 6:315; cf. TP 8:297). The idea of the original contract can also be used, according to Kant, in judging the justice or injustice of particular laws or institutional arrangements. If it is possible that all could have consented to a law or an institution, then it passes a necessary test of least minimal legitimacy; but if this unanimous acceptance is not even thinkable, it is necessarily unjust (TP 8:297, 305; WE 8:39). Kant argues that this permits us to rule illegitimate any political system in which some subjects have the hereditary privilege of rule while others are excluded from it (TP 8:297; cf. PP 8:350–51n), or in which taxes are imposed on one group of landowners while others are exempted (TP 8:297), or an ecclesiastical constitution by which certain articles of faith were decreed to be valid for all time, precluding forever any progress in religious insight (TP 8:305; WE 8:39–40; MM 6:327). Kant also proposes that the idea of an original contract, and the related notion of the general will, can be used by politicians in determining whether their acts and policies are in accordance with right. If, Kant thinks, an act or policy would be self-defeating if made public, because, being contrary to the general will of the people, it would arouse their opposition, then it may be known to be contrary to right (PP 8:381); while if a policy, because it accords with the general will, requires publicity in order to be effective, then it may thereby be known to accord with what is right (PP 8:386).¹¹

The rights of citizens

The basic function of a state, its sole fundamental aim, is to establish, preserve, and perfect a condition of right. Kant lists three fundamental rights that belong to all citizens, constituting a condition of right:

1. *Freedom*, or obedience to no law other than that which (because it accords with the general will) he can be regarded as having given his consent;
2. *Equality*, or not being bound by right to any other individual except in a way in which he can in turn bind that other;
3. *Independence*, of being his own master (*sui iuris*), being dependent only on the state or commonwealth itself, not on any other person or persons (MM 6:314; cf. MM 6:237–38; TP 8:290–97; PP 8:349–50).

Let us briefly consider each of these rights.

Freedom. Considered as a basic right of every citizen, this is simply the rule of the state by the law, as expressive of the general will. For the general will is that volition in which the will of all citizens is supposed to agree, and this is a condition for the possibility of a condition of right in general. Kant agrees with Rousseau that freedom in the civil state does not involve retaining rights that one had in a state of nature, but instead exchanging natural (lawless) freedom for civil freedom (under law) (MM 6:305–8).¹² Kant emphasizes that freedom in this sense means that I am allowed to seek my own good as I see it, rather than having others (the government) decide for me what my good consists in. Freedom is thus opposed to paternalism, government in the name of the welfare of citizens, where the content of their welfare is determined not by themselves but by those who govern (TP 8:290–91).

Equality. In the sense Kant means it, the right of equality precludes unequal rank or status as regards the basic capacity for rights. It is intended to preclude institutions such as serfdom (which still did prevail in Prussia until several years after Kant's death) and also the hereditary privileges of the nobility who in Prussia were exclusively eligible for higher civil service positions and the military officer corps in Kant's time and for generations after. Kant's view, as we shall see presently, is that a state may preserve a condition of right even if its institutions are unjust, and that it is the task of humanity in history to perfect civil constitutions so that they approach ever nearer to the idea (pure concept) of right (IUH 8:22–24; PP 8:349–53; MM 8:317–18). Later, in the section on "Perfection of the Civil Condition," we will see that Kant even accepts some political institutions that we would be more likely to regard as fundamentally unjust.

Independence. It is sometimes pointed out that Kant regards civil equality as "quite consistent with the greatest inequality in terms of the quantity and degree

of their possessions" (TP 8:291). But it should be equally stressed that Kant, like Rousseau, does think that right or justice requires limiting the inequality of possessions – not on grounds of equality but on grounds of *freedom and independence*. As Rousseau puts it: "as for wealth, no citizen [should] be so very rich that he can buy another, and none so poor that he is compelled to sell himself."¹³ Being independent or *sui iuris*, as Kant conceives it, means having enough property to support oneself independently, so that a citizen "serves no one other than the commonwealth" (TP 8:295). In the section on "Perfection of the Civil Condition," we will see that right of independence seems clearly inconsistent with some institutions Kant accepted, and even with institutions we still accept today.

The powers of the state

The sole rightful function of the state is to establish, preserve, and perfect a condition of right. Politicians and statesmen ultimately may not exercise power for any other end. What it might take to sustain, and especially to perfect, a condition of right, however, could be fairly broad in scope, because this requires the willingness of subjects to obey laws and the commanding authority. Kant thinks, therefore, that for the ends of right, a legislature and a ruler need to provide for the satisfaction of various needs of subjects. For example, Kant thinks that the state needs to provide for their bodily welfare, by training and certifying physicians; for their civil welfare by training and certifying lawyers; and for their eternal or spiritual welfare by training and certifying clergy. The state also needs to support the kinds of free inquiry that can assure these tasks are being carried out well, and also promotes the free discussion that leads to the improvement of the civil constitution. Kant's theory of public education in universities, and the right of the state to support it, is based on these considerations (CF 7:17–36). Many other public services might be based on the same considerations.¹⁴

Kant lists five main powers that follow from the concept of the state, as constituting a condition of right:

- A. The sovereign has no duties of right that it can be coerced to fulfill (MM 8:318–23; cf. TP 8:299–303).
- B. The sovereign is supreme proprietor of the land, since what belongs to each person involves the consent of all, given by the state in accordance with the laws (the general will) (MM 6:324–25).
- C. The supreme commander (executive) has the power to tax citizens in order to maintain a condition of right, and for such other purposes as are deemed serviceable to that end (MM 6:325–28).

- D. The supreme commander also has the right to distribute offices within the state for these purposes (MM 6:328–30).
- E. The ruler has the right to punish crimes, according to law, and as prescribed by a court of law (MM 8:331–37); and also to grant clemency (but only for violations against the state, not for violations of the rights of citizens) (MM 6:337–42).

For our present purposes, A and C seem to call for special comment.¹⁵

Kant and the right of revolution. Kant denies that it can ever be consistent with right to resist the sovereign power in a legitimate state. He thinks that the sovereign power, in accordance with the laws, could rightfully depose and replace the supreme commander (or executive authority) (MM 6:317). But Kant denies that it could ever be rightful for citizens forcibly to overthrow the ruler of a state, even if the ruler behaves unjustly, illegally, or despotically. Most of us do not agree with Kant here; many are scandalized by his views. Without pretending to defend Kant's views or litigate all the issues connected with them, I now suggest four points that at least show that the issues here are not as stark and simple as we are tempted to imagine.

First, Kant rejects the Hobbesian view that the ruler (whom Hobbes identifies with the sovereign) has no duties of right toward subjects (TP 8:289–306). His position is only that, as in the case of what he calls *ius aequivoca* (duties of equity and the right of necessity), there is no one in a position coercively to enforce these duties (cf. MM 6:234–36).

Second, we should appreciate the context in which Kant formulated these doctrines (in his chapter on theory and practice). In the year 1793, "theory" was bound to be taken by much of Kant's audience to refer to the sometimes radical ideas of Enlightenment philosophers, while "practice" would refer to the received wisdom of social tradition, to which these theories were often opposed. Kant's thesis in this chapter, that what is true in theory must also hold in practice, was bound to be perceived by many as advocacy of Jacobin political principles, and an apology for the destruction they were at that very moment wreaking in France. Kant's insistence that rational principles of right cannot countenance the forcible overthrow of an established political order was meant to highlight an aspect of his position that would reassure those who feared that Kant's position is a direct incitement to insurrection, social disorder, terror, and dictatorship.

Third, as several scholars have recently pointed out, Kant's views do permit the forcible overthrow of someone *pretending* to exercise legitimate authority when the condition is one not merely of *despotism* (unjust rule), but rather *barbarism*, where force is being exercised without right (An 7:331).¹⁶ It is not clear that this really differs in practice from the view of those who think they

disagree with Kant. Both involve a distinction between a flawed and unjust but nevertheless legitimate political order and a mere pretense of such an order, that lacks legitimacy; both hold that we may depose the unjust power in the latter case but not the former.

Finally, it is even less often appreciated that Kant's views on the duty to obey legitimate authority allow that disobedience is permitted (or even required) when obedience would conflict with "inner morality" or conscience (MM 6:371). Conscience on Kant's view need not be objectively correct, and even when it is not, we are still required to follow its verdict (MM 6:401, 437–44). Suppose I believe (contrary to Kant's arguments) that I am required in conscience to rebel against the existing head of state. Kant holds that my belief is objectively erroneous, but Kantian ethics apparently absolves me of the duty to obey, just as it would justify me in refusing, as a violation of my conscience, to bear false witness against an innocent person if so commanded by the head of state (see CPR 5:30, 155–56).

The state's right, and duty, to tax the wealthy for support of the poor. The Kantian thesis that every person has an innate right to the protection of their rightful external freedom entails that the state is entitled, or even required by right, to support those who are destitute, or incapable of living independently on what they own. The freedom and independence of the poor can be preserved if their means of life are dependent on the state, but not if they are dependent on the good will of others. The poor cannot be regarded as consenting to a condition in which they lack the means of survival, or are dependent through their poverty on the arbitrary will of other private persons. It could not accord with the general will, therefore, for the state to fail to support them, or if other private persons lay claim to the wealth needed for their support.

On Kantian principles, then, it is the state's right and also its duty to tax the wealthy in order to protect the poor from a condition in which their freedom and independence would be compromised. This right and duty on the part of the state belongs not to their entitlement to welfare, but simply to their rightful freedom. The wealthy have a peremptory right to what is theirs at all only because it is protected by the state, and the state as supreme proprietor has the right to distribute (or redistribute) the property of its citizens however it likes, according to law and the general will. Kant explicitly recognizes this duty to the poor on the part of the state, and also its right to tax the wealthy to provide for this support, and to extract such wealth from them by coercion, as a duty of right, not merely by way of voluntary contributions, as if it were charity:

The wealthy have acquired an obligation to the commonwealth, since they owe their existence to an act of submitting to its protection and care, which they need in order to live; on this obligation the state now bases its right to contribute what is theirs to maintaining their fellow citizens.... it will do

this by way of coercion, by public taxation, not merely by *voluntary* contributions. (MM 6:326)

General injustice. Many particular injustices arise because individuals violate the law and the duties of right that they owe to others. But Kant holds that there can also be such a thing as *general injustice*, resulting from the cumulative consequences, perhaps unintended by any individual, of many individual acts, none of which is in itself unjust. Kant holds that much of what people consider “charitable beneficence” is really no more than a very partial rectification of injustice. It is the responsibility of the government to remedy general injustice, by apportioning property according to right. That the government permits general injustice, and does not prevent or remedy it, amounts to its introducing the general injustice it fails to prevent or remedy. The poor should demand that the government remedy general injustice, and they should demand it as their right, not merely beg for it submissively as charity:

One may take a share in the general injustice, even though one does nobody any wrong by civil laws and practices. So if we now do a kindness to an unfortunate, we have not made a free gift to him, but repaid him what we were helping to take away through a general injustice. For if none might appropriate more of this world's goods than his neighbor, there would be no rich folk, but also no poor. (LE 27:416)

Having the resources to practice such beneficence as depends on the goods of fortune is, for the most part, a result of certain human beings being favored through the injustice of the government, which introduces an inequality of wealth that makes others need their beneficence. (MM 6:454)

In our present condition, when general injustice is firmly entrenched, the natural rights of the lowly cease. They are therefore only debtors, the superiors owe them nothing. Therefore, these superiors are called “gracious lords.” But he who needs nothing from them but justice can hold them to their debts and does not need to be submissive. (Ak 20:140–41)

Perfection of the civil condition

Existing state constitutions, Kant believes, do constitute a condition of right, but none of them answers to the idea of right, and it is an important aim of the state (even a categorical imperative of right) to work toward the perfection of the political constitution. Kant holds that because the human being is crooked wood, from which nothing straight can be made (IUH 8:23; Rel 6:100), this process of perfection will be endless. And it faces a serious obstacle: because the human being is an animal in need of a master – that is, most

human beings will conform to right only if coerced – it follows that whoever is placed in the position of master will also be an animal in need of a master (IUH 8:23).

The idea (or rational concept) of a constitution would in Kant's view be that of a republic, with divided powers, a representative legislature, a constitutionally limited executive, and equal eligibility of all citizens for public office. Kant never lived under such a constitution, but he believed that one day people would come to regard only this model of a political state as acceptable. He seems now to have been correct in that belief. Moreover, it is easy for us to see that Kant accepted as legitimate certain other institutions that would seem equally to violate the equality of citizens. He accepts the restrictions on political participation that goes with the distinction between "active" and "passive citizens" – where those economically dependent on others are relegated to the latter category, lacking the right of direct political participation or even of voting (in case of representative institutions or plebiscites) (MM 8:314–15; cf. TP 8:296). "Passive citizenship" excludes all servants, peasants, wage laborers – and of course all women – from any active political participation, so that Kant accepts the property and occupational qualifications for the franchise that were virtually universal in the eighteenth century (where such institutions existed at all). Kant also recognizes the right of head of household forcibly to retrieve family servants if they run away (MM 8:283). These would seem to be obvious inconsistencies within Kant's theory of right as it is applied to the social world as it existed then (or even as it exists today). And of course Kant also still accepts, as our institutions do today, the practice of capitalist wage labor (MM 8:285–86), which involves the dependency of those who labor on those who privately own the means of production, and is inconsistent with the right of independence (the right to be *sui iuris*).

Most enlightened people today agree with Kant that our political constitutions are far from perfect, that it is the function of the state itself endlessly to reform itself in the direction of greater justice. We may disagree with Kant, and even among ourselves, which reforms are necessary to approach nearer to justice. But we accept the need for progressive political reform.

Kant's practical philosophy, including his theory of right, is based on strict principles. But his own attitude toward political change was cautious, probably too cautious for many of us. He rejects in principle the path of forcible revolution or civil disobedience, favoring a slower process by which he hopes those in power will become enlightened and choose to make reforms in accordance with rational principles. It should be appreciated that in the eighteenth century, this attitude was not irrational, as judged by the political reforms that had actually occurred in most European states.

The strictness of Kant's principles, combined with his caution in practice, ought to be seen as an appreciation of the moral ambiguity of human life, and of social and political life in particular. Those who like to praise the appreciation of ambiguity often see themselves as opposed to the strictness of Kantian principles. But it was Kant's insight that a proper appreciation of ambiguity requires strict principles, for it requires us to be striving to satisfy them while also accepting that we must deal with a reality that is always too far from doing so. The acceptance of ambiguity that rejects strict principles is one that too easily degenerates into that complacent, corrupt cynicism that flatters itself with the euphemistic name "political realism." Kant had few illusions about human nature and was probably too cautious about political change, but we cannot accuse him of being a *realist*.

Notes

1. "Political philosophy is often thought of as an application of general moral principles to the factual circumstances that make political institutions necessary. ... [But] Kant not only denies that political philosophy is an application of the Categorical Imperative to a specific situation; he also rejects the idea that political institutions are a response to unfortunate circumstances" (Arthur Ripstein, *Force and Freedom: Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009], 1–2).
2. Kant never actually calls either the principle of right or the law of right a categorical imperative. But he does call various principles and duties based on them categorical imperatives: the duty to respect property (Ak 23:286), the duty to keep promises (contracts) (MM 6:273), the law of punishment (MM 6:331), the duty to obey authority (MM 6:371), the duty to perfect the condition of right (MM 6:318). So there is reason to try to make sense of the claim that duties or principles of right can be categorical imperatives.
3. This concept also shows us that Kant's use of the phenomenal/noumenal distinction, especially in practical philosophy, does not necessarily involve any metaphysical doctrine about "things in themselves." The point is rather that my rightful possession may be something cognized through the understanding, even when it is not possession that can be cognized directly through the senses, by cognizing the relation of the object immediately to my body.
4. See Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767; reprint, London: Transaction, 1995).
5. "Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a *property* in his own *person*: this no body has any right to but himself. The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this *labour* being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined

- to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others" (John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980], ch. 5, §27).
6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), Third Essay, §9.
 7. "Il n'est rien si dissociable et sociable que l'homme: l'un par son vice, l'autre par sa nature" (Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, "De la solitude," in *Essais*, ed. André Tournon [Paris: Imprimerie nationale Éditions, 1998], 1:388). "There is nothing more unsociable than Man, and nothing more sociable: unsociable by his vice, sociable by his nature" (Michel de Montaigne, "Of Solitude," in *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech [London: Penguin, 1991], 267).
 8. It is an important and original part of Kant's theory of right to explicate the conditions of international right (the rightful relations between states) and also cosmopolitan right (the rights holding between human beings from different states simply as human beings) (MM 6:343–53; PP 8:354–60). But except for its contribution to the historical process by which the state constitution is perfected, Kant's conception of the way peace between nations is to be promoted, through a federalism of free states or a state of nations whose members are states (IUH 8:24–28; TP 8:307–13; PP 8:343–86), lies beyond the scope of Kant's political philosophy, regarded as the philosophy of law and the state. See Allen W. Wood, "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 59–76.
 9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *"The Social Contract" and Other Later Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) bk. III, ch. 1.
 10. *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. 15. Rousseau instead appears to think that justice is achievable only in small states, where the legislature can consist in an assembly of the people.
 11. For further discussion of these two "principles of publicity," see Allen Wood, "Kant's Principles of Publicity," in *Politics and Teleology in Kant*, ed. Paul Formosa, Avery Goldman, and Tatiana Patrone (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), 76–92; and Allen W. Wood, *The Free Development of Each: Studies on Freedom, Right, and Ethics in Classical German Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 4.
 12. Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, bk. I, ch. 6.
 13. *Ibid.*, bk. II, ch. 11 (p. 78).
 14. See Allen W. Wood, "Recht und Universität bei Kant," in *Kants "Streit der Fakultäten" oder der Ort der Bildung zwischen Lebenswelt und Wissenschaften*, ed. Ludger Honnefelder et al. (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2012), 66–88. It does not follow, therefore, that a state whose basic function is to protect rightful freedom must be a state with sharply limited powers and activities – a libertarian "night watchman" state, devoted only to the protection of existing property rights. In fact, Kant argues, the very opposite is more likely to be the case (WE 8:41). Kant's political philosophy thus may be used to show that "libertarianism" cannot possibly name a coherent political philosophy but only a pernicious error that sophistically rationalizes gross injustice.
 15. Regarding E, see Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), ch. 12; and Allen W. Wood, "Punishment, Retribution, and the Coercive Enforcement of Right," in *Kant's "Metaphysics of Morals": A Critical Guide*, ed. Lara Denis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 111–29.

16. Jan Joerden, "From Anarchy to Republic: Kant's History of State Constitutions," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress*, V 1\1 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), 139–56; Alyssa Bernstein, "Kant on Rights and Coercion in International Law: The Implications for Humanitarian Intervention," *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik/International Yearbook for Right and Ethics* 16 (2008): 57–100; and Ripstein, *Force and Freedom*, ch. 7.

9

Kant's Anthropology and Its Method: The Epistemic Uses of Teleology in the Natural World and Beyond

Alix Cohen

Although it is a little known fact beyond the world of Kant scholars, the last book Kant published in his lifetime was titled *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.¹ Moreover, the lecture course that he gave most frequently, from 1772–73 to 1795–96, was dedicated to anthropology. This subject was thus very prominent in his work as a practicing philosopher. And yet until recently, the anthropological part of his corpus has been for the most part overlooked both within and outside Kantian circles. Kant is, of course, better known for his three *Critiques*, and his *Anthropology*, together with his more empirical works more generally, has often been thought of as outside of, if not irrelevant to, the Kantian system as such – starting from Schleiermacher's 1799 review that describes it as a “collection of trivialities.”² In the last few years however, this has started to change. A number of commentators have begun to take it into account, first in order to understand or flesh out his critical philosophy, and then for its own sake.³ In this chapter, I will build on these advances and defend the claim that Kant's anthropology inaugurates a new methodological paradigm for the discipline.⁴ After spelling out some of its specific features, I will explore their implications for its method.

Kant's anthropology: A new scientific paradigm

The aim of this section is to spell out in what sense Kant's anthropology redefines our discourse about human beings, thereby inaugurating a new scientific paradigm. I will do so by focusing on its object and its method. To understand the distinctive feature of the object of Kant's anthropology, it is crucial to distinguish it from what Kant calls physical geography. Physical geography consists of a positivist inventory of the world.⁵ Its first part presents an archaeology of the earth that focuses on winds, waters, and the various transformations that

have taken place in the natural world. Its second part examines what is on the earth by successively exploring human beings, animals, plants, and minerals. Two sections of Kant's *Lectures on Physical Geography* specifically study human phenomena: the first section of the second part, titled "Of the human being," and the third part, titled "Rough observations of the main natural curios in all countries, according to a geographical order."⁶ The first section examines facts about human beings' different skin colors, their physical characteristics (on the one hand their external bodily characteristics, the form of the face, the eyes, body hairs, and on the other their physical abilities, running speed, sight, endurance), their diet (from hunting, gathering, breeding, or fishing), the changes they make to their appearance (weighted ears, nose-rings, tongue-rings, emasculation, body-painting), and their taste (relative to their different senses). The section titled "Rough observations of the main natural curios in all countries" surveys the demography, the culture, and the customs found in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America.

The crucial feature of physical geography is that it does not study the human being as an intentional being, but rather as an inhabitant of the earth like plants, animals, and minerals – it considers him as one type of "thing" on earth. Being essentially descriptive, it does not refer to agents' intentions and purposes in order to explain their actions, but is limited to external descriptions of social behavior and physical appearances. While physical geography studies them as one type of "thing" on earth, independently of the intentionality at the basis of their actions, anthropology considers humans as intentional beings.

Kant further defines anthropology by contrast with what he calls "physiological anthropology":

He who ponders natural phenomena, for example, what the causes of the faculty of memory may rest on, can speculate back and forth (like Descartes) over the traces of impressions remaining in the brain, but in doing so he must admit that in this play of his representations he is a mere observer and must let nature runs [*sic*] its course, for he does not know the cranial nerves and fibers, nor does he understand how to put them to use for his purposes. Therefore all theoretical speculation about this [physiological knowledge of the human being] is a pure waste of time. (An 7:119)

This conception of anthropology defines it as the study of body and soul in their mutual relations, limitations, and interactions. Kant rejects this approach in a letter to Marcus Herz: "the subtle and, to my view, eternally futile inquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought I omit entirely" (C 10:145). For Kant, physiological investigations of human beings do not belong to pragmatic anthropology. A number of passages from the

Anthropology reiterate and justify this claim. First, these investigations have not reached a sufficient level of scientific certainty to be reliable: “physicians and physiologists in general are still not advanced enough to see deeply into the mechanical element in the human being” (An 7:214; see also An 7:287). Second, and more importantly, insofar as the purpose of Kant’s anthropology is pragmatic, it cannot make any use of physiological knowledge in this context. Physiology can certainly be of some use to doctors but not to human beings who want to use anthropological knowledge to realize their purposes.

Contrary to physical geography and physiological anthropology, which study human beings in terms of their physical or physiological nature, Kant’s pragmatic anthropology adopts as its starting point the fact that they are the only beings who act according to the purposes they set for themselves:

The materials for an anthropology ... the method of their use in attempting a history of humanity in the whole of its vocation ... may be sought neither in metaphysics nor in the cabinet of natural history specimens by comparing the skeleton of the human being with that of other species of animals; ... that vocation can be found solely in human *actions*, which reveal the human character.⁷

Kant’s anthropology is “pragmatic” in the sense that it studies the human being not through what he is (physical geography) or how he functions (physiological anthropology) but through what he does: “it observes solely the actual behaviour of man” (LE 27:244; see also An 7:119). To do so, it requires knowledge gained through interacting with its object, the human being, rather than the knowledge of a mere observer: “the expressions ‘to *know* the world’ and ‘to *have* the world’ are rather far from each other in their meaning, since one only *understands* the play that one has watched, while the other has *participated* in it” (An 7:120). It is in this sense that anthropological observations differ from straightforward theoretical observations. Although observation is necessary to anthropology, it needs to be supplemented by interaction in order to access them as intentional beings. We cannot know them as having motives and purposes through observation alone, since it would amount to treating them as “things.” To do so, we need to interact with them, most notably “through social intercourse” (An 7:120).

Correlatively to the distinctive features of its object, Kant’s anthropology has a distinctive method in order to organize inquiries and gather data. Any science requires heuristic principles to confront experience with a set of questions, but by contrast with the natural sciences, which are based on a mechanical model, the guiding principle at the basis of Kant’s anthropology is teleology. It supplies the *a priori* principles and maxims with which we can investigate the human world, its aim being to maximize intelligibility:

everything in the world is good for something, ... nothing in it is in vain; and by means of the example that nature gives in its organic products, one is justified, indeed called upon to expect nothing in nature and its laws but what is purposive in the whole. (CJ 5:379)

With this principle, anthropological inquiries can proceed by applying this teleological maxim to human actions in the form of the following principle: "Everything in the human world is good for something or other," which in turn gives rise to the concepts of means/ends and defeating/fulfilling a purpose (see for instance An 7:272–75).

The prominence of teleology in Kant's anthropological method, and in particular the fact that it encourages anthropologists to assume the same teleological principle used in the investigation of nonhuman nature, may seem to suggest that far from being interested in human beings' distinctive form of intentionality through their actions, it is rather interested in human beings as one of many creatures in nature. However, it is crucial to distinguish between two conceptions of anthropological inquiry: one as the investigation of the mind-body relation (physiological anthropology), the other as the investigation of nature's purposes for the human species (natural anthropology). So if one form of the inquiry, the investigation of mind-body relations, is in vain, another form, that of the investigation of nature's purposes for the human species, is legitimate when it is used to improve our anthropological knowledge of human beings. From an anthropological point of view, the human being is a biological organism as well as an intentional being. In this sense, there is no difficulty in saying that anthropology studies human beings as intentional, and at the same time that it studies the ways in which nature restricts or determines their actions. And in fact, since their actions are in many ways constrained by human nature, anthropology should study these constraints.

To have a better understanding of this twofold dimension of human beings, let us turn a moment to Kant's account of nature's intentions for the human species. As is well known, Kant often portrays nature as having providential aspects that allow human beings to fulfill their moral destiny: "nature still displays ... a purposive effort at an education to make us receptive to higher ends than nature itself can afford," and in particular "a subject of morality, ... a final end, to which the whole of nature is teleologically subordinated" (CJ 5:433, 436). While Kant's account of moral teleology is familiar, what is less so is that in his anthropological works, he also portrays nature as aiming at the preservation of the human species and the full development of its capacities: since "in nature everything is designed to achieve its greatest possible perfection" (LAn 25:694), "nature has also put into her economy here such a rich treasure of arrangements for her end, which is nothing less than the maintenance of the species" (An 7:310). A number of human characteristics and

aptitudes are thus defined as being determined, at least partly, according to nature's intentions for the species: "Innate to human nature are germs which develop and can achieve the perfection for which they are determined" (LAn 25:694).

Thus, a distinctive feature of humankind is that, as an object of study, it calls for two distinct levels of inquiry, that of the individual and that of the species. The level of the species is methodologically necessary in order to make sense of certain human characteristics that cannot be accounted for at the level of the individual. A number of underlying principles of human nature, which are revealed by our teleological inquiries, make sense at the macro-level of the species alone. This is due to the fact that "for the ends of nature one can assume as a principle that nature wants every creature to reach its destiny through the appropriate development of all predispositions of its nature, so that at least the species, if not every *individual*, fulfills nature's purpose" (An 7:329). With regard to human beings, we are forced to think globally (from the "objective level of nature") as well as individually (from the "subjective level of human agents"), for it is only at the level of the species that we can decipher objectively purposive patterns in their behavior. Yet what does this entail for Kant's anthropological method? Does it provide adequate epistemic tools to account for these two levels of explanation?

My aim in the next section is to spell out and defend Kant's anthropological method, and in particular the role of teleology. To do so, I will begin by showing that the basis of his method is to be found foremost in the biological sciences. Their epistemic model can be used to develop a twofold methodology for anthropology that consists of a combination of two types of account: functionalist accounts, which explain practices and behavior in terms of their natural functions, and intentionalist accounts, which explain them in terms of agents' intentions. I will then defend this model against some objections.

Kant's model for anthropology: The antinomy of reflective judgment

The aim of this section is to argue that the basis of the method of anthropology for Kant is to be found foremost in his model of biological science. To support this claim, I will contrast it with an alternative model, the third antinomy of pure reason, and show why it will not do.

[Antinomy (i) – Third antinomy of pure reason]

Thesis: Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them.

Antithesis: There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature. (A444/B472–A445/B473)

[Antinomy (ii) – Antinomy of reflective judgment]

The *first maxim* of the power of judgment is the *thesis*: All generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.

The *second maxim* is the *antithesis*: Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes). (CJ 5:387)

First, human phenomena should be tackled from an empirical perspective. Yet the thesis of antinomy (i) is about the intelligible while its antithesis is about the empirical. Consequently, antinomy (ii) alone, consisting as it does of two claims about the empirical, seems to take up the appropriate perspective. Of course, one could argue that it is precisely because antinomy (i) is about both the intelligible and the empirical that it is the most appropriate model for anthropology. Insofar as human beings can be viewed from two standpoints, studying them should entail that we investigate them from both standpoints. However, as an empirical science, anthropology is not concerned with transcendental freedom but merely with human intentionality, the power to set our own purposes.⁸ From the standpoint of anthropology, the empirical form of human action is purposive – namely, it is motivated by intentions and entails the representation of ends.

Second, while antinomy (i) posits the principle of natural determinism as universally valid for all phenomena, antinomy (ii) introduces the idea that certain phenomena call for teleological explanations. It suggests that mechanical explanations do not exclude teleological explanations in the cases in which the former are unable to account for the features of certain objects, and in particular their purposive nature. The antinomy of reflective judgment is resolved by showing that it is legitimate to resort to teleological explanations insofar as they allow us to understand the organic features and properties that cannot be accounted for through mechanism alone – the result of the supersensible solution to the antinomy of reflective judgment being the guarantee that the two principles are compatible in principle:

The principle which is to make possible the unifiability of both in the judging of nature in accordance with them must be placed in what lies outside of both (hence outside of the possible empirical representation of nature) but which still contains the ground of both, i.e., in the supersensible, and each of these two kinds of explanation must be related to that. (CJ 5:412)

By acknowledging that mechanism is not the only principle legitimately applicable to the empirical realm, antinomy (ii) validates the resort to teleology. This argument is decisive for the possibility of anthropology because of Kant's biological conception of human nature. Insofar as human beings develop a number of goal-directed natural predispositions, human phenomena exhibit certain purposive characteristics that cannot be understood without resorting to the *telos* of the species: "what meets the eye in individual subjects as confused and irregular yet in the whole species can be recognized as a steadily progressing though slow development of its original predispositions" (IUH 8:17). We can thus understand certain human features by viewing them as parts that are both purposes and means in a greater whole, and thereby focus on the level of the big picture, namely the human species.

Third, the resolution of antinomy (ii) does not consist in the suppression of the conflict between the thesis and the antithesis, as in antinomy (i), but in the legitimization of the conflict within the boundaries of the empirical, at an epistemological level as opposed to an ontological one. While I cannot get into the details of Kant's resolution of antinomy (ii) in this chapter, what is crucial for my present purpose is that its resolution has fundamental implications for our use of mechanical and teleological principles:⁹

The two principles cannot be united in one and the same thing in nature as fundamental principles for the explanation (deduction) of one from the other, i.e., as dogmatic and constitutive principles of insight into nature for the determining power of judgment. ... For one kind of explanation excludes the other, even on the supposition that objectively both grounds of the possibility rest on a single one, but one of which we take no account. (CJ 5:411–12)

First, we should acknowledge the reflective nature of mechanism and teleology. They are not about the world but about our way of judging the world. This entails that, epistemically, teleological claims about natural purposes cannot be legitimately ontologically committed. Insofar as teleology refers to the possibility of our judgments, as opposed to the possibility of things themselves, it lacks objective explanatory power: it "does not pertain to the possibility of such things themselves (even considered as phenomena) in accordance with this sort of generation, but pertains only to the judging of them that is possible for our understanding" (CJ 5:408; see also CJ 5:397). Because of their reflective nature, teleological judgments are hypothetical modes of explanation that cannot attain the level of objectivity required by physical science. However, what they do supply to cognition is descriptions: "positing ends of nature in its products, insofar as it constitutes a system in accordance with teleological concepts, belongs only to the description of nature" (CJ 5:417).

These descriptions make sense to us because they bring organisms back to the empirical level by using the instrument that is the analogy with intentional action. For it is only at this more concrete level that the possibility of purposive objects can be made understandable. Through the reflective application of this concept to the empirical world, what Kant acknowledges is the existence of a distinctive dimension of judgment, a dimension that does not explain things according to mechanical laws, but makes them intelligible through the idea of purposive causality: "the inner possibility of [organisms] is only *intelligible* [*verständlich*] through a causality according to ends. ... the mere mechanism of nature cannot be adequate at all for the explanation of these products of it" (CJ 5:413).

Thus, antinomy (ii) can be interpreted as putting forward two distinct models of explanation and two different notions of understanding, one that consists in "explaining" the object through mechanical laws, and another that allows the "understanding" of certain features of the object through teleology. The first model, which is put forward by the thesis of antinomy (ii), defines the explanation of an event as the deduction of its occurrence from the conditions that causally produce it. The second model, which corresponds to the antithesis of antinomy (ii), defines the explanation of an event as systematically connected with other events in a purposive way.

If we apply these two epistemic models to our account of human phenomena, it follows that, on the one hand, human actions being intentional products, they should be accounted for in teleological terms by focusing on the motives behind the actions and placing them within the intentional framework constituted by agents' purposes. Yet on the other hand, as part of a biological species that develops natural predispositions through generations, human beings' actions should be accounted for in terms of their function for the development of the species, by focusing on the natural causes of behavior and replacing them within the framework of nature's purposes for the species. (See Diagram 9.1)

Human phenomena can thus be tackled from two perspectives, and within each perspective they face the following methodological conflicts. From the perspective of individuals, teleological judgments about motives (legitimate insofar as human beings set their own purposes) conflict with mechanical judgments about causes (legitimate insofar as human beings are biological organisms). From the perspective of the human species, teleological explanations in which the destination of the species determines individual behavior through predispositions conflict with mechanical explanations in which the sum of individual intentions causes the development of the species.

Note that these conflicts mirror the antinomy of reflective judgment, in both their form and their epistemic motivations. From the perspective of individuals, human phenomena cannot be fully accounted for by mechanical explanations

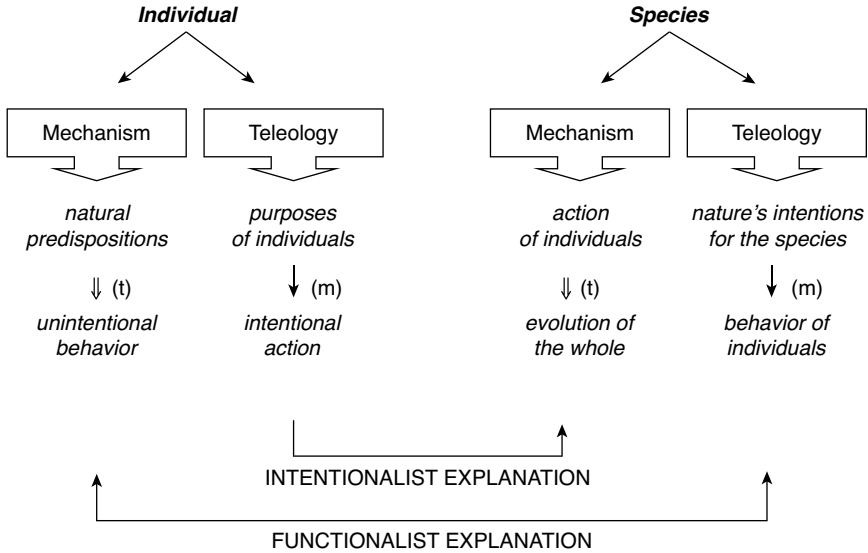


Diagram 9.1 The two perspectives on human phenomena¹⁰

(namely biological accounts based on natural predispositions), for they seem to overlook some of their fundamental features (i.e., their intentional character), thus legitimating the resort to teleology as a principle of explanation of human purposiveness. From the perspective of the species, human phenomena cannot be fully accounted for by mechanical explanations (i.e., accounts based on individual intentionality), for they seem to overlook some of their fundamental features (namely the purposive character of natural predispositions), thus legitimating the resort to teleology as a principle of explanation of nature's intentions for the species. Crucially, the conflict between the two models of explanation I have spelled out can be resolved in the same fashion as the biological antinomy. Since the compatibility between mechanical and teleological explanations can be guaranteed in principle by resorting to the possibility of their supersensible reconciliation, both explanations are legitimate. They provide distinct approaches to the human realm, which, being reflective, are compatible and complementary.¹¹

Consequently, anthropology can be thought of as following two threads, each consisting in the application of reflective judgment to a level of human phenomena: one focuses on the intentions of the parts (human beings), the other on the destination of the whole (the human species). It gives rise to two types of methodologies based on different focal points. For, if we combine the two levels of study, the level of the species and that of the individual, we are led to two distinct pictures of the human world. On the one hand, the teleological

account of individual behavior is connected to the mechanical account of the evolution of the species. It amounts to an intentionalist picture of the human world in which human purposes determine the evolution of the species. On the other hand, the mechanical account of individual behavior is connected to the teleological account of the evolution of the species. It amounts to a functionalist picture of the human world in which the final destination of the species determines human behavior. In both accounts, mechanical explanations are oriented by teleological principles: in the first account, the purpose of the species; in the second, human purposes.

This is of course very sketchy, but my aim in this section has been to show in what sense the basis of the method of anthropology for Kant can be found foremost in his model of biological science. I will now turn to the defense of this claim against objections that have been raised most notably by Patrick Frierson.

Defense against Frierson's objections

Frierson's challenge as I understand it calls for a defense of the application of teleology to the empirical realm of human action.¹² He argues that using teleology in the explanation of particular acts of an organism's powers, as the account just delineated does, lies outside the scope of the explanatory force of teleology within the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.¹³ He claims this, first, because Kant's use of teleology in biology is restricted to the explanation of the origin of various organisms and their dispositions – what Kant calls the explanation of the “generation” of an organism, the “causality of its origin” (CJ 5:387, 369). If this is so, my use of it in the context of the explanation of *particular* human actions is epistemically illegitimate. Frierson's second point is that, insofar as teleology is *not* intrinsically intentional, it cannot legitimately be used to explain human intentionality. However, I will show that, first, Kant's use of teleology in biology is not restricted to the explanation of the origin of various organisms. And second, I will argue that, although teleology is not intrinsically intentional, it originates from the practical form of our rationality. If correct, this legitimates the epistemic status of teleology as a principle of explanation of human purposiveness.

First, on my reading, Kant's account of the use of teleology in biology is not merely about the generation of a particular organism. It is more importantly about the generation of organisms and their functioning. If so, then there is no reason why these distinct uses cannot be applied to the case of human behavior: on the one hand about their generation (through their natural predispositions), and on the other about their functioning (through their intentionality). This claim is supported by the fact that Kant resorts to teleology to address two distinct issues: one concerning the origin of organisms, the other concerning

the functioning of organisms. The former inquires into the very existence of organic products – that is to say the origin of life – in relation to inert matter. The latter studies the actual organization and functioning of living beings. These two issues should be clearly distinguished, because they do not in fact belong to the same scientific domain: the former belongs to natural history (what Kant sometimes calls the “archaeology of nature”), while the latter is encompassed by biology.¹⁴ In this sense, organisms pose two distinct problems for Kant: the ontological inexplicability of their origin, and the epistemic inexplicability of their functioning. Teleology is used to address both problems, although it does so through different arguments.

However, the legitimacy of this distinction could potentially be undermined by another distinction, drawn by Hannah Ginsborg, between what she calls two kinds of mechanical inexplicability. As she writes, “the self-producing character which Kant ascribes to organisms makes it hard to draw a sharp distinction between the origin of an individual organism and its functioning.”¹⁵ In other words, the origin of an individual oak cannot be treated separately from the workings of the oak, because an account of the functioning of an oak cannot but include an account of how oaks produce acorns and how acorns develop into oaks.

While I agree that the account of the origin of particular organisms cannot be sharply distinguished from the account of their functioning, I would like to suggest that the account of the origin of organisms in general can and should be distinguished sharply from the problem of their functioning. In other words, the question of the origin of organisms should be understood as the problem of the origin of life as such, rather than the problem of the origin of an individual organism. If this claim is correct, it substantiates my suggestion that teleology has two distinct legitimate uses in biology, and that these distinct uses can be applied to the case of human behavior: on the one hand in the explanation of their generation (through their natural predispositions), and on the other in the explanation of their functioning (through their intentionality).

To understand my first claim, we need to turn to Kant’s epigenetic account of the origin of life. Kant chooses epigenesis as the only viable theory of life precisely because it “begins all physical explanation of these formations with organized matter” (CJ 5:424). Two essential features of epigenesis are particularly attractive for Kant. First, it does not try to account for the possibility of an original form of organization and “leaves natural mechanism an indeterminate but at the same time also unmistakable role under this inscrutable *principle of an original organization*” (CJ 5:424). Thus, epigenesis rightly leaves aside the question of nature’s beginnings and limits itself to the claim that an organism can only be conceived as the product of another organism.¹⁶

Second, epigenesis characterizes nature not only as something that develops mechanically, but as something productive that has a teleological element: "it considers nature, at least as far as propagation is concerned, as itself producing rather than merely developing" (CJ 5:424).¹⁷ Epigenesis accounts for the original organization of matter in organisms without resorting to a mechanistic explanation of the origin of life. In this sense, its decisive contribution to the debates on organic generation is to acknowledge a primitive organization and thereby to subordinate mechanical principles to teleological principles.¹⁸ This "historical" or ontological question of the origin of life, which Kant addresses by endorsing epigenesis and the use it makes of teleology, should be sharply distinguished from the "biological" or epistemic question of our understanding of the functioning of organic processes. As the concept of "natural purpose" indicates, the functioning of particular organisms not only entails efficient causality – a phenomenon's determination by its antecedent – but also a reciprocity of the cause and the effect.

To understand the nature of this reciprocity, let us look at Kant's discussion of the example of a tree. In his description of the functioning of a tree, its essential features all have to do with the fact that it produces itself in three different ways: reproduction, generation, and conservation. First, "reproduction" points to the fact that a tree can produce other trees: "a tree generates another tree in accordance with a known natural law. However, the tree that it generates is of the same species; and so it generates itself as far as the *species* is concerned" (CJ 5:371). Organisms produce offspring of the same kind and thus secure the survival of their species; that is, an organism produces itself at the level of the species. Second, "generation" refers to the fact that, for instance, the tree's leaves protect the branches that nourish them: this growth "is to be regarded as equivalent...with generation. This plant...develops itself further by means of material which, as far as its composition is concerned, is its own product. ... there is to be found an originality of the capacity for separation and formation in this sort of natural being" (CJ 5:371). In this sense, an organism produces itself as an individual. Finally, "conservation" indicates that the tree grows, regenerates, and repairs itself: "part of this creature also generates itself in such a way that the preservation of the one is reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the others" (CJ 5:371). Thus, an organism produces itself at the level of its parts.

What the example of the tree is meant to show is that the reciprocity of the cause and the effect in particular organisms takes three different forms, which are all accounted for in teleological terms. Therefore, on Kant's account, to describe something as an organism is to conceive its parts as combining into a whole in which they reciprocally produce each other: "*An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well*" (CJ

5:376). This distinctive feature has been broken down into three categories which all have to do with the fact that organisms in some sense produce themselves: reproduction, generation, and conservation. These essential characteristics can be described in the following terms:

1. An organism is both cause and effect of itself.
2. Its parts are only possible through their relation to the whole, and they exist for the sake of the whole.
3. The whole and its parts are both causes and effects of their organization.

While I cannot discuss further the detail of Kant's biological account of organisms here, I hope this will suffice to suggest that teleology has two distinct legitimate uses in biology: one that accounts for the origin of life, the other that accounts for the functioning of particular organisms. On this basis, there is no epistemic reason why these uses of teleology cannot be applied to the case of human behavior: on the one hand about their generation (biological predispositions leading to natural behavior), and on the other about their functioning (intentions leading to action).

However, even if I am correct in claiming that there are distinct uses of teleology in biology in Kant's account, Frierson further objects that I am not entitled to apply these uses to the explanation of the intentionality of human behavior. More precisely, he believes that I "purport ... to find intentionality at the core of individual purposiveness in the *Critique of Judgment*." And yet, as he notes, "Throughout his discussion of teleological principles in biology, Kant insists that this teleology is *not* intrinsically intentional: he 'abstracts entirely from the question of whether the ends...are *intentional* or *unintentional*' [CJ 5:382]."¹⁹ From this Frierson concludes that the use of teleology in explanations of human actions through intentionality lies outside the scope of explanatory force of teleology. However, I will argue that what he seems to forget is that for Kant, our concept of teleology is originally based on an analogy with human practical causality.

According to Kant, while the concept of purposive causality and the concept of natural causality both have objective reality, that of natural purpose does not. It is not derived from experience, and thus "it cannot be provided with objective reality for determining judgments" (CJ 5:397). However, crucially, we can use our concept of practical purposiveness instead. For, insofar as it is the idea of the realization of something according to a plan, "The concept of a causality through ends (of art) certainly has objective reality" (CJ 5:397). We can thus use it analogically and apply it reflectively to nature.²⁰ Insofar as it is an analogy of course, we cannot use this concept determinately. But we can do so regulatively, to guide our investigations of organisms:

The concept of a thing as in itself a natural end...can still be a regulative concept for the reflecting power of judgment, for guiding research into objects of this kind and thinking over their highest ground in accordance with a remote analogy with our own causality in accordance with ends; not, of course, for the sake of knowledge of nature or of its original ground, but rather for the sake of the very same practical faculty of reason in us in analogy with which we consider the cause of that purposiveness. (CJ 5:375)²¹

As the genealogy of the concept of purposiveness in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* suggests, there is an intimate connection between conceptual causality and intentionality:

where...the object itself (its form or its existence) as an effect is thought of as possible only through a concept of the latter, there one thinks of an end. The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause, and precedes the latter. (CJ 5:220)

The causal efficacy of concepts is thus encountered in the context of a will's intentional agency. It is the contingent circumstances connected to our acquisition of the concept. Now, Hannah Ginsborg has argued that the technical definition of purposiveness must be understood in terms of intentionality; by contrast, Thomas Teufel has suggested that this definition deliberately abstracts from the intentional aspects surrounding conceptual causality.²² But whichever way one goes, both interpretations are compatible with my claim that using teleology to describe human intentionality at the empirical level is justified. For as I have tried to show, our concept of teleology is genealogically based on our practical causality.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to defend the method for anthropology put forward by Kant in his works on anthropology, or at least what I take it to be. As I have tried to show, they comprise robust and fertile views on anthropology, its methodology, its function, and its subject, human beings. Historically of course, these views have had a very limited influence on the development of the discipline itself and the social sciences more generally. For instance, in Alan Barnard's summary of the anthropological traditions from the perspective of its history, the absence of Kant is notable: "While Lévi-Strauss once argued that Rousseau was the founder of the social sciences, Radcliffe-Brown gave that honour to Montesquieu; and the styles of the later structuralist and structural-functionalist

traditions do owe much to the respective rationalism of Rousseau and empiricism of Montesquieu.”²³ Although some would argue that Kant’s works have had a crucial influence on the human sciences in the context of continental philosophy, this influence is essentially negative. Kant’s project is repeatedly presented as the one that ought to be supplemented, overcome, and even defeated.²⁴ Similarly, Kant’s anthropological work has received only superficial attention within the history and philosophy of the social sciences. This is partly due to the fact that it has not been perceived as being in continuity with the discipline as social scientists know it. As Reinhard Brandt has noted, “The *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* remained a stray piece in the history of sciences.”²⁵ According to John Zammito, “There is reason to question whether Kant’s vision of what anthropology as a discipline should become had any sustained impact on the subsequent development of that field. I have taken the view that it was far less influential than rival versions – both at home and abroad.”²⁶ Yet I hope to have shown that, no less than Hume, Herder, or Dilthey, Kant deserves to stand out as an original philosopher of the human sciences.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the conference “Kant’s Conception of Empirical Knowledge” in Jerusalem in December 2013. I would like to thank the organizer, Ido Geiger, as well as all the members of the audience for their invaluable feedback.
2. Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Review of Kant’s *Anthropology*,” in *Schleiermacher on the Workings of the Knowing Mind: New Translations, Resources, and Understandings*, ed. Ruth Drucilla Richardson (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1998), 16.
3. For the former, see for instance Robert B. Louden, *Kant’s Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For the latter, see Holly L. Wilson, *Pragmatic Anthropology: Its Origins, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Thomas Sturm, *Kant und die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2009).
4. There are of course a number of topics I could have chosen to tackle instead, most notably that of the relationship between Kant’s anthropology and his moral philosophy. However, since Lara Denis’s and Benjamin Vilhauer’s contributions in this volume (Chapters 4 and 5, respectively) already discuss the ethical dimension of Kant’s philosophy, I have chosen to focus on the epistemological dimension of Kant’s anthropology, which will also allow me to discuss his account of biology.
5. Although its discourse is essentially made of natural descriptions, physical geography should not be mistaken for the discipline of natural history. Natural history identifies the inner relations among the various species according to their reconstructed biological history and their ability to propagate, while a description of nature (physiography) describes the physical diversity of nature and organizes it according to similarities. It seems plausible to understand Kant’s *Lectures on Physical Geography* as belonging to physiography rather than physiogony.

6. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Physical Geography*, trans. Olaf Reinhardt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), 9:311, 377.
7. Immanuel Kant, "Review of J. G. Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity. Parts 1 and 2* (1795)," trans. Allen W. Wood, in *Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon, 121–42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8:56, translation modified.
8. As I have argued elsewhere, what anthropology needs in order to study the human being as free is no more than practical freedom, that is to say the faculty of choice "which can be determined independently of sensory impulses, thus through motives that can only be represented by reason" (A802/B830). Unfortunately, I cannot defend this claim here. See Alix Cohen, "Kant's Concept of Freedom and the Human Sciences," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (March 2009): 113–36. For a critical discussion of the relationship between Kant's account of freedom and his anthropology, see for instance Patrick R. Frierson, "Two Standpoints and the Problem of Moral Anthropology," in *Kant's Moral Metaphysics: God, Freedom, and Immortality*, ed. Benjamin J. Bruxvoort Lipscomb and James Krueger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 83–110.
9. For a critical discussion of the resolution of the antinomy of reflective judgment, see Eric Watkins, "The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment," in *Kant Yearbook*, vol. 1: *Teleology*, ed. Dietmar H. Heidemann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 197–222.
10. To avoid any misunderstanding, note that in Diagram 1, although I place "intentional action" under "individual teleology," on my account the mechanical nature of intentional explanations is no less present at the individual level. From the perspective of the species, these accounts are described as "mechanical." Therefore, intentional explanations of human behavior presuppose a mechanical connection between the intentions of the individual and his behavior.
11. Of course, as I have noted elsewhere, and as has been noted by Eric Watkins (for instance), there remains a nagging worry that they are not ultimately reconcilable. However, even if it is the case, it does not threaten my claim that, within the human sciences, both mechanical and teleological explanations are compatible and thus legitimate since they provide distinct reflective approaches to the human realm. See Alix Cohen, "Kant's Antinomy of Reflective Judgment: A Re-evaluation," *Teorema* 23, no. 1–3 (2004): 183–97; and Watkins, "Antinomy of Reflective Judgment," 197–222.
12. Note that, despite what this section may suggest, I take my account to be largely compatible with Frierson's claim about the relationship between Kant's account of empirical psychology and anthropology.
13. See Patrick Frierson, *Kant's Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
14. As Kant writes, "*natural history* would only consist in tracing back, as far as the analogy permits, the connection between certain present-day conditions of the things in nature and their causes in earlier times according to laws of efficient causality, which we do not make up but derive from the powers of nature as it presents itself to us now" (TelP 8:161–62).
15. Hannah Ginsborg, "Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability in Kant and Aristotle," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 1 (2004): 50.
16. As shown in Blumenbach's theory: "No one could be more totally convinced by something than I am of the mighty abyss which nature has fixed between the living and the lifeless creation, between the organized and the unorganized creatures" (Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb* [Göttingen: Dieterich,

- 1789], 71; quoted in John H. Zammito “‘This Inscrutable *Principle* of an Original *Organization*’: Epigenesis and ‘Looseness of Fit’ in Kant’s Philosophy of Science,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 34 [2003]: 95). As Robert J. Richards writes, “This was why [Kant] found Blumenbach’s principle of the *Bildungstrieb* so attractive – because he interpreted the biologist to be saying that ultimately only organized matter could produce organized matter,” against theories which assert a radical spontaneity of matter (“Kant and Blumenbach on the *Bildungstrieb*: A Historical Misunderstanding,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 31, no. 1 [March 2000]: 29).
17. The conception of nature as productive is conveyed by the concept of *Bildungstrieb*, or “formative impulse,” which Kant borrows from Blumenbach: “this inscrutable *principle* of an original *organization*, on account of which he [Blumenbach] calls the faculty in the matter in an organized body (in distinction from the merely mechanical *formative power* [*Bildungstrieb*] that is present in all matter) a *formative drive* (standing, as it were, under the guidance and direction of that former principle)” (CJ 5:424).
 18. See also the title of §80: “On the necessary subordination of the principle of mechanism to the teleological principle in the explanation of a thing as a natural end” (CJ 5:417). If mechanical explanations are unlimited in principle, our ability to provide them is not only restricted, but intrinsically limited, because of the finite nature of our cognitive powers.
 19. Frierson, *Kant’s Empirical Psychology*, 31.
 20. For a detailed analysis of this claim, see Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 81–83.
 21. See also CJ 5:181, where Kant writes: “The purposiveness of nature is thus a special *a priori* concept that has its origin strictly in the reflecting power of judgment. ... This concept is also entirely distinct from that of practical purposiveness (of human art as well as of morals), although it is certainly conceived of in terms of an analogy with that.”
 22. Thomas Teufel, “Kant’s Non-Teleological Conception of Purposiveness,” *Kant-Studien* 102, no. 2 (2011): 232–52.
 23. Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23.
 24. See in particular Dilthey, Gadamer, Windelband, Weber, or Rickert. For a discussion of this tradition, see William Y. Adams, *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1998). As George Sidney Brett has noted, “Here, then [in Kant’s *Anthropology*] is the real beginning of ‘psychology without a soul’” (*A History of Psychology, Mediaeval and Early Modern Period* [New York: Psychology Press, 2002], 840). See also Wilhelm Dilthey, “Understanding Psychology,” in *Contemporary Theories and Systems in Psychology*, by Benjamin B. Wolman (New York: Plenum, 1981), pt. 3, pp. 409–22.
 25. Reinhard Brandt, *Kritischer Kommentar zu Kants Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (1798)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999), 43.
 26. John H. Zammito, *Critical Guide: Kant’s Lectures on Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Part II

Reactions to Kant

I do not deny that Jacobi has often inspired me, although I am well aware that his dialectical skill is not in proportion to his noble enthusiasm, but in his eloquence he is a noble, genuine, lovable, richly gifted protest of the spirit against the systematic constricting of existence, a triumphant consciousness of, and an inspired struggle for, existence being longer and deeper than the couple of years one spends forgetting oneself in order to study the system.

— Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846)¹

My respect for Maimon's talent knows no bounds. I firmly believe that he has completely overturned the entire Kantian philosophy as it has been understood by everyone until now, including you, *and I am prepared to prove it*. No one noticed what he had done; they looked down on him from their heights. I believe that future centuries will mock us bitterly.

— J. G. Fichte, letter to K. L. Reinhold, March–April 1795²

[T]he author of the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* [i.e., Reinhold] has demonstrated in an exemplary manner his talent, insight and laudable mode of thought in usefully applying that [transcendental] philosophy to universally necessary ends. ... The talent of a lucid, even graceful presentation of dry abstract doctrines, without loss of their thoroughness, is so rare (it is the least granted to old age) and yet so useful, I will not say only for the recommendation, but even for the clarity of insight, the intelligibility and the conviction associated with it – that I consider myself obliged to pay thanks publicly to the man who supplemented [*ergänzte*] my works, to which I was not able to provide this facilitation, in such a manner.

— Immanuel Kant, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy” (1788)³

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. and ed. Alasdair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 210.

² J. G. Fichte to K. L. Reinhold, Jena, March–April 1795, *Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1988), 383–84 (GA III/2, no. 272).

³ Immanuel Kant, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” trans. Günter Zöllner, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217–18 (Ak 8:183).

10

Jacobi on Kant, or Moral Naturalism vs. Idealism

Benjamin D. Crowe

F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819) is a central member of what one might call, borrowing a phrase from Dieter Henrich, the “constellation” of figures, ideas, and debates that makes up German Idealism.¹ Already well-known through his chapters and literary works, Jacobi burst upon the philosophical scene in 1785 with his *Letters concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*.² Jacobi’s epochal intervention came just as Kant’s critical philosophy was emerging into public view – as if Jacobi had the interests of future historians of philosophy already in mind. The reception of Kant’s thought in the 1790s and beyond was profoundly shaped by Jacobi’s debate with the key Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Jacobi’s philosophical writings, including *David Hume on Faith* (1787), his open letter *Jacobi to Fichte* (1799), and *On Divine Things and Their Revelation* (1811), alongside his novels *Edward Allwill’s Collection of Letters* and *Woldemar* (which received their more or less final forms in 1792 and 1796, respectively), secured for Jacobi a leading role in the intellectual and cultural life of the era. Add to these his voluminous correspondence with figures such as Hamann, Herder, Fichte, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, as well as his on-again-off-again relationship with Goethe, and it is no exaggeration to say that Jacobi is literally present *everywhere* in this pivotal philosophical period.³ His career spans the Enlightenment, the *Sturm und Drang* era, and the rise of Romanticism, and yet Jacobi himself cannot be easily assimilated into any of these intellectual trends. At one time dismissed as a sentimental irrationalist, the precise nature of Jacobi’s own position, as well as his intentions in intervening in the ways that he did, remain a matter of discussion and debate.⁴

The basic facts of the case, however, are relatively clear. By invoking Spinoza during a crucial transition period of German intellectual discourse, Jacobi decisively influenced the direction that thinkers such as Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel took in the 1790s and beyond.⁵ His challenge to Kant’s distinction between things in themselves and appearances, which Jacobi first laid out in the appendix to *David Hume*, catalyzed the development of Fichte’s radical

idealism. Jacobi argues that Kant transgresses the limits set by the critical philosophy by asserting a causal connection between appearances and otherwise unknowable things in themselves. Jacobi's characterization of Fichte's system as "nihilism" (i.e., as formal and existentially empty) in his 1799 open letter not only impacted the direction that Schelling and Hegel took away from a Fichtean position in the early 1800s toward *Naturphilosophie*, but also shaped Fichte's own ongoing development.⁶ The treatment of key epistemological issues that Jacobi presented in both the 1785 edition of the *Spinoza Letters* and in *David Hume* fed directly into the debates about skepticism and foundationalism in the early Romantic circle.⁷ Finally, in his late turn to what he called a "positive philosophy," Schelling once again acknowledged the importance of Jacobi's criticisms of Enlightenment rationalism and of transcendental idealism. Kant himself, while critical of Jacobi both publicly and privately, was forced to confront some of the issues raised by Jacobi's interventions.⁸

Many valuable studies of Jacobi's position in the development of German Idealism have appeared in recent decades. In addition, an important body of work has emerged aimed at understanding Jacobi's position in its own right. Otto Bollnow's study of Jacobi's early thought is one clear example from a previous era, while Klaus Hammacher set the stage for a renewed appreciation of Jacobi's place in the constellation of German Idealism.⁹ Others have taken up particular aspects of Jacobi's philosophy, such as his concept of freedom.¹⁰ Valuable collections of chapters have also appeared that deal with biographical, literary, philosophical, and theological issues in Jacobi's work.¹¹

In view of the existence of this impressive body of scholarship, my aim in this chapter is not to present an overview of Jacobi's thought or to recapitulate others' discussions of his place in the history of German Idealism. Instead, my goal is to explore a less frequently discussed aspect of Jacobi's ideas, namely, his critical engagement with moral philosophy. To guide this exploration, Kant's much more well-known practical philosophy becomes a useful foil.¹² On the one hand, Jacobi professes to be sympathetic to Kant's efforts to vindicate human freedom and to found religious conviction on the moral life.¹³ Indeed, Jacobi had been an early enthusiast for many of Kant's ideas.¹⁴ At the same time, Jacobi became convinced that Kant's moral philosophy falls prey to the fundamental flaw in many (if not quite all) philosophical systems; that is, Kant adopts an abstract point of view, what Bernard Williams famously calls (in a critique of utilitarianism) "the point of view of the universe."¹⁵ By adopting such an abstract point of view, Kant, like other moral theorists whom Jacobi does not directly name, finds himself mired in contradictions.¹⁶ Against this tendency, Jacobi asserts a humanistic moral vision that he calls, in the 1785 *Spinoza Letters*, his "practical path." Grounding the moral life in the cultivation of natural sentiments, Jacobi champions virtues of loyalty, friendship, and honor against an impartial ethics of principle.

Jacobi on Kant

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams captures the thrust of much of his work in terms of an all-out attack on the “peculiar institution” of morality (or the “morality system”) as conceptualized by modern moral philosophers.¹⁷ At the core of Williams’s critique lies the claim, made elsewhere, that philosophers tend to adopt “the point of view of the universe,” an impartial perspective divorced from the concerns and motivations of actual moral agents, and attempt to reconstruct moral life from this perspective. Jacobi anticipates Williams’s concern by almost two centuries. Like Williams, Jacobi locates the perspective of “eternity” as the starting point of philosophical theorizing (MPW 530 [*Werke* 2/1:234]). In the 1785 *Spinoza Letters*, Jacobi maintains that, from this point of view, there is nothing like personal agency in the universe (MPW 188–89 [*Werke* 1/1:20–21]).¹⁸ The *salto mortale*, or “death-defying leap,” that Jacobi recommends as an antidote is not a blind leap of faith into the unknown, but rather a kind of somersault meant to catapult a person back to the point of view of a finite human being. As will become clear below, Jacobi’s discussions of Kant’s moral philosophy are meant to be illustrative of what Jacobi sees as the results that one can hope to gain from ignoring this advice.

Of Jacobi’s explicit discussions of Kant’s practical philosophy, the most detailed is probably the concluding section of the 1802 chapter *Concerning the Undertaking of Critical Philosophy to Bring Reason to Its Senses*.¹⁹ Other discussions, however, are to be found throughout Jacobi’s writings, some of which will be considered more fully below.²⁰ In the 1802 chapter, Jacobi starts his critique by identifying how, for Kant, the “highest end” of reason lies in “cognition of God, morality, and religion” (*Werke* 2/1:274); were reason not to produce a well-grounded belief “in God, freedom and immortality,” it will have thereby failed in its defining vocation (*Werke* 2/1:274). According to Jacobi, in order to prevent this failure, Kant first traverses the “rational path of understanding [*vernünftigen Verstandesweg*]” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, only to learn that we have no cognition of the objects of morality and religion. Kant then embarks upon the “path of reason without understanding [*unverständigen Vernunftweg*]” to reach the conclusion that we do, after all, possess cognition of these objects, though only as “problematic” postulates (*Werke* 2/1:275).²¹ As for what this status amounts to, Jacobi produces various passages from Kant, the upshot of which he summarizes as follows: a “problematic” object is one regarding which it is “undetermined whether it is *something* or *nothing*, etc.” (*Werke* 2/1:276). The point that Jacobi wants to convey is that, once we have traversed Kant’s “paths,” we are forced to conclude that “a human being stands, via his reason, in an eternal contradiction” (*Werke* 2/1:324), namely, a contradiction between the highest vocation of reason and the actual deliverances of the same. Kant’s

supposed way out of this contradiction seems, according to Jacobi, to lie in “superstition,” or the advice to believe in things that reason convinces us do not exist (*Werke* 2/1:324–25).

This alleged contradiction, however, is only the first of several that ensue from Kant’s effort to treat “the objects of the theory of ethics and religion” by means of “mere concepts” (*Werke* 2/1:329). A more glaring difficulty seems to arise from Kant’s treatment of freedom. According to Jacobi, Kant rightly sees freedom as the foundation of morality. Further, Jacobi explains how, for Kant, freedom consists in the independence of the will from motives of sensuousness (*Werke* 2/1:326). Practical reason furnishes a law that obtains independently of any such motive; thus, in acting on the basis of the moral law, we act freely. For Jacobi, this implies that, if there is no opposing motive (presumably one derived from sensuousness), then action according to the moral law follows “mechanically” (*Werke* 2/1:326). Thus, unless our sensuous inclinations mount a rebellion, we are mere slaves of the law (*Werke* 2/1:326–27). To avoid this conclusion, Kant must resort to the notion of a higher will, one that is independent of any motive whatsoever; otherwise we risk rendering accountability for our moral actions unintelligible, since they are mechanical (*Werke* 2/1:327). Jacobi, however, argues that this solution renders Kant’s account even more problematic. He summarizes the argument with a rhetorical flourish: “Wretched, strange creatures, we mortals! Our action is groundless, and yet a reckoning of our action will take place!” (*Werke* 2/1:327). An action without any subjective ground is just as difficult to attribute to an agent as that of a “rational machine” (*Werke* 2/1:327). Jacobi concludes that Kant’s account of freedom is, therefore, hopelessly muddled. On the one hand, we are not accountable for our moral actions because, absent a sensuous motive, they seem to result irresistibly from the command of practical reason. On the other hand, if our wills are able to determine themselves independently of any motive, then there is no ultimate reason for why we act one way rather than another. Either way, for Jacobi, we wind up with a view on which action cannot be attributed to agents.

Jacobi’s final target in the chapter is Kant’s theory of the postulates of practical reason. On Kant’s picture, morality seemingly commands us to resist our own striving for happiness, with the result that, so long as we wage a pitiless war on our inclinations here below, we are guaranteed that they will be satisfied hereafter. “A sensuous desire that in this finite, earthly life would rob it of dignity, will adorn it in an infinite future...” (*Werke* 2/1:328). Put differently, Jacobi’s point is that “[t]he Kantian moral system is taken captive in its own end; the ethical motive works originally without anything material; and yet the reward of virtue is precisely this sensuous material, pleasant sensations, though of course not in our *sensible* world, but rather in a future,

unsensible one" (*Werke* 2/1:328). The supposed absurdity of such a doctrine is, by Jacobi's lights, meant to speak for itself. The upshot is that Kant's account of practical reason actually fails to fulfill what he himself regards as reason's vocation, that is, the furnishing of well-grounded faith in God, freedom, and immortality.²²

Jacobi's diagnosis of the alleged paradoxes of Kant's practical philosophy is that, once we have abstracted away from the motives, concerns, and sentiments of our natures, we become unable to reconstruct moral or religious life (which amount to the same thing for Jacobi) in a coherent way. In a typically florid passage in the same chapter, Jacobi writes:

Happiness is merely the smoke from a fire that never dies out, which glows within our breast; the moral law is merely the for itself empty shell of the fruit; the philosophy of religion is only a witness of the religion found within the human being; the divinely endowed spirit of a human being lights this fire, bears this fruit, and looks with inborn eyes upon the Creator! (*Werke* 2/1:330)

One can recognize in this passage key conceptual elements of Kant's practical philosophy. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that, during the course of our development as agents, we reach a point where we can envision the sum total of the satisfaction of our inclinations; that is, we form an "idea of happiness." Kant also famously maintains that the morality of our actions is determined by pure practical reason alone. From these two claims (along with their corollaries), Kant develops the idea that there is an antinomy of practical reason, one that pits the requirements of morality against the conditions of prudential rationality. The antinomy is only resolved by postulating a future life, in which morality and happiness are reconciled, and a divine being, whose characteristics enable him to achieve this reconciliation. Jacobi's claim is that these conceptual elements are a kind of residue of the vital roots of morality and religion within human nature. The "detours and byways" of philosophy can never lead back to these roots once the abstractive move has occurred (*Werke* 2/1:275). The best that can result is a jumble of contradictions.

The line of argument directed against Kant in the 1802 chapter can be seen elsewhere in Jacobi's writings, despite the fact that its target is not quite as explicitly connected to any particular philosopher. In *Woldemar*, for example, Jacobi's hero engages in a lengthy argumentative dialogue with the other characters on the nature and roots of virtue, culminating in the declaration that it is not "pondering reason [*überlegende Vernunft*]" but rather "the immediate instrument of the spirit shrouded in sensibility" that guides our moral lives

(*Werke* 7/1:271). In *Edward Allwill*, the title character pens a lengthy critique of the ethics of principles, albeit as part of an attempt to justify his own unprincipled behavior. Allwill writes to Lucy:

It's the hollownest idea in the world to think that *bare* reason can be the basis of our actions, since by itself reason has only the power to lay out given feelings and inclinations before the heart in a schematized form, and [reason] obviously always acts in the service of the *original source of life* from which alone the *first* orientation, the *final* determination, the *power, movement, and action* derive. (MPW 466–67 [*Werke* 6/1:195–96])

Here, Allwill articulates Jacobi's own account of reason as the shape that sensibility takes in creatures like us, spelled out most fully in *David Hume*. By viewing reason as rooted in our sensible natures (rather than as a completely distinct faculty), Jacobi–Allwill's position has fewer difficulties in accounting for how reason could motivate than alternative views might have. Allwill goes on to try to capture the “hollowness” he refers to by means of a simile: “whenever anyone counsels me to become virtuous on the basis of principles, it sounds to me as if he were to propose that I should fall in love upon principles. *One in love – not* from feeling, but from design – would of course be *very faithful*” (MPW 467 [*Werke* 6/1:196–97]). He goes on to envision a judge who, quite rightly, acts in accord with his “juridical, *public*” conscience when sitting on the bench; but, Allwill asks, what sort of *person* would the judge be if this “public” (i.e., totally impartial) conscience were his guide in daily life (MPW 468–69 [*Werke* 6/1:198])? That Allwill's position captures at least something of Jacobi's own seems clear from a passage in the 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Letters*, in which he denies that the force of a moral judgment can be modeled on that of a logical law or inferential rule (MPW 346–47 [*Werke* 1/1:165–66]). As he puts it in a footnote to this passage, “Man's reason, abstracted from man himself and from every incentive, is a mere *ens rationis* that can neither act nor react, neither think nor act” (MPW 347 [*Werke* 1/1:166]).

A fairly consistent picture of Jacobi's concern with a certain strand of moral philosophy emerges from these and other texts. Jacobi thinks that philosophers too easily strive to adopt an impartial, abstract point of view. To paraphrase Williams again, such a point of view is not, for moral purposes, a very good one.²³ This is because it is fundamentally unable to capture moral life “from the inside”; it abstracts away from the motives and concerns that, on Jacobi's view, ground our judgments and account for our actions. Even a thinker as interested in vindicating the practical point of view as Kant ultimately fails to do just that because he takes up this universal point of view.²⁴

Jacobi and the moral law

On the basis of this general worry, Jacobi also attacks what many contemporary theorists regard as the very core of Kant's moral philosophy, namely the categorical imperative. While many are willing to follow John Rawls's advice and abandon the metaphysical commitments characteristic of Kant's own view, few would regard as "Kantian" a moral theory that did not locate something like reason's imperative at the heart of the account.²⁵ For his part, Jacobi is quite content to attack even this central feature of Kantian ethics. On Jacobi's reading, the categorical imperative is essentially a principle of consistency, a practical analogue of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (MPW 518 [Werke 2/1:214]). The problem that he sees is summed up in this passage from *Jacobi to Fichte* (1799):

Don't teach me what I know and understand how to demonstrate perhaps better than you might like, namely that if a *universally valid and rigorously scientific system* of morality is to be established, one *must* necessarily lay at its foundation that *will that wills nothing*, that *impersonal personality*, that naked *selfhood [Ichheit]* of the I without any *self* – in a word, *pure and bare inessentialities*. For love of the secure progress of science you *must*, yea you cannot but, subject conscience (*spirit most certain*) to the living death of *rationality*, make it *blindly* legalistic, deaf, dumb, and unfeeling; must tear from it its living root which is the *heart of man*, up to the last fibre.... (MPW 516–17 [Werke 2/1:211–12])

Jacobi's point is that the ambition to turn morality into a science can only be realized by adopting the abstract point of view described above. The idea is that systematic consistency or coherence is the hallmark of science, and that the manifold motives and sentiments of human nature cannot be rendered sufficiently systematic as they stand. From the abstract point of view, however, the core of moral agency ("the heart of man") can be stripped of its content and transformed into *mere* or *bare* reason in a way analogous to how formal logic models ordinary inferences by abstracting from any particular content. By itself such abstraction might not be a concern, but it must be recalled that the theory that is generated is meant to be a scientific *morality*; that is, it is meant not only to model moral life but actually to guide it. When the content that Jacobi groups together under the heading of the "heart" is subtracted out, the resulting "law can never become the *heart* of man and truly elevate him above himself" (MPW 517 [Werke 2/1:212]). While a principle of consistency may indeed be identified and articulated, once the sentiments and concerns of a person are left out of the account it becomes hard to see how such a principle could actually gain purchase on an actual person.²⁶

Jacobi had first developed this worry (not necessarily with Kant in mind) in *David Hume*. There the target is political rather than moral in the individual sense; Jacobi maintains that the rational self-governance championed by rationalist theorists of the day is only plausible in a “state of restriction,” where everything *but* reason has been excluded from the relevant equation (MPW 326 [*Werke* 2/1:95–96]). Jacobi makes a similar point in a short treatise on freedom added to the 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Letters*. In a series of twenty-three propositions on freedom and moral agency, Jacobi outlines what he takes to be at least one picture that follows from the adoption of the “point of view of the universe.” In this case, he outlines a naturalistic picture according to which practical reason is just the shape that the instinct for self-preservation takes on in certain kinds of creatures. “Irrational desires” are ones that run contrary to the nature of the being that is supposed to be preserved (MPW 342–43 [*Werke* 1/1:159–61]). The inevitability of unhealthy consequences that derive from pursuing these desires is the ground of “the whole system of practical reason,” which turns on treating the basic urge for self-preservation as a kind of rule for coordinating the other desires (MPW 343 [*Werke* 1/1:160]). As Jacobi puts it, “inner right” (i.e., morality) becomes the mirror of “external right,” a political *modus vivendi* in which conflict is eliminated and maximum consistency between competing claims is achieved (MPW 343 [*Werke* 1/1:161]). Here again, a rule or principle of consistency has been derived. What has been excluded, however, is the *particular* nature of the individual. Indeed, the abstract “person,” that is, one’s nature as a member of a species that one is driven to preserve, trumps the individual in the calculation that is meant to determine which desires to pursue. In the political case, *who I am* is not supposed to enter into the calculus. As it turns out, the same is true of the allied moral theory. Jacobi writes:

The Love of the *person* therefore limits the love of the *individuum*, and necessitates my not holding myself in high regard. But in order to avoid extending this last condition theoretically to the point where the individual might be totally destroyed, leaving us with a mere *personified* nothingness, more precise determinations are required. (MPW 344 [*Werke* 1/1:161–62])

Jacobi does not provide any insight regarding what these “more precise determinations” might be, the implication being that “personified nothingness” is indeed the logical consequence of adopting the standpoint he is describing here. He does, however, observe that “we have attained to a clear insight into the origin of the moral laws that we call *apodeictic* laws of practical reason...” (MPW 344 [*Werke* 1/1:162]). In other words, moral laws attain the necessity and universal bindingness of the laws of logic when, like the latter, particular content is deleted. No relevant distinction obtains between the individual and the species or between particular individuals. The point appears again

in a preface added to the 1792 edition of *Allwill*, where Jacobi describes how, through a process of abstraction, the concept of “personality” arises “to the exclusion of *person* and *existence*, since person and existence require individuality which is here necessarily omitted” (MPW 383 [*Werke* 6/1:90]).

Jacobi’s abiding claim is that the identification of the moral law with a principle of consistency rests on the adoption of a perspective that strips an agent of the concerns, motives, and sentiments that constitute her *particular* agency. He puts the point this way in “To Erhard O**,” a fictional missive (from Jacobi to an unknown individual) that is added to the end of the 1792 edition of *Allwill*:

As little as infinite space can determine the particular nature of any one body, so little can the *pure* reason of *man* constitute with its will (which is evenly good everywhere since it is *one and the same* in all men) the foundation of a particular, *differentiated* life, or impart to the *actual person* its proper individual value. (MPW 488 [*Werke* 6/1:228])

Reason, Jacobi avers, is like one half of a pair of scissors, whereas “sense-dispositions” furnish, as it were, the other half without which reason cannot get any grip (MPW 488 [*Werke* 6/1:229]). The abstract route by which an apodictic moral law is established winds up leaving it unclear how such a law might link with an individual’s actual motivational makeup. Moreover, as the material from the 1789 *Spinoza Letters* clearly suggests, the results of privileging this abstract point of view have something *inhuman* about them. This is because it is not immediately clear how such a point of view preserves moral differences between a particular individual and the species as a whole, or between particular individuals themselves. Understanding the force of this point, however, requires some grasp on the positive moral vision that Jacobi sketches in opposition to the kinds of theories exemplified, in his mind anyway, by Kant.

Jacobi’s moral vision

The basic contours of Jacobi’s moral vision are sketched in the *Spinoza Letters*, a work typically not read with an eye toward practical philosophy. At the heart of Jacobi’s theory is the claim that human beings have natural tendencies toward the good, along with other basic moral sentiments, and that these require careful practical cultivation. Jacobi supports his claim initially with lengthy quotations from a work by the Dutch neo-Platonist philosopher Frans Hemsterhuis and from one of Plato’s letters. The take-away message is then posed by Jacobi as a question:

But must not the feeling that lies at the ground of this conviction [i.e., belief in God’s existence] be found in all men, and should it not be possible

to liberate it to some extent in those who appear to be destitute of it, by working to remove the hindrances that inhibit its effective action? (MPW 214 [*Werke* 1/1:86–87])

Jacobi commits himself to key elements of a traditional humanistic position: (1) the fundamental goodness of human nature and (2) the need for cultivation or, to use the term that came to dominate subsequent discussions in Germany, *Bildung*. The second point is especially important, for without it Jacobi might be viewed as advocating a simple life of childlike sentimentality against the allegedly artificial sophistication of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. It is equally important to see that Jacobi's advocacy for Christianity, which scandalized many of his contemporaries, is neither a matter of nostalgia for a pre-rational culture nor a recommendation of blind faith. Instead, here in the *Spinoza Letters*, Jacobi sees Christianity as a vehicle for the cultivation of our basic moral sentiments. He writes to Mendelssohn:

It is a faith that has as its object, not eternal truths, but the finite, accidental nature of man. The religion of the Christians instructs man how to take on qualities through which he can make progress in his existence and propel himself to a higher life – and with this life to a higher consciousness, in this consciousness to a higher cognition. (MPW 231 [*Werke* 1/1:116–17])

To say that the “object” of Christianity is our “finite, accidental nature” is just to say that it precisely *does not* adopt the abstract “point of view of the universe” in the way that, for Jacobi, too many philosophical moralists tend to do. Jacobi's claim is that, rather than abstracting away from the natural concerns and sentiments, Christianity aims to bring them to a more perfect expression. It does so, he suggests, by having a *person*, a *historical individual*, namely Christ, as its central figure (MPW 231 [*Werke* 1/1:117]). A perfect or “godly” life is one patterned not after a principle of consistency but after the concrete existence of a specific person.

Jacobi goes on to label his approach a “practical path,” one that, no doubt, seems overly simplistic or perhaps even irrational from the point of view of a “[r]eason that has fallen into poverty and has become speculative...” (MPW 231 [*Werke* 1/1:118]). As we have seen, the tendency of reason toward abstraction leads away from the specificities of finite existence toward a perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*. Jacobi takes this to be an impoverishment in that the principles arrived at along this path lose their purchase on the kinds of concerns that motivate actual human beings. In a curious anticipation of Nietzsche, Jacobi claims that it is only his “practical path” that takes up the standpoint of someone located on earth:

We find ourselves situated on this earth, and as our actions become there, so too becomes our cognition; as our moral character turns out to be, so too does our insight into all things related to it. As the heart, so too the mind; and as the mind, so too the heart. Man cannot artificially contrive through reason to be wise, virtuous, or pious: he must be *moved* to it, and yet *move* himself; he must be organically disposed for it, yet *so dispose* himself. (MPW 237 [*Werke* 1/1:130])

The advantage of Jacobi's "practical path" over its rival is that, by starting from the natural sentiments, it charts a course toward virtue that does not involve alienating people from their inclinations in the way that he came to think Kant's moral philosophy does (in the essay on reason and understanding discussed above). Jacobi refuses to divide reason from sensibility, and so does not relegate constitutive features of our individuality or the concerns that most deeply drive us to a domain supposedly antithetical to morality. This aspect of Jacobi's moral vision parallels his general view of the mind as a kind of organic totality (as opposed to other theories that compartmentalize the mind into distinct faculties), articulated, for example, in *David Hume* (MPW 294–95, 315–16 [*Werke* 2/1:57–58, 84–85]). To illustrate the "practical path" that is rooted in this conception of the mind, Jacobi invokes Herodotus's tale of Sperchis and Bulis, commenting that what they lacked in "philosophy" they had in "their heart's sentiment, their affection" (MPW 238 [*Werke* 1/1:131–32]).²⁷

The *terminus ad quem* of Jacobi's "practical path," according to the 1785 *Spinoza Letters*, consists first of all in a kind of practical cognition of God's goodness that he calls "wisdom," or "the resplendence of eternal light, an untarnished mirror of divine action and reflection of his goodness" (MPW 243 [*Werke* 1/1:138]). This is less a piece of metaphysical knowledge than a lively and motivating sense of the dignity of humanity and of one's capacity to participate in the divine life.²⁸ Jacobi goes on to assert that his "practical path" leads to honor (in the sense of the ancient virtue *honestum*), that is, a kind of integrity through which "we are as we appear" (MPW 247 [*Werke* 1/1:142]).

Jacobi's outlook clearly has strong affinities with the ethos of humanism as well as with ancient Stoicism.²⁹ Jacobi himself often invokes Aristotle, whose picture of virtue as growing out of the cultivation of natural sentiments and reticence toward treating morality as a "science" (see discussions in the opening sections of *Nicomachean Ethics*) seem parallel to aspects of the position Jacobi tries to develop. Jacobi invokes Aristotle somewhat cryptically at the beginning of *David Hume*, probably with Aristotle's claim that virtue must precede moral theorizing in the mind (MPW 259 [*Werke* 2/1:5]). Aristotle is also brought in at several points in the discussions added to the 1796 edition of *Woldemar*. For example, in response to a (somewhat loose) quotation from *Nicomachean Ethics* produced by his interlocutor Sidney, Woldemar avers that no philosopher has

seen as deeply into the nature of human excellence as has Aristotle (*Werke* 7/1:247–48). After Sidney continues his invocation of Aristotle, to the effect that moral laws cannot be systematized in the way the laws of nature can be, since the former do not produce their effects with mechanical necessity, Woldemar expands on the theme:

The science of the good is, like the science of the beautiful, subordinate to the condition of *taste*, without which it cannot even *begin* and beyond which it cannot be led. The taste for the good, like taste for the beautiful, is developed [*ausbildet*] by means of excellent exemplars [*Muster*]; and the lofty originals are always works of genius. Through genius, nature gives the rule to art; just as much to the art of the good as to that of the beautiful. Both are *liberal* [*frei*] arts, not bound to the rules of a trade guild [*schmiegen sich nicht unter Zunftgesetze*]; they cannot be debased to the level of a handicraft or placed in the service of some business. (*Werke* 7/1:249)

The character Woldemar's Aristotelian position clearly echoes the "practical path" Jacobi had outlined in the 1785 *Spinoza Letters*. Moreover, Woldemar's speech also reverberates with Jacobi's suspicion of moral theorists like Kant who translate the life of virtue into an ethics of principle. *Woldemar* also strikes Stoic notes in its lengthy discussion of the intrinsic value of virtue and the tranquility that comes to the honorable person (*Werke* 7/1:232, 246, 254–61).³⁰ Woldemar and his potential father-in-law, Hornich, likewise debate in the same passages the relative advantages of an ethics of cultivated sentiment (Woldemar's preferred option) vis-à-vis an ethics of clear-cut rules (Hornich's favored view). In a manner that recalls the discussion of the ethics of principle in the 1789 *Spinoza Letters* (described above), Hornich appeals to a kind of psychological egoism to support his insistence on rules. Humankind's innate selfishness means that Woldemar's woolly-minded paean to the sentiments of the virtuous man is likely to generate dangerous antinomian consequences. Jacobi's own sympathies clearly lie with Woldemar (who gets the last word), but he is also making the point, emphasized in the 1785 *Spinoza Letters*, that natural sentiments require cultivation and refinement.

For all the resonances between Jacobi's position and the lofty heights of Stoic and Aristotelian excellence, it is important to recognize that the virtues rooted in our natural sentiments can be exhibited elsewhere than merely on the grand stage of history. Jacobi is, of course, happy to invoke Plutarchian heroes such as the Theban general Epaminondas and the tyrant-slayer Timoleon, as well as Euripides' selfless Pylades, as paragons of virtues such as honor and friendship (e.g., MPW 516 [*Werke* 2/1:211]). Indeed, Epaminondas is something of a favorite, finding his way not only into *Jacobi to Fichte* but also into both *Woldemar* and *Allwill*. For Jacobi, he represents the value of virtues that cannot

be properly cast as obedience to abstract principles. As the character Lucy puts it in her rebuke of Allwill toward the end of the novel:

If the disregarding of friendship, private obligations, promise, and kin, for the sake of the universal good or out of obedience to authority, is a sign of greatness of courage, or the effect of extraordinary virtue, then it is fair enough for us to say that a greatness of this sort was not one that found a place in the soul of Epaminondas. (MPW 481 [*Werke* 6/1:215])

The setting of both of Jacobi's novels, the humbler domain of a family circle, is, in part, meant to convey the point that it is on the level of one's most intimate relationships that genuine virtue must be expressed.

The character of Amalia in *Allwill* embodies many of the same virtues referred to in the passage on Epaminondas quoted above. It is telling that her character is described in almost rapturous terms by Allwill himself, a person who is both deeply fragmented and alienated from genuine human connections. Allwill explains how Amalia is the opposite of the "all-encompassing ones," those whose commitments are "*everywhere, yet nowhere*" (MPW 416–17 [*Werke* 6/1:132–33]). That is, Amalia's goodness is an expression of her particularity, of her bonds with certain individuals. She demonstrates a kind of genuineness and loyalty. Allwill's description captures the key difference:

She is so good to all men, *mother Amalia*; yet if the circumstances required it, she could certainly do without them all, as long as just her *husband* and her *children* were left to her. I must not hide from you that she is terribly loyal to *these* – to her *husband* – just about as the old republicans were loyal to their fatherland. But of course, you are not one of our mighty philosophers, who survey the whole earth-globe – what am I saying? – the *whole universe*, from on high and take it to heart accordingly, and out of burning love for *men in general* carry a grudge against the patriotism of old, or any other partisan love. (MPW 416 [*Werke* 6/1:132])

Allwill's comparison between Amalia and the heroes of republican Rome, with their almost filial devotion to the state, serves as a direct link between the virtues attributed to people like Epaminondas and the more homely context of the family. Indeed, the latter context serves in some measure to bring out the contrast between Jacobi's moral vision and that of the theorists that he opposes. For Jacobi, natural sentiments like those reflected in marriage and family life are the vital roots of moral excellence. Impartial principles of universal benevolence are at best derivative representations of the deeper emotional connections that drive both great and small acts of loyalty and self-renunciation.

Conclusion

Jacobi engaged not only with Kant's theoretical philosophy (in ways that were to have a deep impact on the subsequent trajectory of German Idealism), but also cast a critical eye onto Kant's practical philosophy in a way that has not yet been fully explored. For Jacobi, Kant's moral thought, despite its impressive rigor and admittedly "sublime" vision of human freedom, founders because of its abstract starting point. According to Jacobi, the *aporias* in Kant's conception of freedom and in his doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason stem largely from the attempt to reconstruct the moral life from an impartial, general perspective. Kant's conception of the moral law as a categorical imperative, like other law-based theories, goes astray for similar reasons. In ways that anticipate some more recent criticisms of moral philosophy, and anticipate the contemporary revival of virtue ethics, Jacobi champions natural sentiment and its cultivation as the core of his own moral vision. Against the supposed primacy of a general legal formula, Jacobi stresses the role of exemplary individuals in the formation of sound moral judgments. Against attempts to transform human beings into rational angels or self-interested animals, Jacobi tries, in his novels and other writings, to identify the human capacity for self-transcendence in a way that remains sensitive to our basic finitude. Jacobi's interventions into the domain of moral theory are philosophically weighty, and so well worth the same level of attention as his other, more well-known, ideas.³¹

Notes

1. This metaphor derives from Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).
2. Jacobi's works are cited parenthetically in the body of the text using the following system of abbreviations, followed by the page number. In every case where an English translation exists, I reference Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"*, ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), abbreviated as MPW. In all other cases, I reference Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Werke*, 7 vols., ed. Walter Jaeschke et al. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998–), abbreviated as *Werke* with the appropriate volume number, part number (where applicable), and page number.
3. For the correspondence documenting Jacobi's connection to Goethe, see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "*Ich träume lieber Fritz den Augenblick...*," in *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und F. H. Jacobi*, ed. Max Jacobi, rev. ed. Andreas Remmel and Paul Remmel (Bonn: Bernstein, 2005).
4. Heinrich Heine's later judgment encapsulates a prevalent opinion regarding Jacobi: "Pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany, as was predicted fifty years ago by those German writers who campaigned so intensively against Spinoza. The fiercest of these opponents of Spinoza was Fr. Heinr. Jacobi, who is occasionally honored by being named among the German philosophers. He was nothing but a quarrelsome sneak, who, disguising himself in a philosopher's cloak, made his way in among

- the philosophers, first whimpering to them about his love and his tender soul, and then letting loose against reason. His refrain always went: philosophy, knowledge through reason, is a vain delusion; reason does not even itself know where it leads; it brings one into a dark labyrinth of error and contradiction; and only faith can lead one securely. That mole! He did not see that reason is like the eternal sun, which, as it makes its steady way above, illuminates its own path with its own light. Nothing compares to the pious, smug hatred little Jacobi harbored for the great Spinoza" (Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. Terry Pinkard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 59). Recent, more balanced, discussions of Jacobi and reason include Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 2; and Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 4. For a defense of Jacobi against the charge of irrationalism, see my "F. H. Jacobi on Faith, or What It Takes to be an Irrationalist," *Religious Studies* 45, no. 3 (Sept. 2009): 309–24. The most sympathetic recent reconstruction of Jacobi's thought as a whole in English is George di Giovanni, "Introduction: The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi," in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"*, 1–157.
5. For a recent general discussion of the so-called "Spinoza dispute," see Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 44–83. A classic account is found in Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit. Studien zur Religionsphilosophie der Goethezeit*, vol. 1: *Die Spinozarennaissance* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1974). On the reception of Spinoza in Germany more generally, see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984). On the impact of the "pantheism controversy" on German Idealism, particularly on Hegel, see Dale Everts Snow, "F. H. Jacobi and the Development of German Idealism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 3 (July 1987): 397–415; and Peter Jonkers, "The Importance of the Pantheism-Controversy for the Development of Hegel's Thought," *Hegel-Jahrbuch* 11 (2002): 272–78.
 6. For a detailed discussion of Jacobi's confrontation with Fichte in 1799, see George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the impact of Jacobi's intervention on Fichte, see, for example, Günter Zöller, "Das Element aller Gewissheit' – Jacobi, Kant und Fichte über den Glauben," *Fichte-Studien* 14 (1998): 21–41.
 7. On skepticism and the Jena Romantics, see Manfred Frank, "Unendliche Annäherungen." *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1997); and Elizabeth Millán, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). This is to say nothing of Hegel, who dealt with the epistemological issues raised by Jacobi in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802) and in the opening sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).
 8. Kant's initial intervention in the "Spinoza dispute" is "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" (OT 8:133–46). Privately, Kant attacked Jacobi in correspondence with his friend Marcus Herz (C 10:442–43). Kant revisits some of the issues raised by Jacobi's invocation of Spinoza in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. See especially CJ §73.
 9. Otto Bollnow, *Die Lebensphilosophie F. H. Jacobis*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966); and Klaus Hammacher, *Die Philosophie Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis* (Munich: Fink, 1969).

10. Karl Homann, *F. H. Jacobis Philosophie der Freiheit* (Freiburg: Alber, 1973); and Birgit Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache. Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis* (Munich: Fink, 2000).
11. Klaus Hammacher, ed., *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Philosoph und Literat der Goethezeit: Beiträge einer Tagung in Düsseldorf 1969 aus Anlaß seines 150. Todestages und Berichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1971); and Walter Jaeschke and Birgit Sandkaulen, eds., *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Ein Wendepunkt der geistigen Bildung der Zeit* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004).
12. Jürgen Stolzenberg provides one of the few direct treatments of Jacobi's critique of Kant's moral theory. Much of what I have to say here is indebted to Stolzenberg's important chapter. See Jürgen Stolzenberg, "Was ist Freiheit? Jacobis Kritik der Moralphilosophie Kants," in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, 19–36. A recent treatment of some of the core ideas in Jacobi's moral thought is Oliver Koch, *Individualität als Fundamentalgefühl. Zur Metaphysik der Person bei Jacobi und Jean Paul* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2013). Unfortunately, Koch's study came to my attention too late to be incorporated into the present chapter; I am grateful to Birgit Sandkaulen for pointing me to it.
13. In an 1815 preface to his collected works, Jacobi says of Kant's practical philosophy that, at least "in spirit," it is "as true as it is sublime" (MPW 556 [Werke 2/1:44]). This echoes earlier comments found in *On Divine Things and Their Revelation* (Werke 3:73–74).
14. Jacobi himself relates the details of this reception in *David Hume* (MPW 283 [Werke 2/1:46]).
15. Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers, 1982–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 169.
16. Jacobi often seems to read Kant as a formalist about morality, and, to this extent, a reading of Kant that is more attuned to the latter's discussions of moral development and moral feeling might well escape some of Jacobi's stronger charges.
17. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), esp. ch. 10.
18. A supplement to the letter to Fichte of 1799 echoes this earlier discussion: "Whoever can now accept this and, based on the conclusions of his temporal reason, does not shy away from claiming that Homer, Sophocles, Pindar, the barbarians Ossian and Klopstock, Aristotle, Leibniz, Plato, Kant and Fichte – all the poets and philosophers whatever their names, all the law-givers, the artists and the heroes – that *at bottom* all of them have brought forth their works and deeds blindly and of necessity ...; that *intelligence only accompanies consciousness*, and that therefore it only has had *merely the function of observing* in all this – whoever, I say, can accept this and make it his truth, with him there is no further arguing" (MPW 531 [Werke 2/1:235–36]).
19. The German title, *Ueber das Unternehmen des Criticismus, die Vernunft zu Verstande zu bringen...*, involves a typically Jacobian wordplay. The ordinary phrase contained in the title means to bring one to one's senses, literally, "to bring one to understanding." Jacobi is playing off of Kant's well-known distinction between "understanding [*Verstand*]" and "reason [*Vernunft*]."
20. As the editors of the most recent collected edition of Jacobi's writings point out, Jacobi had planned, at least as early as 1790, to compose a comprehensive treatment of Kant's philosophy (Werke 2/2:458–60). A 1791 piece ("Epistel über die Kantische Philosophie") and a series of appendices attached to the letter to Fichte are among the more complete discussions provided by Jacobi.
21. Here again, Jacobi's German better expresses the critical point. *Unverständlich* denotes insensate, stupid, or foolish.

22. The picture that Jacobi presents of the self-contradictory agent here bears a striking resemblance to Hegel's more well-known treatment of the "unhappy consciousness" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (PhG §§206–30).
23. Cf. Bernard Williams and J. J. C. Smart, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 118.
24. For a very interesting effort to vindicate the universal standpoint as precisely the standpoint of morality, with a perceptive analysis of the ensuing inevitability of tragedy, see Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
25. For Rawls's influential reading of Kant, see several of the chapters gathered in John Rawls, *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
26. It is worth noting here that it was not Kant's ambition to *invent* a new principle of morality out of whole cloth; instead, as he says in an important note in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he takes his project to be one of explicating or articulating a principle already present, in some sense, within our ordinary moral judgments (G 4:403–4).
27. In *Allwill*, the character Lucy relates the story of Wigard Erdig, an avuncular philanthropist who benefited his fellow townspeople on the basis of a homey regard for their well-being and a down-to-earth sense of duty (MPW 478–79 [*Werke* 6/1:210–11]).
28. Jacobi tries to summarize this "wisdom" in the following passage: "The idea of a virtuous being originates in the enjoyment of virtue; the idea of a free being, in the enjoyment of freedom; the idea of a living being, in the enjoyment of life: the idea of one like unto God, and of *God* himself, in the enjoyment of what is divine" (MPW 243 [*Werke* 1/1:138]).
29. With its conception of virtue as likeness to God, Stoicism was taken up early on in the history of Christianity. This fact probably goes some way toward explaining Jacobi's own humanistic understanding of Christianity as a religion of *Bildung*. For an interesting discussion of this Stoic tradition and its development, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
30. Similarly Stoic in spirit are Jacobi's discussion of the virtue of honor in the 1789 *Spinoza Letters* and the character Clerdon's brief invocation of the Stoic ideal in *Allwill* (MPW 345–46, 410 [*Werke* 1/1:165, 6/1:165]).
31. Many thanks to Kristin Gjesdal and Owen Ware for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter.

11

Rationalism, Empiricism, and Skepticism: The Curious Case of Maimon's "Coalition-System"

Peter Thielke

In the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes skeptics as "a kind of nomads who abhor all permanent cultivation of the soil," and who on occasion "shattered the civil unity" of rational dogmatism (Aix). Kant's dim view of skepticism as the adversary of rationalism is, I take it, one that is widely shared. There are, of course, many types of skeptical positions, but the common link between them is usually understood to rest on a suspicion about reason's ability to provide us with truths about the world – the skeptic, in short, is typically treated as the rationalist's enemy. This certainly seems true of the two main varieties of modern skepticism: Descartes claims to overcome the method of doubt by means of rational insight, while Hume retains a skeptical attitude precisely because reason cannot provide us with any grasp of matters of fact.

It is then common to think of rationalism and skepticism as philosophical antagonists – but need they be? A central assertion of Salomon Maimon – the man whom Kant described as the best of his critics – is that a commitment to rationalism in fact *leads*, at least indirectly, to skepticism. This is a seemingly strange and iconoclastic assertion, one whose oddity is compounded by Maimon's claims to have developed a "Coalition-System" that manages to combine the views of, among others, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume. At first blush this might look hopeless, but closer examination reveals not only a principled view – which I will call Maimon's "apostate rationalism" – but also one that is surprisingly compelling, and indeed threatening to the traditional philosophical enterprise of rational inquiry.

An unlikely philosopher

The peculiarity of Maimon's views is mirrored by the singularly odd life that led him onto the philosophical stage.¹ He was born as Salomon ben Joshua

in 1753 in Sukoviborg, a small Jewish village in the backwoods of Lithuania. His father was a rabbinic scholar, and from an early age Maimon's intellectual talents were evident, though there were few opportunities for academic development. As a boy, he was sent to live in various Jewish schools in the area, though he later had scathing criticisms of the squalor and ignorance of the teachers there. Soon after, his Talmudic talents attracted the attention of several mothers with eligible daughters, and in a bittersweet comedy of errors he was betrothed to one girl before being kidnapped by the mother of another, who quickly married young Salomon to her daughter. Both he and his new bride were around eleven, and Maimon chafed under the command of his mother-in-law. He and his wife had a child when he was fourteen, and Maimon seemed destined to lead a life of complete anonymity in Lithuania, working as a tutor to other Jewish families.² Maimon would travel widely to procure new books, and he began to be exposed to works that reached beyond the traditional Talmudic literature; the seeds of his philosophical career are likely found in his increasing access to these books. In his early twenties, he abandoned his family and ventured to Berlin, hoping to begin work on a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, from whom he had borrowed the surname Maimon. His crude manner and rudimentary German did not appeal to the Jewish customs agents in Berlin, who summarily expelled him.

In the face of this indignity, Maimon found himself penniless, and he was reduced to begging to sustain himself. After months as essentially a vagrant, he was taken in by the chief rabbi in Posen, who offered him a place to live and the opportunity to work as a teacher. Around 1781, after several years in the German countryside, Maimon was able to return to Berlin, in much more auspicious circumstances. He was taken under the wing of Moses Mendelssohn and other figures in the Jewish Enlightenment, who saw in Maimon something like a living example of Rousseau's Noble Savage: while his demeanor was admittedly coarse, and he tended to be rude and direct, no one could deny the perspicacity of his thought. Maimon was respected as an intellectual, but his manners, as well as his fondness for wine and brothels, soon wore on his patrons, and Mendelssohn suggested that he should leave Berlin. He decamped to Amsterdam, where he attempted to set himself up as a pharmacist, but he was so miserable that he contemplated suicide. He then made his way to Hamburg, where a generous benefactor agreed to pay for Maimon's tuition at a gymnasium in Altona; there, Maimon learned the rudiments of English and German composition, and excelled in the study of mathematics. In 1785, he moved to Breslau, where he made the acquaintance of Christian Garve, a leading "popular philosopher [*Popularphilosoph*]" of the day and the author of one of the earliest reviews of Kant's *Critique*. By this time Maimon's estranged wife had tracked him down, and, failing to convince him to return to Lithuania,

finally secured a divorce. His 1789 return to Berlin turned out to be fateful, for it was during this time that he decided to read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. He had already formulated the skeleton of what he called his "Coalition-System," and undertook his study of Kant in the same vein:

In the first reading I reached a vague sense of each section, which through subsequent readings I then sought to make determinate, and by this to penetrate the meaning of the author. This is what is properly meant when one thinks oneself into a system. Since I had already used this method in mastering the systems of Spinoza, Hume, and Leibniz, it was natural that I would be led to think of them as a "Coalition-System [*Coalitionssystem*]." This I actually discovered, and by and by set it out in the form of notes and observations on the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as this system evolved in me, until finally there arose my Transcendental Philosophy. Here each of the preceding systems was developed so that the points of agreement of all are easily shown. (MGW 1:557–58)

Having so devoured the first *Critique*, Maimon, in a manner typical of both his ambitions and naiveté, decided to write a critical commentary on it. This became the *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, which Marcus Herz sent to Kant, his former teacher, in 1789. Kant's response that "no one has understood me as well as Herr Maimon" (C 11:49) established his reputation, and the work was published in 1790. Maimon followed this with a decade's worth of almost frantic work, publishing seven books and numerous articles. He also found himself embroiled in a variety of philosophical disputes, most notably with K. L. Reinhold, the early champion of Kant's system, who objected when Maimon published their heretofore private correspondence without Reinhold's permission. Despite his productivity and acuity, Maimon remained a relatively marginalized figure, and his condition was not aided by his increasing alcoholism. Finally, he was taken under the wing of a philosophically inclined young nobleman, Count Adolf Kalkreuth, who offered Maimon lodging on his Silesian estate in 1795. Maimon spent the remaining lonely years of his life there, until his relatively early death in 1800.

Even during his lifetime Maimon was mostly known as a critic of Kant, and what little recognition he receives today largely mirrors this assessment. Yet while Maimon is indeed one of Kant's most perspicuous critics, and develops a sustained challenge to the critical philosophy – though one tempered by enormous admiration for Kant's achievements – within his thought is contained a deeper insight than simply one of loyal opposition. Maimon forms his philosophical views within the context of Kant's critical philosophy, but what emerges is a variety of skepticism that takes aim at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. For unlike other forms of philosophical doubt, Maimon's

idiosyncratic position sees skepticism as a product of rational inquiry itself – for this reason I have called it “apostate rationalism.”

Philosophy between two poles

Maimon endorses both dogmatic rationalism and empirical skepticism, but at first glance it is not easy to see how these two views can be reconciled. If rationalism involves the idea that reason alone has insight into the world, or that some truths about the world can be known *a priori*, then it is not at all clear how one could hold such a position and nonetheless remain an empirical skeptic, since reason would presumably provide us with indubitable truths. Likewise, if empirical skepticism calls into question our knowledge of the world, then it is difficult to square such doubts with the ostensibly wide scope of reason’s insight that a dogmatic rationalism would require. The worry, in short, is that Maimon’s syncretic position is broken from the very beginning.

In order to avoid this unfortunate fate, it is helpful to begin by looking at precisely what Maimon takes the contrast case to dogmatic rationalism to be. In outlining various positions in philosophy, Maimon distinguishes between “empirical dogmatists and rational skeptics” on the one hand, and “rational dogmatists and empirical skeptics” on the other. He identifies the Kantian position as the former, and the latter as his own (he also notes that he is the only person who can be so described) (ETP 221–22 [MGW 2:434–36]). The invocation of Kant as a “rational skeptic” provides a clue to what Maimon’s own position involves: to describe the critical philosophy as a rational skepticism suggests that at a *transcendental* level Kant is committed to the view that we cannot know noumena, or that our cognition is of things as they appear to us rather than as they are in themselves. Kant takes himself to be a transcendental idealist – what I propose Maimon is calling a “rational skeptic” – and an empirical realist, and he is entitled to lay claim to what initially might seem to be a contradictory position because these descriptors operate at different explanatory levels. Transcendental idealism is a theory about the possibility of human cognition; it is a second-order explanation about the grounds of the first-order experiences we presumably have of the world. The objects we interact with in our daily lives are empirically real, but Kant argues that philosophical reflection reveals that they are also transcendently ideal, and such reflection works at a different explanatory level than does the experience of real objects.

When Maimon then claims to be a “rational dogmatist,” his position should be understood as offering an alternative to Kant’s account of transcendental idealism. Maimon is a dogmatist not about our experience of objects, but about the transcendental explanations we can provide about these experiences – his dogmatism arises at the “second-order” or transcendental level, while his

skepticism stands as a counterpart to Kant's empirical realism. Just as Kant's idealism and realism are compatible because they operate at different levels, so too Maimon's rationalism and skepticism can be seen as occupying analogous roles, and the worry about an insuperable tension can be at least allayed. In terms of the "Coalition-System" Maimon advances, he draws on the rationalist tenets of Leibniz and Spinoza³ to inform his transcendental position, while at the same time endorsing a Humean skepticism at the empirical level.

Even if it is consistent, this alone does not mean that Maimon's position is *plausible*, since it is not at all clear what either dogmatic rationalism or empirical skepticism involve. In claiming to be an empirical skeptic, Maimon frequently claims that he "denies experience," and this might suggest a kind of radical Cartesian doubt concerning the existence of the external world, or the truth of any of our judgments concerning sense impressions. It is important to note that Maimon is not this kind of skeptic; indeed, he claims that the "extreme skeptic" – by whom he seems to indict the Cartesian meditator – denies even the certainty of inner perceptions, and in so doing "contradicts his own inner convictions" (MGW 3:244). Rather, in claiming to deny experience, Maimon is instead making a Humean-minded point about objective, and in particular causal, judgments. Although he never carefully defines it, for Maimon "experience" requires the application of the pure categories of thought to determine objects – in Kantian terms, Maimonian experience involves something like the *Prolegomena's* "judgments of experience" or objective judgments rather than merely "judgments of perception" or subjective judgments (Pro 4:296–301). As Maimon puts it, "Kant maintains that the categories are conditions of experience, i.e., he asserts that without [the categories] we could have perceptions, but not experience (necessity of perception). By contrast, I join Hume in doubting the reality of experience" (ETP 114 [MGW 2:214]). In denying experience, then, Maimon rejects the idea that when we say, for example, that the sun warms the stone, we have picked out a real causal relation in the world. Of course, we do in fact make such judgments, but Maimon – following Hume – insists that these are not grounded in a perception of real causal relations, but instead reflect only subjective judgments, which stand as "mere perception[s] containing a merely subjective necessity (arising from habit) that is wrongly passed off as an objective necessity" (ETP 43 [MGW 2:273]).

Maimon's denial of experience is then not a form of radical Cartesian doubt, as it might at first appear, but rather involves the idea that we cannot provide a ground for the objective judgments we claim to make. We of course have "experience" in the sense of being aware of objects and our subjective states, but from these resources, Maimon claims, we cannot reach any conclusions about the presumed causal structure of the world. By denying experience, Maimon is really rejecting a specifically Kantian notion of empirical realism

about causal relations, and his reasons for doing so are found in his Humean commitments.

Hume's doubts about causation are usually traced to his suspicions about reason's ability to offer demonstrations of the necessity of causal relations: since we can conceive "with facility and distinctness" the opposite of any matter of fact, reason cannot prove that they are necessary.⁴ Hume's naturalism – and his opposition to rationalism – are then typically taken as concomitant with his skepticism about the possibility of rational insight into the nature of the world. Maimon follows Hume in being skeptical about the necessity of causal relations, but he adopts this position not because of his suspicions about the nature of reason, but precisely because of his rationalist commitments. In short, Maimon's empirical skepticism arises *because* of his rationalist dogmatism.

Why should rational dogmatism lead to empirical skepticism? In order to answer this question, a bit more needs to be said about what rational dogmatism involves. While the invocation of dogmatism might suggest a kind of rationalist epistemology that asserts that we have a direct and indubitable grasp of the nature of the world, for Maimon it has a more methodological cast. In broad terms, Maimon's dogmatism amounts to the view that reason always demands a complete explanation that accords with the unlimited scope of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and that this serves as a regulative ideal guiding rational inquiry. Such a dogmatism does not assert that we in fact can ever achieve this level of cognition – indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely our inability to do so that drives Maimon's skepticism – but only that it provides a methodological standard for reason's work. In this respect, Maimon's rationalism seems of a piece with Kant's notion of reason as a faculty whose demand for explanation requires a ceaseless drive for the unconditioned, but there is a crucial difference as well, since Maimon maintains that the *understanding* is also subject to these rational requirements.⁵ In particular, Maimon's rationalism involves what we might think of as the demand for *insight* into the conceptual foundations of empirical cognition. It is not enough, for example, to simply apply concepts to intuitions in order to ground cognition; instead, we must also have some insight into how cognitive content arises.⁶ The application of a category to intuition, for example, requires a "criterion," which would allow us to see how such determination is possible (ETP 202 [MGW 2:390]). "Someone might think that we can also have insight into the possibility of synthetic propositions *a priori* [of causality]," Maimon notes, but such a grasp of causal relations is not available to us. This demand for insight adds an epistemic dimension to Maimon's rationalism, since it makes a claim about the standards of knowledge *within* experience, rather than just setting out the methodological demands of complete explanation (ETP 202 [MGW 2:390]).⁷ And, as we will see, it also drives Maimon's skepticism, since these standards of insight are *not* met in our experience.

Maimon rejects rationalist metaphysics – understood as the science of things in themselves – while retaining a commitment to the rationalist idea of complete cognition. He maintains that

the *Critique of Pure Reason* has provided an irrefutable result against dogmatism, and... the question: Is metaphysics possible? (in the sense in which Kant takes it, namely, as a science of things in themselves) must be answered with a no. But I also assert that [Kant's] system is inadequate, in two respects. First, it is inadequate to overturn all dogmatism in general, in that I prove that if by metaphysics one understands not the science of things in themselves, which can in no way be thought, but rather merely the science of the limits of appearances (Ideas), which are the actual objects of complete thought, and to which one is necessarily led through cognition of objects of experience, in this respect metaphysics is not only possible, but indeed even necessary, because otherwise no cognition of an object in general would be possible.⁸

While Maimon agrees that Kant has shown that transcendent dogmatism is untenable, he holds that the critical system has not rebutted his own version of dogmatism, where reason provides the limit concept of the objects of experience. On this view, rational dogmatism can be taken to play a methodological or regulative role in cognition: it does not provide us direct knowledge of things in themselves, as more traditional rationalists proposed, but rather tells us what the complete rational grasp of objects of our experience *would* require.

It is just this commitment to a rational dogmatism that leads to Maimon's empirical skepticism, for while we can grasp what reason demands of an account of the necessity of causal relations – the inconceivability of the relation not holding, for example, and some insight into the connection between cause and effect – such a standard is not met in experience, in which we are merely given perceptions of one event following another. Maimon does allow that in *some* cases we can at least partially satisfy these standards, but like Hume he claims to “not grant the objective reality of the category of causality” (MGW 5:398).⁹

Unlike Hume, however, Maimon retains a commitment to reason even in the face of his denial of the possibility of complete rational insight into the empirical world.¹⁰ The reason for this largely comes from the peculiar notion of “real thought” that undergirds Maimon's position, and in the suspicions Maimon has about Kant's answer to the *quid juris* in the Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

At the risk of grossly caricaturing an incredibly complex position, the kernel of Kant's philosophy turns on the claim that human cognition involves two

faculties, sensibility and understanding: sensibility provides spatially and temporally structured intuitive content, which in turn is determined and cognized through the application of the concepts of the understanding. The connection between the two faculties is forged by the *a priori* forms that characterize each element: space and time in the case of sensibility, and the categories of the understanding. Cognition, for Kant, requires both intuitive content that is passively given in sensibility, and an act of conceptualization carried out by the understanding. Moreover – and crucially – each faculty is necessary, and neither can carry out the tasks of the other: sensibility and understanding “cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything” (A51/B75). In short, Kant offers a *discursive* theory of cognition, which holds that human experience requires both sensibility and understanding, and which claims that neither of these elements is reducible to the other.

The Deduction remains one of the more contentious parts of Kant’s system, and Maimon is not convinced that it is able to fulfill its promise of answering the *quid juris* by showing how the pure concepts of the understanding can be legitimately applied to sensible content given in intuition. The problem, Maimon argues, is that even if the forms of intuition – space and time – are taken to be *a priori* features of sensibility, the *content* of intuition is merely brutally given: it is something we simply encounter in our dealings with the world. But this means, Maimon claims, that we cannot give any account of how *a priori* forms of the understanding can be applied to this sensible content, since the two elements are so heterogeneous. Indeed, Maimon argues that Kant’s discursivity thesis, with its attendant cognitive dualism, faces all of the worries surrounding the more familiar Cartesian distinction between mind and body:

[T]he question *quid juris?* is one and the same as the important question that has occupied all previous philosophy, namely the explanation of the community [*Gemeinschaft*] between soul and body. ... [T]he question of the explanation of the soul’s union with the body reduces to the following question: how is it conceivable that *a priori* forms should agree with things given *a posteriori?* ... In the Kantian system, namely where sensibility and understanding are two totally different sources of our cognition, this question is insoluble. ... (ETP 37–38 [MGW 2:63])

Given his sharp distinction between sensibility and understanding, Kant can assert that categories determine *a posteriori* intuitive content, but he cannot provide a rational explanation of how this can occur, any more than a Cartesian dualist can explain the interaction of minds and bodies.¹¹

In place of Kant's discursive model of cognition, Maimon instead proposes an account of "real thought," which is guided by what he calls the Principle of Determinability. Although this is frustratingly opaque, the rudiments of determinability amount to the idea that in a judgment expressive of *a priori* real thought, the "given manifold must stand in a relation such that the subject [of the judgment] can be an object of consciousness in itself without the predicate, but the predicate cannot be an object of consciousness without the subject" (MGW 5:493). The judgment "The angle is right," for example, expresses a real thought, since "angle" can be a subject without the predicate "right," but the predicate requires the subject "angle." By contrast, "a stone that attracts gold" expresses, on Maimon's view, only an arbitrary thought, since both "the subject and the predicate can occur in consciousness without the other" (MGW 5:492).

Maimon's apostate rationalism leads him to reject the *Critique's* discursivity thesis, but the standards of explanation that the Principle of Determinability demands in its place are very high, and it is not clear why Kant – or indeed any non-rationalist – needs to accept them. This might lead to a kind of philosophical stalemate, but Maimon has a further arrow in his quiver: the nature and status of mathematical judgments. The problem with empirical intuition, on Maimon's view, arises from its merely brutally given nature, which suggests that the worries about discursivity could be avoided if the mere givenness of intuition could be reduced or eliminated entirely.¹² In the case of empirical objects, however, the standards of determinability are not met, since "the required relation between subject and predicate is not perceived" (MGW 5:494) and we "lack insight into the relation of determinability" precisely because of the brute givenness of content (MGW 5:496). In order to remedy this lack of insight, it seems, we would need some way of overcoming the passively given nature of intuition.

Mathematics and experience

This might appear to ask for the impossible – it seems obvious, after all, that we simply *do* receive sensible content from the world without insight into its determinable nature – except that in some instances we are not merely passively affected by objects, but instead create the intuitive content according to the conceptual rules of the understanding. The question of the *quid juris*, Maimon suggests, "would not come up if our understanding could produce objects out of itself according to its self-prescribed rules or conditions without needing to be given something from elsewhere" (ETP 37 [MGW 2:63]). Such a productive intellect would again seem far removed from our own limited cognition, but Maimon argues that mathematics provides us with an instance of this constructive capacity. In the *Streifereien*, he notes that an infinite intellect does not think

discursively, as we do, but rather his thoughts are all at once presentations. If one were to object that we have no idea of such a manner of thought, I answer: we certainly have a concept of it, in that we possess it at least in part. All concepts of mathematics that are thought by us are at the same time presented through *a priori* construction as real objects. Thus, in this we are similar to God. (MGW 4:42)

In presenting a constructive account of mathematics, Maimon is essentially following Kant's lead. It is important to note that for both Kant and Maimon, the construction characteristic of mathematics is taken to be guided by a concept, but it is not entirely clear exactly what kind of object such a procedure produces. This is a murky issue, and one that I cannot address in the detail a full answer would require. Instead, I will follow an interpretation of Kant's notion of construction proposed by Lisa Shabel, since I think it fits in nicely with Maimon's own emphasis as well. On Shabel's view, Kant's distinction between pure and empirical construction does not rest on postulating different entities, but rather on how one understands intuitions. Mathematical objects are not distinct things that exist in a realm of pure intuitions, but are rather understood themselves to be pure intuitions that are reflected *in* empirical intuitions. As Shabel puts it, "the pure intuitions which exhibit and construct mathematical concepts, and on which mathematical demonstrations are based, are intuitions of single, individual, sensible objects considered in conjunction with the procedure for the construction of those objects."¹³ The idea is not that there are two types of objects – one "imaged" in pure intuition and the other drawn on paper – but that the same actual construction on paper can at the same time serve as a pure intuition when its "rules of construction" are considered. So, for example, we can bisect line AB "mathematically" by constructing two circles with centers at A and B and with radii equal to AB, and then drawing a line between the two points where the circles intersect. When we carry this out on paper, we consider the actually drawn figure according to the pure rules of construction, and as a result treat the figure as a *pure* intuition. But we can also bisect line AB "mechanically," and make use of exactly the same actual figure, if we use a compass to determine specific magnitudes: employing this method, we would start by estimating a likely candidate for a midpoint, and then using the compass to make a cut on AB with A as the endpoint; we would then use the same compass opening to make a similar cut using B as the endpoint; if the cuts do not line up, we repeat the process, honing in on the midpoint. The difference then between the "mathematical" and "mechanical" constructions lies not in the type of figure produced, but rather in the way a figure is considered: "the mechanical demonstration is not distinguished from the mathematical demonstration by virtue of a distinction between an actually constructed figure and an imagined figure, but rather

by the way in which we operate on and draw inferences from that actually constructed figure."¹⁴

Although he does not ever detail exactly how construction is carried out, I propose that Maimon follows Kant in thinking of mathematics as constructive in the sense that Shabel develops. By Maimon's lights, however, in endorsing the constructive nature of mathematical judgments, Kant puts himself in an awkward and ultimately untenable position. On the one hand, Kant holds that synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible in the case of experience, in which the categories of the understanding determine the necessary structure of content that is given in a manner independent of our conceptual activities. On the other hand, he maintains that the judgments of mathematics are likewise synthetic and *a priori*, but here the necessity of mathematical claims is established because the content of these judgments is constructed, rather than simply encountered. We have two different and seemingly incompatible accounts of synthetic *a priori* judgments, and this, given Maimon's rationalist inclinations, is unacceptable, since we cannot provide any sufficient reason why the distinction holds. If mathematics provides us with a model of synthetic *a priori* judgments, then its methods should serve as the standard for *all* such claims.

Kant wants to keep mathematical and philosophical methodologies rather sharply demarcated, as the discussion in the chapter on the Discipline of Pure Reason in Dogmatic Use makes abundantly clear. There, he argues that since philosophical cognition "considers the particular only in the universal, [while] mathematical cognition considers the universal in the particular," the methods of the one cannot be legitimately applied to the other (A714/B742). While mathematics constructs its contents according to concepts, a transcendental concept does not guide construction of given intuitions, but only can provide a "synthesis of empirical intuitions (which thus cannot be given *a priori*), and since the synthesis cannot proceed *a priori* to the intuition that corresponds to it, no determining synthetic proposition but only a principle of the synthesis of possible empirical intuitions can arise from it" (A722/B750). As a result, "mathematics and philosophy are two entirely different things, although they offer each other their hand in natural science, thus... the procedure of the one can never be imitated by that of the other" (A726/B754).

But invoking such a distinction between mathematics and philosophy only works, it seems, if one already accepts the Kantian notion that the standards of philosophical explanation are satisfied by appeal to possible empirical intuition, rather than the more stringent Maimonian notions of determinability and construction. Kant seems to think in the Discipline that any attempt to impose mathematical methods onto philosophy leads only to antinomial or skeptical conclusions, but this does not cut against Maimon, who as an empirical skeptic is perfectly willing to countenance just this point. Instead, Maimon insists that the burden is on Kant to show why the standards of explanation that hold in

the case of mathematics should not also be imposed upon experience. After all, if mathematics is the paradigm case of necessary *synthetic* knowledge – and if this necessity is guaranteed only by construction – then it seems plausible to think that the same standard of necessity should apply to *all* synthetic knowledge. And, since Kant holds that empirical judgments can be necessary, the standards of construction would also seem to apply to synthetic *a priori* scientific claims about the world.

This point is brought out in the “Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus,” where Maimon notes that Kant’s system bases the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgments in mathematics on construction, and synthetic *a priori* judgments of experience on the application of the categories. Maimon claims that “the possibility of a construction is certainly a principle, on which all mathematical propositions can be based.” But, he continues,

How, from the principle that everything that appears does so according to the law of causality, can I derive, through the given objects of determinate propositions, that the sun’s rays necessarily melt the ice? From this principle it only follows that objects of experience in general must be thought of as causally related to one another, but in no way that it must be just these objects that stand in this relation. [Kant’s] answer to this question then fails, according to me: we know synthetic judgments merely in relation to an object of possible experience in general, but nothing of synthetic judgments that relate to determinate objects of real experience. (MGW 5:489–90)

The contrast Maimon presents between mathematical and empirical judgments rests, I propose, on the role – or lack of it – of construction in each case. Construction in mathematics establishes the reality of its concepts: a mathematical judgment is possible not only because it does not contain contradictions, but also because its content can be constructed. As Maimon puts the point, “I know that a triangle is possible only through the actual construction of a triangle” (MGW 5:491). By contrast, the concept of a regular decahedron contains no contradiction, but the attempt to construct it displays its impossibility. Likewise, the *a priori* rules of the understanding do not contain any contradictions – it is perfectly consistent to think of objects *in general* in causal relations, say – but here we lack the possibility of establishing the reality of the particular judgment through construction. The sun and the ice are objects simply given to us in intuition, and because of this cannot be shown to stand in a determinable relation.

Given these suspicions about the possibility of synthetic *a priori* judgment apart from mathematics, combined with his Humean worries about causal judgments, Maimon argues that Kant’s explanation of necessary judgments about the world, and the model of discursivity on which it is based, should be

rejected. In its place, the constructive account of mathematical judgments can serve as the rational model of cognition, for only in this case do we meet the explanatory demands for insight into the way in which content arises for us. This is what Maimon calls the *Entstehungsart* or “manner of origination”¹⁵ of something: as he puts the point in a note to the *Versuch*,

the sufficient ground for a thing is the complete concept of the way it arises [*Entstehungart*], and although we can approach ever more closely to it, we cannot reach it, because to explain the way that something arises we must presuppose something else that has already arisen (in accordance with the famous axiom: *ex nihilo nihil fit*). (ETP 203 [MGW 2:392])

An *Entstehungsart* requires not only the causal antecedents of something, but also *how* such origination is possible. So, for Maimon, in order to explain the possibility of a thing, it is not enough to show that its concept contains no contradiction; rather, in order to prove the “fact...that such a thing can be actually thought, one must in the bargain also prove the *manner* in which it is possible, or its ‘*Manner of Origination*,’ as for example, Euclid proved the possibility of parallel lines, or an equilateral triangle” (MGW 3:47).

For Maimon, mathematics provides us with a glimpse of what cognition would be like for a divine intellect, for whom content is created and not passively intuited – in this respect we are “similar to God.” When we prove something geometrically, for example, we do so by constructing an *a priori* object, and in doing so at least partially satisfy the rational demand for insight into how conceptual determinations apply to intuitive content. Maimon frequently speaks of the construction of geometric objects in intuition, and this might raise the worry that despite his rejection of the discursivity thesis, he illicitly retains something like the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions. It is important to note, however, that Maimon takes intuitions to reflect our cognitive limitations: we represent things in space and time – the pure forms of intuition – only because we do not have a complete conceptual grasp of them. This suggests that, at least in principle, intuitions have a conceptual foundation that remains inaccessible to us; if we had a complete conceptual grasp of the world, intuitions would be dispensable. This presents a view of intuition that sharply diverges from Kant’s position, and shows that despite the superficial similarity in terminology, Maimon’s notion of intuition does not require a tacit commitment to the discursivity thesis.¹⁶

The idea that intuition reflects the incompleteness of our cognition also has implications for the scope of construction. For all of the promise that mathematics holds, Maimon also recognizes that even here we encounter limitations, in particular concerning the axioms of geometry.¹⁷ For instance, the understanding defines a circle as a figure in which an infinite number of equal lines

are to be drawn from a given point, and the endpoints of these lines are to be joined. By rotating a point around a fixed point, we show that such a figure is possible, but to construct a circle in this way does not prove the material completeness of the concept of a circle, since only a finite number of lines can be drawn in intuition. More generally, the reliance of mathematics on intuition also reflects its limitations, since it cannot wholly rise to the level of pure thought: we can show that geometrical figures are possible in intuition, but we cannot fully grasp how this possibility is to be explained, since we lack “insight” into the conceptual grounds of the axioms of geometry. More generally, even mathematics contains an “experiential” component that resists complete conceptual determination: the axioms are given to us in a way that that remains brute. In Maimon’s terms, while mathematics is *a priori*, it is not *pure a priori* cognition, since it retains an element of the intuitive that pure thought cannot include. Mathematics could be made pure were we to have “insight into the true essence [*Wesen*]” of geometrical figures, but such a view would also make mathematical propositions analytic (ETP 37 [MGW 2:61]).

Such a view about the limitations of mathematics is especially pronounced in the *Versuch*, but as Maimon’s thought develops, he places more emphasis on the role of *a priori* construction, and less on the limitations that pure intuition imposes on our cognition. A claim in the *Streifereien* that it is “beyond doubt” that “mathematics has synthetic propositions” is typical of the later position (MGW 4:72). Moreover, the particular worries about the status of the axioms, for example, do not arise in Maimon’s last major work, the *Kritische Untersuchungen*, where he instead notes that the “principles and postulates [of logic] are very different from the axioms and postulates of mathematics. The latter get both their meaning and their objective reality through construction; the former do not,” and that mathematics “is a *pure a priori* cognition” (MGW 7:23, 57; emphasis added). While the reasons for this shift are not entirely clear, I suspect that Maimon’s position becomes increasingly more skeptical about the prospects for providing a positive account of empirical knowledge in terms of a complete conceptual determination of intuition that he entertains in the *Versuch*.¹⁸ While we might not reach the level of complete insight into the foundations of all mathematical constructions, we can at least provide an explanation of their *Entstehungsarten*: the construction of intuitive content provides the “proof” or test of determinable thought, by displaying its possibility according to conceptual rules. By contrast, the *Entstehungsarten* of empirical intuitions remain unknown to us, and hence fail to meet the standards of determinability.

The limits of rational insight

The challenge that this account of *Entstehungsarten* poses to Kant comes to the fore in Maimon’s objections to the arguments about causation that are

developed in the Second Analogy, where Kant attempts to show how the *a priori* category of causality can serve to determine the temporal ordering of causes and effects. Although Kant's position is notoriously complex, the essential point is that we distinguish between causal and coincidental series of events not by observing a difference in the content of our perceptions – *all* perceptions, after all, are given to us sequentially – but rather in “taking” some orders of perceptions to be bound down in an objective temporal order. To cognize a series of perceptions as causal – say, of seeing a ship floating downstream – is to impose a temporal order on them: the perception of the ship upstream precedes that of it downstream. The binding of perceptions is provided by the category of causality and distinguishes the event of the ship moving downstream from that of a non-causal series, such as my looking at a house, in which the order of perceptions is not temporally bound. In the latter case, I can start at the foundation and look up, or at the roof and look down, since the order in which I perceive the house does not reflect anything about the object in front of me. By contrast, I would not perceive the *event* of the ship moving downstream were I first to see it below a certain point on the river, and later above it.

Maimon offers a variety of objections to this account of causality, some of which suggest that he misunderstands Kant's position. In the *Prolegomena*, for example, Kant distinguishes between judgments of perception, which are taken to reflect only how things seem to me – “I see the ice cream, and then I see the sun, and then I see a runny pool of goo” – and judgments of experience, which Kant holds make objective claims about the world, rather than just the series of my perceptions – “The sun melts the ice cream.” Maimon makes the plausible objection that Kant cannot provide suitable criteria to distinguish the two types of judgment, but it is also not clear that this poses any threat to the account of the Second Analogy, which tellingly does not appeal to the difference between judgments of perception and judgments of experience.

If this were the extent of the challenge, then there would be little threat to Kant's views, but Maimon also proposes a deeper, and more pointed, objection. This concerns the precise way in which the category of causality can be applied to sensible intuitions, and what criteria Kant can provide to account for how such an application can be legitimated. The kernel of Maimon's challenge asks about how one can distinguish between the uses of different categories. As Maimon puts the point, Kant

does not provide any *a priori* criterion, whereby one could know whether a given manifold can be thought in a unity of form in general, still less any criterion by which one could know *in which unity* [this manifold could be thought]. Not every given manifold allows itself to be thought in some objective unity or other....In the manifold given to thought, then, an *a*

priori criterion must be found, whereby one can know not only whether this manifold can be thought in an objective unity in general, but also in which unity it can be thought. (MGW 5:476, emphasis added)

The category of causality, for instance, applies only to some series of perceptions, but – given Kant’s commitment to a discursive model of cognition – it is not clear how this discrimination can work. On the one hand, if some features of the perceptions themselves provided the grounds for the application of the category, then Kant would return to just the type of view that Hume so thoroughly skewered, and which the Second Analogy itself rejects, one in which we could as it were “read off” the causal features of the world from our perceptual experiences. On the other hand, if the category of causality is directly imposed on some orders of perceptions in order to bind their temporal sequence, such an application threatens to be merely arbitrary. All perceptions come to us sequentially in time, but if we cannot appeal to their content, then it appears that there can be no objective criteria that suitably guide the application of the category in some cases rather than others. This is not to deny that we in fact do make causal judgments, or apply the category of causality in our experience, but only that in doing so we are making wholly arbitrary impositions, or operate only on Humean principles of custom and habit.

It is important to emphasize that the challenge to Kant’s position again arises directly from Maimon’s suspicions about a discursive account of cognition. The reason we cannot read off causal features of perceptions stems from the fact that such content is merely given to us, in a non-conceptual manner; likewise, the application of the category of causality stands as an arbitrary imposition because the content of sensibility remains distinct from conceptual determination. Here too Maimon insists that our lack of insight into the *Entstehungsarten* of empirical cognitive content licenses just the skeptical conclusions he draws, since we cannot show that we meet the conditions of real thought. “My skepticism,” Maimon writes,

is based on this two-horned dilemma. Either the fact itself (that we apply the form of hypothetical judgments to empirical objects) is false, and the cited examples are based upon an illusion of the imagination, as I have more than once shown, [and] as such the categories have no use; or, [the fact] is true, and as a result it has no knowable ground, and the categories remain, according to their rigorous deduction and schematism, as before, mere forms which can determine no objects. ...

However, I allow the application of the categories to sensible, but not empirical, objects of pure mathematics, because here I find their application stands in a determinate relation. (MGW 5:250–51)

Were our experience to follow the mathematical model – in which content is constructed according to conceptual rules – the problem would be avoided, since the legitimacy of applying a pure concept to an intuition would be guaranteed by the construction of content guided by the category. We would still not attain wholly pure *a priori* judgments, since our cognition would still rest on intuitive content, but the *quid juris* could be answered.

The fate of philosophy

In our experience, alas, content is encountered rather than constructed, and the skeptical challenge remains in place. In an apt biblical metaphor, Maimon notes that we find ourselves like Moses, able to see what the Promised Land would look like, but being unable to enter it: “An uplifting and at once humbling voice calls out to him: ‘You should see the promised land from afar, but you may not enter it!’ (Deut 34:4). Still, fortunately the seeing and the entering are the same: for those who boast of being able to enter can, for their legitimation, do no more than show the distant view” (MGW 7:554).

Despite this conclusion, however, Maimon’s skepticism retains a hint of optimism. While we can never fully bridge the gap between thought and content, Maimon holds out the hope of asymptotically approaching this epistemic Promised Land. If the problem we confront as limited human cognizers rests on the fact that we are brutally given sensible content, then the solution would seem to require somehow overcoming or even eliminating such intuitive elements in our cognition. What precisely this task involves is never made wholly clear by Maimon, and it is tempting to think that he rejects all sensible experience, or that he holds out the hope of somehow creating a world out of mere thought. Such views border on the fantastical, if not actually delusional, but fortunately, I think a more prosaic account of the asymptotic approach to complete cognition can be provided. The idea is not that we reject the given elements of experience in favor of “constructing” a world, but rather that we seek to find the conceptual and rational underpinnings of the seemingly brute facts of our experiences. Maimon’s objections to Kant, I take it, arise in part from seeing the critical philosophy as ultimately committed to the inexplicability of certain foundational claims, concerning not just the structure of cognition but also the nature of the world. The transcendental distinction between sensibility and understanding consigns us to having all our knowledge ultimately rest on an element of cognition – intuition – that resists complete conceptual determination, and as such, precludes a wholly rational account of the world. Where Kant sees reason’s unceasing search for the unconditioned as an impulse that must be reined in on pains of falling prey to metaphysical antinomies, Maimon pushes reason even further, and demands that *all* givenness be overcome in a complete conceptual determination.

In this respect, Maimon anticipates in an interesting way both the Fichtean response to Kant, and the break that Hegel makes from his idealist counterparts. Fichte – who was clearly influenced by Maimon¹⁹ – rejects the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves, in favor of a position in which the subject *posits* itself as opposed to the not-self, and against which the self strives to comprehend the givenness that confronts it. Fichte, however, along with the early Romantics such as Schlegel, Novalis, Hölderlin, and Schelling, retains a commitment to something like an intellectual intuition, in which the self immediately grasps the truth of the mutually determining relation between I and not-I. Hegel famously rejects such a view as relying on an impossibly murky notion of such a grasp, but his suspicions about the role of intellectual intuition can already be seen in Maimon's claims about the need to conceptualize what is seemingly brutally given to us. Indeed, Hegel's conceptual turn might be seen as an attempt to rise to the challenge posed by Maimon's skepticism – though it is not at all clear whether Hegel's absolute idealism manages to avoid the apostate rationalism that Maimon develops.

Maimon's skepticism is then tempered by the recognition that we *can* make philosophical progress.²⁰ The more insight we gain into the *Entstehungsarten* of things, the less dependent we become on the simply given aspects of our knowledge, and the closer we can approach to a completely conceptual grasp of the world. This complete conceptualization admittedly is not something we can hope fully to achieve, but we can nonetheless seek to come as near to it as possible, and the philosophical enterprise for Maimon reveals just this paradoxical state, in which we ceaselessly strive to overcome the givenness of experience while also realizing that wholly doing so is beyond our power.²¹

What, then, in the final estimate should we make of Maimon's apostate rationalism? Given its close connections to the critical philosophy, it might be tempting to see Maimon's skepticism as an interesting though rather hermetic response to Kant, one that finds a target only in the specific – and not widely shared – account of cognition that is developed in Kant's works. Despite its seeming limitation of scope, though, I propose that in fact Maimon's apostate rationalism offers a challenge not just to transcendental idealism, but to the philosophical enterprise writ large. In particular, Maimon's "coalition" of Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume offers a new way of understanding the philosophical tradition, and forces some reappraisal of the standard pieties that see rationalism and empiricism as fundamentally opposed to one another. It also prompts a reassessment of the ways in which skepticism arises. While it is usual to see Hume's skepticism as the natural conclusion of the empiricist project inaugurated by Locke, through a Maimonian lens it is instead a commitment to an uncompromising *rationalism* that leads inexorably to a skepticism with decidedly Humean overtones. Indeed, the empiricist strands in Maimon's

thought are adopted precisely as a means of responding to the crisis that rationalism precipitates: in the absence of the insight into the *Entstehungsarten* of objects that reason demands, we are left only with a Humean account of the customs and habits of the mind that allow us to navigate – though not know – the world. Like Moses, who after years of struggle glimpses the Promised Land but is unable to enter it, reason offers us a vision of its demands, but also guarantees that we are not capable of meeting them. This, perhaps, is the central lesson to be gleaned from Maimon’s apostate rationalism.²²

Notes

1. The details of Maimon’s life are drawn from his *Autobiography*, found in Salomon Maimon, *Gesammelte Werke*, 7 vols., ed. Valerio Verra (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965–76), 1–588; as well as from Abe Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Salomon Maimon* (Stanford, Cal: Stanford University Press, 2006). In what follows, all passages from Maimon are my translation, with the exception of those from volume two of his *Gesammelte Werke*, which are drawn from Salomon Maimon, *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. Nick Midgley, Henry Somers-Hall, Alistair Welchman, and Merten Reglitz (New York: Continuum, 2010). References to Maimon’s *Gesammelte Werke* are abbreviated MGW, followed by volume and page number, and references to the translated *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* are abbreviated ETP. Both are cited parenthetically in the body of the text.
2. See Socher, *Radical Enlightenment* for a nice account of Maimon’s vexed relation to Judaism. For a good discussion of Maimon’s place in the larger context of German Idealism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
3. For discussion of Maimon’s relation to Spinoza, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 1 (2004): 67–96.
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), ch. 4.
5. On this point, it is telling that Maimon introduces what he calls “ideas of the understanding,” which play a role in our experience similar to what ideas of reason play in Kant’s system. For Maimon, an idea of the understanding is “the material completeness of a concept, in so far as this completeness cannot be given in intuition” (ETP 44 [MGW 2:74]). For instance, while the concept of a circle contains the definitional mark of an infinite number of equal lines drawn from a single point, we can never represent this infinity in intuition.
6. This is what Maimon will call an *Entstehungsart* (“manner of origination”), which will be discussed below.
7. Such a view is not without its peculiarities, since from it Maimon argues that actuality and possibility are independent of one another; the former concerns the representation of things in space and time, while the latter is governed by insight. All intuitions, for example, are actual but not possible, “in so far as we do not have any insight into the way they arise.” Concepts, by contrast, are “possible, i.e., we have insight into the ground of unity in their manifold; but they are not actual because this unity is not thought in time and space” (ETP 131 [MGW 2:248]).

8. Salomon Maimon, "Antwort des Hrn. Maimon auf voriges Schreiben," *Berlinisches Journal für Aufklärung* 9, no. 1 (1790): 52. Reprinted in Salomon Maimon, *Versuch über die Transszendentalphilosophie*, ed. Florian Ehrensperger (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), 239.
9. It is important to note that, for Maimon, the nub of Hume's skepticism is found not in concerns about the meaning of our causal language, but only in their application. As he puts it, Hume "does not derive the *concept* of cause from associations of ideas and habits [of the mind], but merely its supposed *use*. He doubts therefore merely its *objective reality*, in that he shows that the common human understanding could have arrived at a belief in the use of this concept through the confusion of the merely subjective and *comparatively* universal with the objective and *absolutely* universal" (MGW 7:58–59). For more on Maimon's interpretation of Hume, see Peter Thielke, "Apostate Rationalism and Maimon's Hume," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 4 (Oct. 2008): 591–618.
10. As will emerge below, this is a bit misleading, since Maimon holds that while we can never have a complete rational insight into the world, we can nonetheless approach this state, much as we can get ever nearer to an asymptote: "we grasp how their construction must be completed without being able to construct them completely" (ETP 46 [MGW 2:79]).
11. Paul Franks makes the case that Maimon misinterprets Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding as marking real difference between the faculties, where properly understood the distinction is only modal, in the sense that there is only a dependence relation between intuition and understanding. See Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 51–61. More generally, Franks sees Maimon not as raising objections that are internal to Kant's system, but rather as offering a dogmatic rationalism that starts from different premises than those that the critical philosophy endorses; as such, the "dialectic between Kant and Maimon will then be a clash between different programs with different presuppositions, not a conflict between a position and its putative refutation" (Paul W. Franks, "What Should Kantians Learn from Maimon's Skepticism?" in *Salomon Maimon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, ed. Gideon Freudenthal [Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003], 201). I hope to show, though, that the role of construction in mathematics does allow Maimon to offer direct criticisms of Kant.
12. In fact, Maimon claims that for the Leibnizian-Wolffian system, in which both sensible and intelligible elements "flow from one and the same cognitive source," the question is "easily resolved" (ETP 38 [MGW 2:63]).
13. Lisa A. Shabel, *Mathematics in Kant's Critical Philosophy: Reflections on Mathematical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 94.
14. *Ibid.*, 101.
15. Midgley et al. translate *Entstehungsart* as "way of arising" in Maimon, *Essay*.
16. For further discussion of Maimon's account of space and time, see Peter Thielke, "Kant and Maimon on Space and Time," in *Salomon Maimon*, ed. Freudenthal, 89–124.
17. For discussions of the limitations present even in mathematics, see both Meir Buzaglo, *Solomon Maimon: Monism, Skepticism, and Mathematics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); and especially Gideon Freudenthal, *Definition and Construction: Salomon Maimon's Philosophy of Geometry* (Berlin: Max Planck Institute, 2006).

18. The attempt in the *Versuch* to provide a conceptual account of intuitive content stands as one of Maimon's most ambitious – and also most obscure – arguments. Drawing from the notion of the infinitesimal in the calculus, in which two quantities that are in themselves infinitely small can stand in a determinate relation to one another, Maimon proposes that intuition can be treated in a similar manner. The content of cognition, on this view, has a conceptual foundation that remains inaccessible to our finite minds, though the relations *between* these conceptual foundations have a determinate “quantity” that we represent in intuition, much as a geometric line, for example, stands as a spatial representation of the infinitesimal relations that characterize its points. The content represented in intuition is then taken to reflect our *incomplete* grasp of these conceptual determinations. Intuition, on this view, is something like a spatiotemporal “integration” of the conceptual relations thought by the understanding; by basing the contents of intuition on a conceptual foundation, Maimon hopes to avoid the problems of brute givenness that he sees besetting Kant's discursive model of cognition. The view is, however, exceedingly difficult to make out, and it is perhaps not surprising that it largely disappears from Maimon's later works.
19. See Peter Thielke, “Getting Maimon's Goad: Discursivity, Skepticism, and Fichte's Idealism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 2001): 101–34.
20. What exactly this progress involves is never precisely specified, though the suggestion seems to be that it can most easily be found in mathematics.
21. Gideon Freudenthal, “Maimon's Philosophical Program: Understanding versus Intuition,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, vol. 8: *Philosophy and Science*, ed. Fred Rush and Jürgen Stolzenberg (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 83–105, provides a nice account of how Maimon presents us with a “philosophy in the middle,” in which we can neither rise to the level of pure reason nor descend to grasp complete particulars, and argues that this is the foundation of his skepticism.
22. I am grateful to Ahmed Alwishah, Yuval Avnur, Michael Green, Paul Hurley, Brian Keeley, Jim Kreines, and Julie Tannenbaum for their help with this.

12

Reinhold and the Transformation of Philosophy into Science

Kienhow Goh

Upon its first publication, the *Critique of Pure Reason* was widely perceived as advocating a form of subjective idealism or skepticism. Following the illustrious Moses Mendelssohn's portrayal of its author as "all-crushing," the work was increasingly misunderstood as promoting a destructive enterprise.¹ Things began to change dramatically when, from August 1786 to September 1787, the celebrated Weimar journal *Der teutsche Merkur* published a series of imaginary letters – later to be collected, and expanded upon, as the first volume of the *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie (Letters on the Kantian Philosophy)*. Through them, Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823) would come to shape the way that Kant was understood by an entire generation. The approach he takes in the letters is (and continues to be) unique in the unusual extent to which it relies on the Doctrine of Method to unravel the overall aim and significance of the work. Reinhold sees Kant's critique of reason as offering a viable route to meeting "the most pressing philosophical needs of our time," namely, those arising from uncertainty over "the right and power of reason in matters of religion" (LKP 5 [BKP 105])² – a clear allusion to the *Atheismusstreit* raging at the time.³ The public success of the letters led to the appointment of their author to a chair specially installed by the Duke of Weimar at the University of Jena for the study of the Kantian philosophy – an event which established the small university town of Jena as the mecca of post-Kantian speculative idealism for the next two decades.

With the publication of the *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens (Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation)* in 1789, Reinhold's role began to shift from that of an interpreter and advocate of the Kantian philosophy to its reformer and critic. Unlike Jacobi, Maimon, or Schulze, however, Reinhold did not ever question the feasibility of the critical project. He criticized the critique of reason not in order to call its claims or their importance into question, but to demonstrate them more clearly. The next two book-length publications – the first volume of the *Beiträge*

zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen (*Contributions to the Correction of Previous Misunderstandings of the Philosophers*) of 1790 and *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens (On the Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge)* of 1791 – exerted a profound influence on the younger German thinkers and writers who were drawn to the Kantian philosophy at this time. In these works, they discovered a powerful interpretation of Kant’s core insights and a bold vision of how these insights could be recast in systematic form. Also not to be underestimated is the personal example Reinhold set for them of how one could plough the depths of Kant’s philosophy as a *Selbstdenker* to address more directly and forcefully the spiritual needs of their time. Before he left Jena in 1794 to take up a professorship at Kiel, Reinhold published a second volume of the *Letters* (1793), in which he famously distinguished the power of choice (*Willkür*) from practical reason, and a second volume of the *Contributions* (1794), in which he introduced revisions to his concept of a system that proved to be highly consequential to the development of both the Idealists’ and the early Romantics’ anti-foundationalism.⁴

Reinhold’s contribution to the development of post-Kantian speculative idealism is often explained in terms of his attempt to establish philosophy as a science (*Wissenschaft*) by developing it as a system. The view that philosophy only qualifies as a science by taking the form of a system is already expressed by Kant in the Architectonic of Pure Reason. Given the large extent to which Reinhold models his own conception of a philosophical system after Kant’s, it is natural to regard Reinhold as simply executing Kant’s program. However, a comparative glance will quickly reveal fundamental and yet elusive differences in how they understand what it means for philosophy to be a science. Very roughly, Kant seems to understand a philosophical system in terms of the connection of means to ends (see A839/B867–A840/B868), whereas Reinhold seems to see it in terms of the connection of consequences to grounds. While the unity of Kant’s system is derived from its highest end – the final end (*Endzweck*) – the unity of Reinhold’s system is derived from its highest ground – the “absolutely first principle of philosophy.” In Daniel Breazeale’s words, “the major innovation in Reinhold’s approach to Kant’s philosophy at Jena was a dramatic shift of interest away from the consequences of transcendental idealism to its foundation and its starting-point.”⁵ More tellingly, although Kant is averse to identifying the system of reason itself with any result of our philosophical labor to realize it, Reinhold has no qualms in identifying the system he himself is trying to realize (through his effort to bring the “elementary philosophy [*Elementarphilosophie*]” to fruition) with the system itself.

Undergirding these differences are bold but subtle attempts on Reinhold’s part to revise Kant’s theory of philosophical cognition. This chapter aims to clarify Reinhold’s contribution by spelling out these revisions. It shows how Reinhold’s prepossessing effort to render its results compelling to its opponents

led him to transform the Kantian philosophy into a more rationalistic system than Kant ever intended. Inasmuch as Kant's distance from the rationalists is kept by his commitment to dispossessing reason of any capacity for intuition, Reinhold's readiness to assign intuition a role in the philosophical use of reason signals a distinctively rationalistic strain in his thought. By acknowledging an intuitional basis for the concept of representation (that is, mere [*bloße*] representation), Reinhold is able to secure the results of the Kantian philosophy through a science that has *a priori* forms of representations for its object in a way which Kant's theory of objects of possible experience does not, thereby allowing him to introduce into philosophy determinate and accurate concepts of a sort that are akin to mathematical ones.

Can philosophy be like mathematics?

Since antiquity, rationalist philosophers have aspired to the certainty and evidence of mathematical proofs. In the modern era, the aspiration is kept alive by rationalist philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff, who attempt to prove "eternal truths" *more geometrico*. Kant sees the project as a fruitless one. In the Discipline of Pure Reason, he argues that the use of the mathematical method in philosophy can produce nothing but "houses of cards" (A727/B755). Since philosophical and mathematical cognition are both functions of reason, it is natural for us to be beguiled into thinking otherwise. However, rationalist philosophers overlook the fact that mathematical cognition appeals to *a priori* intuitions in a way that philosophical cognition does not. Philosophical cognition is "rational cognition from concepts," whereas mathematical cognition is "rational cognition from the construction of concepts" (A713/B741). To construct a concept is to exhibit the concept's object *a priori* in intuition. For example, the mathematician constructs the concept of a triangle by drawing an individual triangle. By contrast, the philosopher is not in the business of constructing concepts. He analyzes the concept of a triangle "without thereby getting any further than the mere definition [of the concept] with which [he] had to begin" (A719/B747).

Through the construction of concepts, the mathematician is able to demonstrate complex mathematical concepts or principles from a set of simple definitions. To define a concept is "to exhibit originally the exhaustive concept of a thing within its boundaries" (A727/B755), that is, to simply list the thing's attributes without having to derive them from any other concept or principle. In defining a mathematical concept, the mathematician does not run the risk of listing too many or too few of the attributes of the concept's object, because "the concept is first given through the definition" (A731/B759). The concept's object is "defined into existence" so to speak. In defining a philosophical concept, however, the philosopher ends up with an *arbitrary* and *incomplete*

concept (i.e., a concept that lists too many or too few of the attributes of the concept's object and is derived from other concepts). Kant explains this by comparing philosophical concepts (substance, cause, force, etc.) with empirical concepts (gold, fire, water, etc.). The object of an empirical concept is not constructed *a priori* in pure intuition, but given *a posteriori* in empirical intuition. It is inevitable for each of us to understand such a concept differently. For example, those of us who happen to know that gold never rusts include the attribute of never rusting in the definition of *gold*, while those who happen not to know this do not include the attribute in the definition. The boundaries of our concept of gold are prone to shift according to what we happen to know about gold. To be sure, philosophical concepts are unlike empirical concepts in being *a priori*. But they are no different from empirical concepts in this regard: we cannot exhibit their objects *a priori* in pure intuition. Thus philosophy "fumbles around in nature with discursive *a priori* concepts without being able to make their reality intuitive *a priori* and by that means confirm it" (A725/B753). On the other hand, we cannot, in any straightforward sense, exhibit these concepts' objects *a posteriori* in empirical intuition either. The "objects" are *syntheses of empirical intuitions* which are only given *a posteriori* through *a manifold of empirical intuitions*. They are given *a posteriori* in empirical intuition in the peculiar sense of their furnishing the *a priori* rules according to which the manifold is synthesized in the unity of apperception.

Unlike the rationalist philosopher, the transcendental philosopher does not make analytic judgments, but synthetic ones. He does not merely analyze *a priori* concepts, but the concept of *a thing in general*. Still, the concept of a thing in general can only be given *a posteriori* through a manifold of empirical intuitions. It cannot be exhibited *a priori* in pure intuition. Insofar as it contains an empirical component, it is obscure, and the transcendental philosopher can never be certain that he has rid it completely of its obscurity (A728/B756). His concept of it arises from nothing more than a discursive use of reason *in abstracto*, and cannot be more than tentative and open-ended. Consequently, we cannot achieve a *rational cognition* (*cognitio ex principiis*) of a past philosopher's concepts by merely *learning* them. In learning the concepts, we fail to acquire the concepts through our *discursive* use of reason *in abstracto* (i.e., inferring them from the principles from which the philosopher has inferred them), and end up with a *historical cognition* (*cognitio ex datis*) of them. By contrast, we cannot fail to achieve a rational cognition of mathematical concepts by learning them, because we cannot acquire the concepts at all except through our *intuitive* use of reason *in concreto* (i.e., by constructing them).

According to Kant, reason demands that philosophy take the form of a system of rational cognitions according to an idea of systematicity that reason itself determines *a priori*. This "system of pure reason" is more than a collection of parts, a *technical unity*; it is a whole that precedes its parts, an *architectonic unity*, that is without

any “contingent addition or indeterminate magnitude of completion” (A832/B860–A835/B864). Moreover, Kant stresses that the system is, and can function as, nothing but an “archetype for the assessment of all attempts to philosophize”:

philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, which is nowhere given *in concreto*, but which one seeks to approach in various ways until the only footpath, much overgrown by sensibility, is discovered, and the hitherto unsuccessful ectype, so far as it has been granted to humans, is made equal to the archetype. (A838/B866)

Kant clearly maintains a gulf between the system of reason and any result of our effort to realize it: on the one side is the objective and archetypal system that constitutes philosophical science; on the other is each of our subjective and ectypal attempts to approach the system through our philosophizing. For him, philosophical science is more of an abstract ideal than a concrete reality.

As it turns out, Reinhold acknowledges Kant’s point that philosophy cannot be like mathematics, *but only for as long as philosophical cognition is cognition from mere concepts*. However, philosophical cognition is only cognition from mere concepts for the “situation of philosophy” until their time. Upon the discovery of the first principle of the elementary philosophy – the “principle of consciousness” (or the fact on which it is based) – the situation turns around. In Reinhold’s words, Kant’s point “only [applies] to what has passed for philosophy so far, and even to the *critical* philosophy, but not to that philosophy for which the critical philosophy was only intended to *pave the way*” (FPK 81 [FPW 103]) – the system of philosophy which has the elementary philosophy and the principle of consciousness for its inmost foundations.

The systematization of philosophy

As a committed *Aufklärer*, Reinhold believes that reason has the potential to transform and improve human lives and societies. The philosophy of an age is the highest product of the “self-development of reason” for that age. If philosophical reason (*philosophierende Vernunft*) were to be efficacious as a socio-historical force, disagreeing philosophical factions must reconcile their differences and standardize their practices.⁶ This is not to say that Reinhold will have everyone think like a philosopher. Indeed, common sense (*gesunder Menschenverstand*) is all that one needs to be a good human being.⁷ Still, the integrity of common sense is more effectively safeguarded if the specialists can be made to agree with each other. As long as philosophy is fraught with internal strife and conflict, reason’s impact on humanity will continue to be hampered. Thus Reinhold is interested, first and foremost, not so much in developing positions of his own on substantive philosophical issues as he is in reforming philosophy itself. To him,

the predominant problem is not so much a lack of philosophical positions as it is an overabundance of them.

Given his interest in the reform of philosophy, Reinhold is naturally drawn to Kant's idea of the systematicity of philosophical science. Like Kant, he believes that reason dictates not only *what* philosophy propounds, but *how* it expounds what it propounds. Along Kantian lines, Reinhold writes of the "essential form of philosophy" that the "philosophically determinate concept of [each of its parts] is not possible without the concept of the whole"; a philosophical system "can contain nothing arbitrary throughout, nothing dependent on the contingent constitution of the spirit [*Geist*] and to this extent changeable," and nothing "which cannot be referred back [*zurückgeführt*] to the necessary and the universal in the human spirit" (BBM I 19–22). Nevertheless, Reinhold is dissatisfied with the system as Kant leaves it, not because its concepts or principles are not systematically interconnected, but because they are not systematically interconnected *in such a way as to be deducible (and deduced) from a single concept or principle*.

The influence of Descartes's foundationalist conception of knowledge is unmistakable here.⁸ But what is, for Descartes, a personal quest is, for Reinhold, the highest aspiration of an epoch. As we have noted, Reinhold sees philosophy as a product of reason's self-development. Given the unity of reason, there can, strictly speaking, be no more than one philosophy. The standard foundationalist recommends that philosophy take the form of a system which has all of its concepts or principles deduced from a first principle (or a set of first principles) *in order that a set of methodological goals might be achieved*. But nothing in the recommendation suggests that there should be no more than one such system. By contrast, Reinhold considers the systematicity of his Kant-inspired system not only to be a matter of *methodological practice*, but of *metaphysical theory*. In his eyes, there is a theoretical answer not only to this or that *material* question of philosophy, but to the question of the *form* of philosophy itself. A philosophical system is incomplete until it "turns unto itself," so to speak, and accounts for itself.⁹ Accordingly, there is *either one* system of philosophy *or none at all*: "the mere existence of *several* philosophies is reason to be convinced that *none* exists" (BBM I 4).

Nevertheless, the rationale behind Reinhold's break with Kant must be sought in an answer to the question: Why does Reinhold insist that all the concepts or principles of a philosophical system be deducible (and deduced) from a single concept or principle? A concise answer can be found in the *Foundation*, where Reinhold criticizes the critique of reason for being "neither sufficiently *general* (comprehensive [*umfassende*]) nor *firm* to carry the entire scientific edifice of philosophy" (FPK 92 [FPW 129]; see also BBM I 263).

With regard to its scope, Reinhold is convinced that Kant's division of philosophy into theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy must be preceded

by, and deduced from, a more elementary science. Only through this “elementary philosophy” can support and unity be lent to the entire system of philosophy: “Without such a *general elementary science* which lies at the basis of the *particular* – the *theoretical* and the *practical* – *elementary sciences* as the ultimate scientific foundation, the systematic unity of the *entire* elementary philosophy, much less of *philosophy in general*, is not thinkable at all” (FPK 91 [FPW 127–28]).¹⁰ As the foundation of the theoretical sciences of logic and metaphysics, as well as the practical sciences of rights and duties, the elementary philosophy is essentially different from the *philosophia prima* of all previous dogmatic systems of philosophy (which is identified as either logic or metaphysics). Reinhold is critical of the Kantians’ definition of metaphysics on two counts. First, as a result of Kant’s failure to develop a *metaphysics of supersensible nature*, his followers mistake the only part of the metaphysics of nature which Kant has developed – namely, the *metaphysics of sensible nature* – for the whole of the metaphysics of nature (see FPK 89–91 [FPW 121–26]).¹¹ Second, Reinhold is not inclined to follow the Kantians in calling the pure branch of practical philosophy the *metaphysics of morals*, but proposes to adhere to the tradition of reserving the term *metaphysics* for theoretical philosophy. What Kant dubs “metaphysics of morals” is in fact no metaphysics at all, since metaphysics is supposed to be concerned with “*objects* that SUBSIST, and consequently objects that belong to theoretical, not practical philosophy” (FPK 91 [FPW 126]) – a point that Kant himself acknowledges when he refers to the metaphysics of nature as “*metaphysics in the narrower sense*” (A842/B870).

With regard to its foundation, Reinhold criticizes Kant for failing to proceed from any common ground with his opponents. As a serious student of Locke, Leibniz, and Hume, Reinhold does not dismiss any of them lightly. He explains their differences with Kant by a sophisticated theory of *misunderstanding*, a theory he employs as a double-edged sword: by taking the *agreement* “of beardless and bearded scribblers” with Kant (ENT 8 [VNT 13]), as well as the *disagreement* of philosophers with him, to be more apparent than real, Reinhold is able to fend off rival interpretations of Kant, at the same time as he reconciles the philosophers’ differences with him. To ascribe the charlatans’ unity with Kant to misunderstanding is to say that they do not really agree with him at all. Likewise, to ascribe the philosophers’ differences from Kant to misunderstanding is to say that they do not disagree with him at bottom. The main task of the reform of philosophy is to clear up (*aufklären*) misunderstanding – a task that involves finding the common ground of different philosophical factions that “[reconciles] the principles [one] was seeking with what is *true* in all former systems” (ENT 12 [VNT 24]). Once misunderstanding is cleared up, agreement will follow. Reinhold believes that philosophers misunderstand each other not because they fail to attend to the ordinary meaning of words or lack good will toward it. Rather, the cause is rooted in the lack of uniformity

in their attempts to make distinct the ordinary meaning of words that defines the “situation of philosophy” itself (see FPK 75 [FPW 89–90]). For any given concept, some philosophers take it to include more attributes than it does, and some less. This is unavoidable as long as the concept includes complex attributes (i.e., attributes which are only explainable by attributes it does not include). However, if a concept were only to include simple attributes (i.e., attributes which are explainable by attributes it includes), it would furnish us with a tool for clearing up the misunderstanding of concepts which include complex attributes by explaining those attributes of the concepts which the concepts do not themselves explain. Such a “self-explanatory concept” would be the “highest” of the concepts in the sense of being the most universal: its simple attributes would apply to the complex attributes of the other concepts.

In this way, an indeterminate and inaccurate concept could be made determinate and accurate by being determined through a thoroughly determinate and accurate concept. As Reinhold sees it, a principle *presents* a concept by *exhibiting* the attributes that the concept *includes*. The absolutely first principle of a system is the principle from which the other principles of the system are deduced in the sense of being determined (i.e., made determinate and accurate) through it. The first principle is distinguished from the other principles by being “thoroughly determined through itself [*durchgängig durch sich selbst bestimmt seyn*].” It exhibits attributes so simple that they cannot, and need not, be explained through attributes it does not exhibit (see FPK 72–73 [FPW 83–84]). There cannot be more than one such principle for the system. If there were several of them, their systematic relation can only be clarified by showing them to be determinable through a higher principle, or by showing one of them to be that through which the others are determinable.¹²

It is with the aim of clearing up misunderstanding between philosophical factions that Reinhold insists that the first principle be not just a *material*, but a *formal*, foundation of elementary philosophy (and hence of the whole system of philosophy) (see FPK 84–85 [FPW 109–11]). The first principle serves as a material foundation by expressing a self-evident or apodictically certain fact. But it serves as a formal foundation by determining the boundaries of the other concepts (i.e., the meanings of the other words) of the system. Accordingly, the first principle must not only be *universally valid* (*allgemeingültig*), but *universally accepted* (*allgemeingeltend*). A proposition is universally valid when no one who understands it fails to find it to be true, and universally accepted when no one fails to understand it *simpliciter* (see BBM I 150). A universally accepted proposition is *not* a proposition which cannot fail to be admitted by someone who understands it, since this is just what it means for a proposition to be universally valid. On the other hand, it is too strong to claim of a universally accepted proposition that it cannot fail to be understood by everyone, because people who are not capable of any understanding (e.g., infants, children, the

intellectually disabled) would also not fail to understand it. Rather, a universally accepted proposition is one which cannot fail to be understood by anyone who is capable of understanding, that is, cannot be misunderstood. In Reinhold's words, "it either *cannot* be thought at all, or it *must* be thought *rightly*" (BBM I 356; FPK 74 [FPW 87]).

The science of the faculty of representation

Substantively, the elementary philosophy is a *science of the faculty of representation*, a science which cannot, insofar as it presupposes Kant's reform of philosophy, be founded at any earlier time in history. Before Kant, philosophers mixed up the *logical* question of what the faculty of representation consists in (*worin*) with the *metaphysical* question of where the faculty comes from (*woraus*). Their *philosophia prima* is either logic or metaphysics, and their first principle either the Principle of Non-Contradiction or the Principle of Sufficient Reason. With his discovery of the concept of possible experience, Kant opens the door to an inquiry into the *immanent structure* of consciousness, as opposed to the previous inquiry into its *transcendent origin*. If Kant's Copernican revolution were not to be undone, critical investigations into the conditions of the possibility of cognition must be clearly distinguished from dogmatic investigations such as those into the nature of the soul, the organization of the body, or the interaction of the soul and the body.¹³ It is in view of this task that Reinhold characterizes the elementary philosophy as the "science of what is determined *a priori* in the representer [*Vorstellende*]," that is, what is determined in the representing subject *as a mere (bloße) faculty of representation*, rather than *as a substance* or *representing force*. In particular, dogmatic rationalists have been led astray by their preoccupation with the *material* bases of representations to speculate about the substance or representing force, while they should have confined themselves to the *formal* bases of representations by focusing on the mere faculty of representation (see BBM I 61–63).

The mere faculty of representation "must be expressed in a mere representation, since it is only through this faculty that it becomes a mere representation" (BBM I 63). Accordingly, the science of the faculty of representation can proceed from an act of *reflection on* (rather than from one of *abstraction* or *induction from*) our representation (see FPK 70 [FPW 78]). By the act of reflection, we grasp a *fact (Tatsache)* that expresses the "totality of [individual] cases and the laws in which they are connected," "the universal in the particular – not as something separated from it, but as a necessary condition and a moment that is posited in and with it."¹⁴ The fact is expressed by the first principle of the science of the faculty of representation (and hence of the whole system of philosophy) – the "principle of consciousness [*Satz des Bewusstseyns*]" : "In consciousness, the representation is distinguished by the representing subject

from the representing subject and the represented object [*Objekt*], and related to both" (BBM I 167).¹⁵ Consider our representation of a tree. The representation is not us, but belongs to us. We are the subject who has the representation. But the representation of the tree is not the tree either, since the tree *as it is represented through the representation* can change (for example, in its size as we move away from the tree or in its shape as we move around the tree), while the tree remains the same. The tree is the object of which the representation is a representation.¹⁶ For Reinhold, the principle of consciousness expresses a fact which cannot fail to be misunderstood, because it "consists solely of CONSCIOUSNESS as it functions in all people according to basic laws, and what follows directly from that and is really conceded by all thinkers" (ENT 26 [VNT 66]).

Ironically, Reinhold is likely to have been led by Kant himself to assign such an unusually fundamental place to representation in his system. In a letter of December 1787, Kant remarked that, whenever he runs into difficulties, he "need only look back at the general picture of the elements of knowledge, and of the mental powers pertaining to them, in order to discover elucidations [he] has not expected" (C 10:514), thereby alluding to his hierarchical classification in the Transcendental Dialectic of the different kinds of representations (see A319/B376–A320/B377) (often dubbed his *Stufenleiter*). However, the significance of the "representation" of the principle of consciousness – what Reinhold calls a "representation in general" or "mere representation" – turns out to be completely different from that of the "representation" of Kant's *Stufenleiter*. A *mere* representation is in the first instance a "representation in its narrower sense." A representation *in its narrower sense* is a representation considered apart from its *outer conditions*. A representation's outer conditions are its *represented object* and its *representing subject*, while its inner conditions are its *matter* and its *form*. Though a representation's outer conditions are no less necessary for its existence than its inner conditions, they are distinct from the representation in a way which the inner conditions are not. Reinhold explains the difference by comparing the outer conditions to the parents of a human being and the inner conditions to his soul and body (see ENT 91 [VNT 199]). Though the human being's parents are no less necessary for his existence than his soul and body, they are not constitutive of him in the way his soul and body are. A representation's matter is the part of it which belongs to the represented object, while its form is the part of it which belongs to the representing subject. Though we have no clue what the matter and the form of a representation are *in themselves*, we can abstract them from the representation through our representation (that is, our concept) of it. The matter is *given* through receptivity (i.e., susceptibility to be affected from inside or outside) and so conditioned by the way it is affected to take the form of a manifold; the form is *produced* through spontaneity (i.e., activity which has its ground in itself) and so conditioned by the

way it acts to take the form of a unity. Therefore, every representation takes the form of a unity of a manifold.

A representation *in its narrower sense* can be (i) a sensible representation, (ii) a concept, or (iii) an idea. Since the principle of consciousness is true of a representation regardless of whether it is a sensible representation, concept, or idea, it presents a concept of representation which is more generic than that of a representation *in its narrower sense* – the concept of a representation *in its narrowest sense*. A representation *in its narrowest sense* is a representation considered apart from the attributes by which one kind (*Art*) of representation is distinguished from another, that is, the common genus (*Gattung*) of the three different kinds of representations. It is what Reinhold means by a “representation in general” or “mere representation.” Though the concept of mere representation has the same *scope* as Kant’s concept of representation in the *Stufenleiter*, its *content* is importantly different. It is a generic concept (*Gattungsbegriff*) which encompasses a sensible representation, concept, and idea, not by virtue of the *vagueness* of its content, but of its *narrowness*. What Kant is ultimately lacking is a *Gattungsbegriff* of representation.¹⁷

On Reinhold’s view, we cannot have a representation of something without being conscious of it, and vice versa (see ENT 152–54 [VNT 323–27]). Yet we can be conscious (i.e., have a representation) of something without *being conscious of our being conscious* (i.e., having a representation of our having a representation) of it. In this way, he is able to debunk the myth of unconscious representations, *but not without recasting what we ordinarily mean by “consciousness of an object” as a kind of second-order consciousness*. First of all, the consciousness which arises in and with a representation – what Reinhold calls “consciousness in general” – is nothing but the genus of three different kinds of consciousness: (i) *clear consciousness of a representation*, (ii) *distinct consciousness of the representer or self-consciousness*, and (iii) *consciousness of a determinate object (bestimmten Gegenstand) or cognition* (see ENT 153–54 [VNT 325–26]; BBM I 220–21). In particular, we are prone to confound cognition with consciousness in general.

Cognition is not *mere* representation, but a kind of representation. It is related to a cognized object in the same way that a representation is related to a represented object. Nevertheless, while representation is simple, cognition is complex. In the *Attempt*, Reinhold characterizes cognition in terms of the *consciousness of a determinate object*. To be conscious of an object as a determinate object, it is not enough to represent (i.e., to distinguish the representation of it from, and relate it to) an object. We must represent the object *as an object*: “the object [must] not only [be] distinguished from mere representation, it [must] also [be] *represented as distinguished from it*” (ENT 161, translation modified [VNT 341]). But an object must first be an object (i.e., be represented) before it can be represented as an object (i.e., represented as represented).¹⁸ Since we can only conceive an object as something, concepts are indispensable to cognition.

For this reason, intuition is indispensable to it too. A concept can only be related to its object through another representation. Since intuition alone is related immediately to its object, every concept must ultimately be related to some intuition, and cognition must involve concept and intuition.

Between 1789 and 1791, Reinhold's theory of cognition undergoes a fundamental revision. In the *Attempt*, he admits *a priori* cognition of the forms of *understanding and sensibility* (ENT 234–43 [VNT 482–97]), but not *pure* cognition of the forms of *reason*¹⁹: “reason,” he writes, “cognizes nothing” (ENT 251 [VNT 514]). Contrarily, in *Contributions I*, he comes to think of reason as the faculty of *pure intellectual cognition*. The above explanation of cognition, he concedes in the “Explanation of the Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation,” provides too thin a criterion for the Kantian concept of cognition. If cognition were nothing but the representation of an object as an object, the representation of a representation or the representer (both the concept of a concept) would also count as cognition (BBM I 392–93). By this explanation, intuition would no longer be indispensable for cognition. As a result, Reinhold replaces his previous explanation of cognition with the “principle of cognition [*Satz der Erkenntnis*]”: “In cognition, the represented object [*Gegenstand*] is distinguished from the represented representation and the represented representer” (BBM I 223). By this principle, the object of cognition must in principle be something other than a representation and the representer. Moreover, since both a representation and the representer must be represented before they can be distinguished from the represented object, clear consciousness of a representation and distinct self-consciousness are now incorporated into cognition as essential components of it (BBM I 391).

Running parallel to the revision of Reinhold's theory of cognition is a revision of his theory of intuition. In the *Attempt*, he has (notwithstanding his admission of *a priori* intuitions [see ENT 191–98 (VNT 398–410)]) simply identified a sensible intuition with an intuition in general. In *Contributions I*, he comes to admit a *pure intellectual intuition*. A pure intellectual intuition is that through which a concept of pure intellectual cognition is related to its object. Reinhold explains it by contrast with a sensible inner intuition. Inasmuch as they arise from the representer's self-affecting (i.e., the affecting of its receptivity by its spontaneity), both kinds of intuitions are inner intuitions and represent something determined in itself. But while the matter of a sensible inner intuition is determined *a posteriori* through its being affected, the matter of a pure intellectual intuition is determined *a priori* in the faculty of representation. A “pure intellectual intuition” earns its name from the fact that its matter is related to what is *not* sensible in the representer. It “is related to an object that can be represented neither as a mere representation, nor as the representer, but only as the *form of representation* which is determined *a priori* and characteristic of the subject to this extent” (BBM I 249, emphasis added).

Although the form of representation is *actual* only insofar as it is represented, it is determined prior to its being represented according to (*nach*) its *possibility* (see BBM I 245).²⁰ Since a concept of pure intellectual cognition is related to its object through a pure intellectual intuition, pure intellectual cognition has nothing but the form of representation for its object.

A philosophy like mathematics

Once the concept of representation (that is, *mere* representation) is in place, Reinhold feels justified to abandon Kant's conception of philosophical cognition as cognition from mere concepts: "it is [no longer] the case that the new science of the faculty of representation or elementary philosophy demonstrates *merely* from *concepts*" (FPK 79, translation modified [FPW 99]). In declaring his philosophical system to be grounded on the "consciousness of an *actual fact*" (see FPK 70–72, 78, 81 [FPW 77–82, 96, 104]), Reinhold is in effect claiming that the gulf Kant maintains between philosophical and mathematical cognition has been overcome. As we have seen, the absolutely first principle of the elementary philosophy (and hence of the whole system of philosophy) is the principle of consciousness. Since the principle of consciousness presents the concept of representation, another way to put the same point is that philosophy is founded on the concept of representation. Philosophy is thereby "mathematicized" *not* in the substantive sense of its coming to consider things exclusively in terms of *quanta*, but in the following methodological sense: the concept of representation no longer arises from a *discursive* use of reason *in abstracto*, but from an *intuitive* use of reason *in concreto*; it no longer yields an arbitrary and incomplete *exposition* of representation, but a necessary and exhaustive *definition* of it.

The intuitional nature of the concept of representation can be clarified by comparing it with mathematical concepts. Mathematical objects lie originally latent in the forms of appearances prior to all mathematical explanations. Before we can explain them, we must first raise them to consciousness. According to Kant, we do so by constructing their concepts *a priori* in pure intuition. Similarly, representation lies originally latent in consciousness. In order to explain it, we must first raise it to consciousness. Though Reinhold does not call the act of raising representation to consciousness *construction*, he characterizes it as an act that closely resembles it: *reflection*. He writes of the concept of representation that it is "drawn from the CONSCIOUSNESS of an *actual fact*," and explains the consciousness in question as a "simple *reflection* on an actual fact of consciousness" (FPK 70, translation modified [FPW 77–78]) – an act involving the relevant *collation* (*Vergleichung*) of what is already extant (that is, in a latent form) in consciousness. Like construction, *reflection* is a *synthetic* act that takes place "independently of all philosophizing." By

contrast, *explanation* is an *analytic* act of reconnecting (the concept of) a representation with (the concepts of) its attributes. The analysis of the concept of representation is necessarily preceded by a synthesis of it (see FPK 72 [FPW 82]), because we can only *reconnect* what has been connected before: “If the bond of two representations is to be made conscious, this bond must have previously occurred, and what the understanding represents as bound must have previously been bound” (ENT 212, translation modified [VNT 439]). Synthesis gives rise to a “simple” and “unexplainable” concept of representation by first separating a representation from its attributes, while analysis gives rise to a “complex” and “explainable” concept of it by reconnecting the representation with the separated attributes (see FPK 71 [FPW 79]).

At the same time, Reinhold believes that we can come to reflect on the fact only through a gradual and laborious path of the analytic progress of philosophical reason in history. As we have noted, he believes that the elementary philosophy (and hence philosophical science) cannot be founded at any earlier time in history, because it presupposes the results of Kant’s critique of reason. Someone of Kant’s genius must first attend to the attributes of the *specific* concepts of sensible representation, concept, and idea before we can come to spell out the attributes of the *generic* concept of representation. More precisely, Kant must first *explain* each of the different kinds of representations before we can be led by the question of their common genus to *reflect* on representation *per se* (see FPK 78 [FPW 96–97]). Before the question is raised, philosophers naturally take the concept of a *thing* (as opposed to a *representation*) to be the highest concept, and the attribute of *thinkability* (as opposed to *representability*) to be the highest attribute.

The revision of Reinhold’s theory of cognition (and of intuition) between 1789 and 1791 is in fact a result of his attempt to delve deeper into the nature of philosophical cognition. In the *Attempt*, he has simply identified the faculty of cognition in general with the faculty of empirical cognition. In *Contributions I*, he comes to understand the faculty of cognition in general as the genus of two distinct kinds of faculties: the *lower (empirical) faculty of cognition* (which consists of *sensibility* and *understanding*), and the *higher (pure) faculty of cognition* (which consists of *reason*) (see BBM I 250–54). By the *pure faculty of cognition*, Reinhold has in mind the “faculty by which we recognize *the forms of representations* as determined *a priori*” (FPK 67, translation modified [FPW 71]; emphasis added). While the empirical faculty of cognition is responsible for *empirical cognitions*, the pure faculty of cognition is responsible for *pure intellectual cognitions*. Pure intellectual cognitions have nothing but “the forms of representations” for their objects, because their concepts are related to their objects through *pure intellectual intuitions*. Through pure intellectual intuitions, the transcendental philosopher is able to cognize “the forms of representations” as something more than mere conceptual rules of synthesis: he is able to exhibit the rules *a*

priori in pure intuition. Accordingly, in the *Foundation*, Reinhold distinguishes his science of the faculty of cognition from Kant's theory of an object of possible experience as follows:

the one has for its object the object of experience, i.e., what is cognizable *a posteriori*, insofar as it is represented through the *a priori* determined forms of the sensible representation and of the concepts; the other has for its object these forms themselves *as what is originally cognizable a priori*. (FPK 67, translation modified, emphasis added [FPW 70])

The science of the faculty of representation has the *a priori* forms of representations for its objects in a way which Kant's theory of an object of possible experience does not in the sense that it is developed on the basis of cognitions whose concepts are related to their objects through pure intellectual intuitions, that is, pure intellectual cognitions.

Reinhold's move beyond Kant's conception of philosophical cognition (as cognition from mere concepts) is especially evident from his admittance of definitions into philosophy. The principle of consciousness is no mere definition, but it makes philosophical definitions possible for the first time by presenting the "highest definition" from which all other philosophical definitions are supposed to follow. Recall that Kant is kept from admitting definitions into philosophy by the fact that no *explanation* of philosophical concepts is (like that of mathematical concepts) determined through the synthesis of attributes of a third thing. Unlike mathematical objects, philosophical objects cannot be exhibited *a priori* in pure intuition. Our concepts of these objects are, insofar as they arise from the mere discursive use of reason, necessarily tentative and open-ended. Even if we were accustomed to call the results of our attempts to spell out the attributes which the concepts include *definitions*, they would really be nothing but arbitrary and incomplete *expositions*. In Reinhold's eyes, the source of misunderstanding between philosophical factions lies precisely in the arbitrariness and incompleteness in their expositions of philosophical concepts.

In the concept of representation, however, Reinhold believes himself to have discovered a philosophical concept which has something non-empirical for its object, that is, we can exhibit its concept *a priori* in pure intuition. His explanation of the concept of representation, he argues, meets Kant's own criterion for a definition: it exhibits the original exhaustive concept of representation within its boundaries (see A727/B755). First, his explanation is *exhaustive*, inasmuch as it does not fail to exhibit any attribute which a representation has. Second, it keeps *within the boundaries of the concept*, inasmuch as it does not exhibit any attribute which a representation does not have. Third, it is *original*, inasmuch as it cannot be derived from any further explanation; it is "*absolutely*

fundamental" (FPK 80 [FPW 100–101]). Because Reinhold's explanation of the concept of representation is exhaustive *and* keeps within the boundaries of the concept, it is not arbitrary; and because it is original, it is not incomplete. In this way, philosophical concepts can be *learned* like mathematical concepts. As long as we determine them through the concept of representation, we cannot fail to cognize them rationally.

But notwithstanding the similarities of philosophical and mathematical cognition, they remain different in crucial ways. Reinhold admits that *more than one* philosophical concept has something non-empirical for its object. Besides the generic concept of representation, each of the specific concepts of sensible representation, concept, and idea has something non-empirical for its object. Besides the "principle of consciousness in general" which expresses the object from consciousness itself, "particular principles of consciousness" express different objects from "particular kinds of consciousness" (FPK 80, 82 [FPW 101, 106]). However, the generic concept of representation is alone capable of yielding a definition *immediately*. The *explanations* of sensible representation, concept, and idea (and every other philosophical concept) become *definitions* only through it (by being further determined through it). In Reinhold's terminology, they are *fundamental explanations*, but not *absolutely fundamental explanations*. The only absolutely fundamental explanation is the explanation of representation through the principle of consciousness. The thoroughly self-determined principle of consciousness qualifies as an absolutely fundamental explanation only by exhibiting simple attributes which cannot, and need not, be explained by attributes that it does not exhibit. Therefore, no definition is admissible into philosophy until philosophical reason takes the final step in its path of analytic progress in history by spelling out the attributes which the concept of representation includes. As far as the "situation of philosophy" prior to the discovery of the concept goes, Kant is right that there is no room for definitions in philosophy.

Unlike mathematics, philosophy must first discover what the highest concept (or attribute) is before it can, through the concept (or attribute), make every other philosophical concept (or attribute) determinate and accurate. To this extent, philosophy is even more systematic than mathematics. But the deductive relation pertains to its *form*, and not to its *matter*. The point is not that every other philosophical concept (or attribute) is contained in the concept of representation (or the attribute of representability) like the whole of the *Iliad* is said to "[lie] enwrapped in a nutshell" (BBM I 116; see also FPK 69–70 [FPW 75–77]). It is rather that *the determinacy and accuracy* of every other philosophical concept (or attribute) is contained in the concept of representation. So, for example, from the fact that a *representation* is distinguished from and related to a subject and an object, it necessarily follows

that a *sensible representation* is distinguished from and related to a subject and an object, or from the fact that things in themselves are not *representable*, it necessarily follows that they are not *cognizable*.²¹ What is clear is that as long as the concept of representation (or the attribute of representability) remains indeterminate and inaccurate, every other philosophical concept (or attribute) must likewise remain indeterminate and inaccurate. No other philosophical concept (or attribute) can be made determinate and accurate except through the concept of representation.

Conclusion

Reinhold's move beyond Kant's conception of philosophical cognition as cognition from mere concepts might seem slight, but for him it marks a momentous event in the history of philosophy. To the Kantians of his time who will have everything "left to rest just as Kant has laid it down," the absolutely fundamental explanation of representation constitutes a "hard and insurmountable stone of scandal" (FPK 82 [FPW 105]). It offers nothing less than the *Punctum Archimedis* by which subjective and ectypal attempts at philosophizing are raised once and for all to the objective and archetypal science of philosophy.

On Reinhold's view, the transformation of philosophy into a science means more than just the systematic interconnection of philosophical concepts. It also means the clearing up of misunderstanding between philosophical factions through ridding philosophical concepts of their indeterminacy and inaccuracy. Kant's demonstrations from mere concepts will have limited force against his dogmatic opponents as long as these concepts remain indeterminate and inaccurate. In particular, they will continue to understand experience differently from the way Kant understands it as long as the concept of experience is not further determined through the concept of representation: dogmatic rationalists will continue to understand it in terms of obscure and confused concepts, dogmatic skeptics in terms of randomly associated impressions and ideas, and so on. Only when the concept of experience is made determinate and accurate through a common concept of representation will the Kantian concept of experience as a rule-governed synthesis of an empirical manifold of intuitions come to be universally accepted. But no such concept is forthcoming for Kant as long as he denies that a philosopher has any intuitional access to consciousness. Whatever he demonstrates, he demonstrates merely from indeterminate and inaccurate concepts. Against Kant, Reinhold insists that the philosopher has some kind of intuitional access to consciousness. As soon as we reflect on our consciousness, he argues, the object of the concept of representation is given *a priori* to us in pure intuition.²²

Notes

1. Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* (Berlin: Voß und Sohn, 1786), a2, my translation. Similarly, Heinrich Heine called the *Critique of Pure Reason* an “executioner’s sword” and a “destructive, world-crushing thought” (Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, in *Heinrich Heines sämtliche Werke: Bibliothek-Ausgabe* [Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1885], 7:96–97).
2. In this chapter, I use the following abbreviations of Reinhold’s texts to cite his work parenthetically:

BKP *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*. Ed. Raymund Schmidt. Leipzig: Reclam, 1924.

VNT *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögen*. Prag und Jena: Widtmann und Mauke, 1789.

BBM I *Beiträge zur Berechtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen, erster Band das Fundament der Elementarphilosophie betreffend*. Jena: Mauke, 1790.

BBM II *Beiträge zur Berechtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen, zweiter Band die Fundamente des philosophischen Wissens, der Metaphysik, Moral, moralischen Religion und Geschmackslehre betreffend*. Jena: Mauke, 1794.

FPW *Über die Fundament des philosophischen Wissens nebst einigen Erläuterungen über die Theorie des Vorstellungsvermögen*. Jena: Mauke, 1791.

When possible, I have also referred to the following English translations of Reinhold’s texts:

LKP *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. Trans. James Hebbeler. Ed. Karl Ameriks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

ENT *Essay on a New Theory of the Human Capacity for Representation*. Trans. Tim Mehigan and Barry Empson. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011.

FPK “The Foundation of Philosophical Knowledge.” In *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, 51-103. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000.

3. The “pantheism controversy” was one of the epoch-making events in the intellectual history of late eighteenth-century Germany, comparable in importance to the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the French Revolution. Beginning as a local dispute F. H. Jacobi initiated with Mendelssohn over the recently deceased Gotthold Lessing’s clandestine commitment to Spinozism (and hence pantheism), it spread like wildfire, involving almost every key intellectual figure of the day. The controversy centered on the question of whether reason supports or undermines the cause of religious faith. Reinhold’s *Letters I* served as a remarkable *tour de force* for the Kantian alternative to Lessing’s alleged rational nihilism and Jacobi’s irrational fideism. It prepared the public for Kant’s own statement of his position on the issue in the chapter “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” (OT 8:133–47).
4. Martin Bondeli, *Das Anfangsproblem bei Karl Leonhard Reinhold* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985), 132–35. Manfred Frank’s interpretation is especially important for showing how early Romantics’ anti-foundationalism developed from problems they encountered in Reinhold’s concept of a philosophical system. See Manfred Frank, *“Unendliche Annäherung”: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

5. Daniel Breazeale, "Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's Elementary Philosophy," *Review of Metaphysics* 35, no. 4 (June 1982): 790.
6. For a detailed study of Reinhold's Enlightenment ideals and how they shape the elementary philosophy, see Karianne J. Marx, *The Usefulness of the Kantian Philosophy: How Karl Leonhard Reinhold's Commitment to Enlightenment Influenced His Reception of Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 35–78. See also Alfred Klemmt's discussion of the circumstances which convinced Reinhold of the need for a new basis for the Kantian philosophy in his *Karl Leonhard Reinholds Elementarphilosophie: Eine Studie über den Ursprung des spekulativen deutschen Idealismus* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1958), 34–43.
7. It is strongly suggested throughout *Letters I* and *II* that common sense operates independently of philosophical reason (see, for example, LKP 18 [BKP 127] and BKP 529–30), and eventually confirmed in *Contributions II* that "common understanding [*gemeine Verstand*], insofar as it is healthy [*gesund*], possesses far more truth than philosophical reason before it has found the ultimate comprehensible ground that it absolutely needs in order to clarify and refine common cognition through strict scientific principles" (BBM II 17). For a concise study of the development from 1787 to 1792 of Reinhold's view of common understanding and its relation to philosophical reason, see Alessandro Lazzari, "*Das Eine, was der Menschheit Noth ist*": *Einheit und Freiheit in der Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds (1789–1792)* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004), 223–70.
8. Reinhold does not only owe his foundationalist conception of knowledge to Descartes. His acute awareness of the problem posed by the differences of opinion, his resolve to admit only what cannot be doubted, and his belief in coping with complex problems by beginning with the simplest elements of knowledge can all be traced to Chapter 2 of *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences* (1637).
9. Karl Ameriks speaks of the "full reflexivity" of Reinhold's system, by which he means that it "include[s] an account of itself and of how it can assert the general limits to knowledge that it claims, in order to provide a guarantee in principle for its results against dogmatic back-sliders" (*Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 117). He illustrates his point *at the philosophical level* by how the principle of consciousness justifies Kant's claim to draw the bounds of knowledge. See Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 116–20. In the same spirit, Frederick C. Beiser describes Reinhold as "the first philosopher to rethink and rebuild epistemology upon a meta-epistemological foundation" (*The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987], 226). However, I think that the same point is better illustrated *at the metaphilosophical level* by how philosophy determines the concept of philosophy. With a remarkable consistency, Reinhold takes the *concept of philosophy* to be deducible as a *philosophical concept* from the first principle of philosophy. See BBM I 4–9; FPK 78 (FPW 95–96).
10. Unfortunately, it is unclear what Reinhold has in mind by the particular theoretical and the practical elementary sciences, and how the general elementary science is supposed to ground each of them. J. E. Erdmann has remarked that, since Reinhold himself admits that the elementary philosophy "is exhausted" by "the content of the theories of cognition in general" (BBM I 363), the task of developing a theory of practical cognition seems to have been overlooked altogether. See J. E. Erdmann, *Die Entwicklung des deutschen Idealismus seit Kant* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1848), 466–67. But, from a crucial passage in "On the Relation of

- the Theory of the Faculty of Representation to the Critique of Pure Reason" (BBM I 275–77), Bondeli argues that Reinhold reinterprets the faculty of cognition as encompassing objects of practical as well as theoretical reason (of desiring as well as cognizing). See Bondeli, *Anfangsproblem*, 76–79. In what is arguably the most original and exciting study of Reinhold of our day, Alessandro Lazzari argues that the difficulty Reinhold faces in developing the idea of the representing subject as an absolutely free cause from within the conceptual framework of the theory of the faculty of representation first led him to insert the subsection "Outline of a Theory of the Faculty of Desire" into the section "Theory of Reason" in the *Attempt*, followed by a series of modifications introduced into subsequent works. See Lazzari, "Das Eine, was der Menschheit Noth ist."
11. See Bondeli, *Anfangsproblem*, 73–76.
 12. See Frank, "Unendliche Annäherung", 225.
 13. Ernst Cassirer identifies this as the *Grundgedanke* of Reinhold's entire thought at this time. See Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Cassirer, 1920), 36–40. See also Faustino Fabbianelli's discussion of the significance of the distinction between the question of the *woraus* and the *worin* in his *Coscienza e realtà: Un Saggio su Reinhold* (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2011), 50–54.
 14. Cassirer, *Erkenntnisproblem*, 39, my translation.
 15. In the first appearance of the principle of consciousness in the *Attempt*, we are said to be compelled (*genötigt*) by consciousness to recognize that a representing subject and a represented object belong to every representation (ENT 92 [VNT 200]). In "On the Need, Possibility, and Character of a Universally Accepted First Principle of Philosophy," the representer's role in distinguishing and relating is left out: "The representation is in consciousness distinguished from the representer and the represented and related to both" (BBM I 144, 145). For an account of the likely reason behind the changes in its formulation, see Bondeli, *Anfangsproblem*, 56–59.
 16. See Dieter Henrich's excellent discussion of the problems to which the principle is exposed in his *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 131–35.
 17. See Bondeli, *Anfangsproblem*, 44.
 18. See Erdmann, *Entwicklung*, 449–50.
 19. By Kant's understanding, all *a priori* cognitions are pure, but not all pure cognitions are *a priori*. *A priori* cognitions "are [only] called *pure* with which nothing empirical is intermixed" (B3).
 20. German readers who are interested in the historical circumstances leading to Reinhold's revision of his theory could refer to Faustino Fabbianelli's introduction to *Contributions I in Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Mißverständnisse der Philosophen*, ed. Faustino Fabbianelli (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), xvi–xxxv.
 21. Reinhold's position on things in themselves stands midway between Kant's view and that of the succeeding idealists. It is more radical than Kant's, insofar as it deduces the unknowability of things in themselves directly from their non-representability (and hence non-cognizability), thereby bypassing Kant's consideration of sensibility and its role in knowledge. In other words, he argues for their unknowability from their *impossibility*, rather than from their *baselessness* (see BBM II 431). Unlike the idealists who follow him, however, Reinhold maintains that things in themselves and their properties "are not only not impossible, but even something *indispensable* for representation, because no mere representation is conceivable without matter and no matter [is conceivable] without something

outside the representation which does not have the form of representation" (ENT 116, translation modified [VNT 249]). For an evaluation of Reinhold's position, see Karl Ameriks, "Reinhold and the Short Argument to Idealism," in *German Idealism: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*, ed. Klaus Brinkmann (London: Routledge, 2007), 2:99–106.

22. I am indebted to Jeremy Dickinson (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo) for going through drafts of this chapter, and Thavamani Ratnasamy (Central Library of the National University of Singapore) for helping me to get access to some of the references.

Part III

Fichte

It is no exaggeration to say that the thought of Fichte, more than any other thinker (even Kant or Hegel) holds the key to understanding the entire tradition of philosophy on the European continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ... I would argue that for virtually every significant figure in the European continental tradition of later modern philosophy, there is an absolutely central idea in that philosopher's thought which can be traced directly back to Fichte as its originator.

— Allen W. Wood, introduction to Fichte's
Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation (2010)¹

¹ Allen W. Wood, introduction to *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, trans. Garrett Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vii, xxiv. The quotation has been slightly modified at the request of the author.

13

Fichte: His Life and Philosophical Calling

Marina F. Bykova

Few thinkers have lived more remarkable lives than Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), whose career began with an incredible ascent from rural poverty to academic celebrity and was filled with challenge, conflict, failure, and ultimate triumph. Despite the abstract nature of his philosophical ideas and difficulty to grasp the dynamics of his thought, it is possible to notice some important parallels between Fichte’s highly technical “philosophy of striving” and his personal striving to establish himself professionally and socially, to position himself within the philosophical field, and, most important, through his work to have an effect upon his contemporaries and his troublesome age. Exploring links between Fichte’s career, philosophy, and a specific intellectual context is the primary goal of this chapter. The main assumption that guides this exploration is that the meaning of philosophical ideas and philosophical texts can be recovered contextually as a product of a particular time and place. Hence the chapter aims at contextualizing Fichte’s scholarly development and exploring his philosophy in the context of that social and intellectual discourse that influenced him both personally and professionally. I hope to draw a portrait of a thinker in his world and his intellectual interactions with his surroundings.

Interestingly, Fichte himself was a firm advocate of a timeless philosophy; he urged his readers not to take the “letter” of his philosophical texts too seriously, but instead to discover the infinite “spirit” of transcendental idealism which is revealed over time. Thus perhaps Fichte would contend with the contemporary biographer that his life is one that must be understood not in context, but through the lens of the timeless philosophical truths. I leave it to the reader to decide how to interpret such an insight, but it is my attempt to offer an expository analysis of Fichte’s tremendously prolific life and to explicate the rudiments and origins of his innovative philosophy.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first devoted to the early stage of Fichte’s intellectual development (mainly 1790–93), the second covering

the Jena period (1794–99), the third discussing the atheism controversy and other essential disputes in which Fichte was embroiled in Jena, and the fourth addressing Fichte's philosophical evolution in the late period of his life mostly spent in Berlin (1800–1814). I attempt to show that Fichte's radically revised and rigorously systematic version of transcendental idealism, which is known as the *Wissenschaftslehre*, is more than just a response to Kant and the challenges of his critical philosophy, as it is usually interpreted. The aims and main conclusions of Fichte's transcendental idealism become clear only when considered in the historical and social context that formed and engaged his mind.

Early life and sudden rise to prominence (1762–93)

Throughout his eventful and controversial life, Fichte was acutely sensitive about his more than humble origins.¹ While his ascent from obscurity to the philosophical elite was not unique,² there was something very stunning about it. Fichte was born on May 19, 1762 in the rural village of Rammenau (Saxony), whose inhabitants depended primary on ribbon weaving for their livelihood. His parents – Christian Fichte and Johanna Maria Dorothea – were no exception. While not the poorest among the villagers, they had a small ribbon weaving home business and a little farm, just big enough to support the family. The first – and the father's favorite – of the nine children, Johann Gottlieb Fichte was probably also destined for the weaver's career. However, his life took a sudden, almost miraculous turn one Sunday in 1770, when the local pastor, Johann Gottfried Dinndorf, brought the young Fichte before Baron Ernst Hauboldt von Miltitz and had the boy recite verbatim the day's sermon, which the Baron had missed due to his travel delay. Impressed by then nine-year-old Fichte's intellectual gift, the Baron extended his financial support toward the bright boy's academic future. In an unexpected twist of fate, in a few days Fichte found himself in the unfamiliar setting of the Miltitz estate on the Elbe River.

The Baron had arranged for him first to attend the Stadtschule in Meißen, and four years later, in 1774, the privileged Schulpforta near Naumburg. After graduating from the elite boarding school known for its great academic tradition and strong religious orientation, Fichte entered university with the intention to study theology and eventually join the clergy. He studied in Jena, Wittenberg, and Leipzig, but by graduation he no longer wanted to be a pastor. By the time he entered the university, his sponsor had died, and a few years later, the widowed Baroness suspended his financial support, noticing Fichte's declining interest in becoming a clergyman.

Left without any academic career prospects and desperate to find suitable employment elsewhere, between 1785 and 1794 Fichte sustained himself by

-serving as a live-in tutor in wealthy households in Zurich, Krakow, and Leipzig, the job commonly left to “poor intellectuals” of similarly humble origins. It was the almost ironic culmination of the previous fifteen years of his life. Extracted from his rural village at a young age, and thus separated from his family, he struggled to find his place among the academic or any other hierarchy of Prussian intelligentsia. This further perpetuated his nearly limitless sense of solitariness and victimization, which was especially acute at the end of the 1780s.³

The serious concern with his own situation affected Fichte’s unsettled relationship with Johanna Rahn, whom he, then twenty-eight years old, met when travelling between tutoring positions in Zurich, where she lived. The daughter of a textile manufacturer and city official, Johann Hartmann Rahn, Marie Johanne (known as Johanna) was thirty-five at the time of their introduction. The two became very close friends almost immediately. As Fichte wrote in one of his letters, “at first sight, at the first conversation, my entire heart was open for [her]” (GA III/1, no. 21). Despite their age difference, they got informally engaged only a few months into their relationship. Yet it was not until October 1793 that Fichte and Johanna were wed, after numerous breaks and delays on both sides of the relationship. Much of the troubles and initial distance between them was socially motivated. The Rahn family, which had been in the lower rungs of politics for generations, exemplified a kind of political elite, while Fichte’s family origins were much more modest. Another, perhaps more pivotal reason for Fichte’s hesitation and uneasiness about that relationship was his lack of any career prospects, which would make his engagement to Johanna, if formally established, one of gold-digging and money chasing in the eyes of the public around them. Only when Fichte finally managed to establish a circle of scholarly contacts and when he – not without Kant’s input – rose from his marginal status to a celebrity whose reputation was fully intact, did he feel ready to “unite [with Johanna] before the eyes of God” (GA III/1, no. 43). Although Fichte was largely financially depended on his spouse, especially in the early years of their bond, their marriage provided the warmth, affection, and psychological and emotional support that Fichte needed. At the same time, it further intensified his determination to prove himself, which for him would mean not only becoming a scholar and “public figure,” but also eliminating his financial dependence on Johanna, which caused him a lot of anxiety and was damaging to his pride.

The man with a “restless urge to expand,” a person with an increasingly ambitious sense of mission and desire to “have an effect upon his age,” Fichte was still in search of his calling in the late 1780s and early 1790s (GA III/1, no. 64). Thrust into a strange world, he had to devise a way to find a professional career while maintaining an efficacious existence. This naturally led him to pursue the pulpit, though he quickly realized that the ecclesiastical

hold of the church's orthodoxy forced him to restrain his natural openness and intellectual passion.

Around that time, he had completed two draft sermons—on the Annunciation⁴ and on the Resurrection⁵—and a longer chapter, *Some Aphorisms on Religion and Deism* (1790) (GA II/1:283–92), where he articulated his thoughts on the arbitrary nature of social power. Carefully balancing between the warring rational (Neologist) theism and natural (Rousseauian) theism, Fichte maintained a form of synthesis internal to human subjectivity as a “bond” between emotion and reason, thus perfecting the nature of man. His theory of providence, laid out in the second sermon, was his early attempt to respond to the pantheism controversy, a major intellectual and religious concern of the time that served as a ground for much wider theological and philosophical debates. Perhaps this is where he became attuned to Spinozism, against which he would position himself later in life. Yet in his early years, Fichte adhered to a form of natural determinism that—in spite of a declared attempt to avoid collision with subjectivity and free will—was at odds with human freedom. He had interpreted God as the natural order and the individual free will as the self-imposed limitation required for obeying providence.

At the end of the 1780s, Fichte was still moving from one tutoring job to another, not being able to solve his serious financial problems and satisfy his passionate nature. He finally found a true inspiration for his passion only in the summer of 1790 in Leipzig, when, after agreeing to tutor a university student in Kant's philosophy, which he was not familiar with at the time, he first read and studied the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This encounter decisively influenced Fichte, both personally and philosophically. Personally, Fichte discovered the way to elevate himself from his utter self-pity and wallowing without purpose brought about by his previous feelings of forced alienation. Around that time, he wrote to his then fiancée, Johanna Rahn: “I have finally acquired a most noble morality and, instead of occupying myself with the external things, I am devoting myself to my own inner self. This has given me a peace such as I have felt never before; amid uncertain worldly prospects I have experienced my happiest days” (GA III/1, no. 64; see also GA III/1, nos. 63, 68).⁶ Finally, he was able to resolve his youthful crisis and shift his focus to the autonomous self and its actual manifestation.

Philosophically, Fichte took his spiritual liberation as the ground for his own philosophical investigation. He reported to his close friend, F. A. Weißhuhn, that, upon finishing Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, the concept of absolute freedom had been irrevocably proven.⁷ Furthermore, he realized that a morally free will does not do what it wants to do, but what it ought to do. Its freedom lies in fulfilling its duty, despite constraints of the natural self. In this sense, freedom is a necessary condition of any moral action and morality in general. In November 1790, Fichte shared this insight with his friend H. N. Achelis:

The influence that this [Kantian] philosophy, especially its moral part (though this is unintelligible apart from a study of the *Critique of Pure Reason*), has upon one's entire way of thinking is unbelievable – as is the revolution that it has occasioned in my way of thinking in particular....I now believe wholeheartedly in human freedom and realize full well that duty, virtue, and morality are all possible only if freedom is presupposed. (EPW 360 [GA III/1, no. 70a])

Fichte, who had previously defended a deterministic view of the world, discovered in Kant's critical philosophy a way to reconcile freedom and determinism that would not only preserve freedom but also make it one of the central tenets of his own philosophical inquiry.

Setting out to meet Kant in person, in July 1791, Fichte traveled to Königsberg. However, a brief audience with the master was not very productive for the young Fichte. Kant showed no interest in his visitor and was unwilling to lend any assistance to him. Hoping that his expertise in critical philosophy would be recognized by the master and in order to prove his own ability in philosophical writing, Fichte quickly – in a few weeks' time – composed a manuscript, in which he extended Kant's practical philosophy into the sphere of religion, considering the concept of divine revelation. That was an issue that Kant himself planned to address in his future writings,⁸ which may have influenced his reaction to Fichte's effort. Upon receiving the manuscript, Kant was impressed by both Fichte's genuine adherence to Kant's own claims about morality and religion, and the conclusions that Fichte was able to draw from his analysis. He encouraged Fichte to publish the work and recommended it to his own publisher. It appeared in 1792 under the title *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (GA I/1:17–123).⁹ For an unknown reason, the author's name was omitted from the first edition of the work, and since the book displayed some similarities to Kant's thought, many believed that the master himself had written it. The confusion was removed only when Kant identified Fichte as the author. This catapulted Fichte to intellectual celebrity, making him instantaneously famous. He became widely known as the next great Kantian philosopher.

For the next two years, he continued working as a tutor while trying to shape his own philosophical ideas. However, in the wake of the French Revolution, the social and cultural conditions in Prussia became severely restricting, which had a harmful effect on the German Enlightenment and also put yet another strain on Fichte's own career ambitions. As a newcomer, he had to tread lightly to avoid a backlash from his more politically oriented contemporaries.

Further distancing himself from Prussia's political elite, in 1793 Fichte published two texts on the current political situation: *Contribution to the Rectification of the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution* (GA I/1:203–404)

and *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe, Who Have Oppressed It until Now* (GA I/1:167–92). Both texts were meant as a radical demystification of the notion that the ruler's paternal vocation was to care for the people's happiness. Critical of "Europe's princes" and their ability to rule, he described them as those "who lag behind their own age by at least as many years as they have been in power" (GA I/1:208). In the latter text, Fichte also issued a call to the public, expressing his hope that people would wage a war on paternalistic government, whose proper role is to administer justice and not to watch over happiness. Perhaps the most radical aspiration of the work is a demand for the "freedom to communicate" so that members of society could learn and achieve autonomy, in order to avoid the dehumanizing effect of the German machine.

While both works were published anonymously, it became widely known that Fichte was their author. Thus, from the very beginning of his public career, Fichte got a reputation as someone with radical views and far-reaching political and social ideas. With his sudden rise to philosophical celebrity, he decided to devote his attention to the larger task to which Kant's philosophy may be appropriately applied, that is, to the education of society toward freedom and moral perfection. This aspiration defined his thought and writings from the start.

At the end of 1793, Fichte unexpectedly received a call from the University of Jena, which was emerging as the center of the new German philosophy. Following the advice of Christian Gottlob Voigt and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe¹⁰ – the two individuals who played an important role in the political story of Fichte's years in Jena – the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, Karl August,¹¹ appointed Fichte as successor to Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758–1823), a well-known proponent and interpreter of the Kantian philosophy. It was another twist of fate that brought Fichte to academia and allowed him at last to find his true calling.

While Fichte saw his task as improving upon Kant's critical philosophy and thus trying to work out a philosophical truce between faith and reason, as well as between free will and determinism, his overarching goal was a reconciliation of Kant's intention to raise philosophy to the level of a science. Two philosophical developments had greatly influenced the progression of his thought toward the realization of this project. One was Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*, which, first presented to the public in 1789, challenged Kant's inability to provide a satisfactory foundation for philosophy's scientific status and insisted that "philosophy cannot become scientific until a convincing derivation from a first principle has been supplied."¹² In order to provide a foundation for the Kantian critical philosophy, Reinhold proposed the concept of representation. He argued that being a reflectively known fact of consciousness, the concept of representation is a fundamental principle known with certainty.

Another great influence on Fichte was G. E. Schulze's *Aenesidemus* (1792),¹³ a skeptical polemic against both Kant's account of the foundation of knowledge and Reinhold's attempt to provide a missing foundation for philosophy. While Schulze agreed that to be scientific philosophy must be grounded in a single fundamental principle, he argued that Reinhold's principle of representation, empirical in its nature, was largely deficient and thus could not be used for this purpose.¹⁴

These two works demonstrated to Fichte the need to search for a satisfactory foundation for philosophy if it is to become a science and survive the incessant doubts of the skeptics. Reviewing *Aenesidemus* for the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* in 1793–94,¹⁵ Fichte found himself in agreement with much of Schulze's critique and grew confident that the critical philosophy required a new and unshakable foundation. In his letter to the Tübingen professor J. F. Flatt, he wrote:

Aenesidemus, which I consider to be one of the most remarkable products of our decade, has convinced me of something which I admittedly already suspected: that even after the labors of Kant and Reinhold, philosophy is still not a science. *Aenesidemus* has shaken my own system to its very foundations, and, since one cannot very well live under the open sky, I have been forced to construct a new system. (EPW 366 [GA III/2, no. 168a])

This rebuilding resulted in Fichte's philosophical – allegedly all-encompassing – system known as the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The fundamental features of the new system were sketched out before his arrival in Jena, in a long manuscript, "Private Meditations on Elementary Philosophy/Practical Philosophy" (GA II/3:20–266), composed during the winter of 1793–94. In the spring of 1794, he gave his first lecture series on his newly designed conception of philosophy to a small group of intellectuals in Zurich who considered themselves the followers and advocates of the critical philosophy.

Around the same time he started to draft the outline and methodology of his rigorously systematic philosophy that was later brought out as a concise book, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) (EPW 94–135 [GA I/2:107–72]). The first full-scale public announcement of his system, Fichte composed it as an "introductory work" that was supposed to attract prospective students and provide important background information for his upcoming course and lectures. Here he laid out his conception of philosophy as a science that is grounded in a single principle and also articulated his thoughts – first hinted at in his review of *Aenesidemus* – on a new foundation,¹⁶ which would allow a systematic deduction of philosophical propositions.

Fichte claimed to remain true to the spirit, if not the letter, of Kant's thought when he, following Reinhold, argued that philosophy must begin with a

first principle. Yet contrary to Reinhold, who appealed to a fact (*Tatsache*) of consciousness, Fichte insisted that this principle must express a fact/act (*Tathandlung*), which is known with self-evident certainty, and not empirically. The elaborate development of the newly found first principle became a core of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Jena period (1794–99)

Fichte started teaching at Jena in the summer of 1794. He was at the peak of his fame, and when he arrived, he was enthusiastically welcomed by his university colleagues, students, and the general public alike. During his five years there, which perhaps were the most productive in Fichte's philosophical career, he grew into a central figure in the German philosophical world, having – through his lectures, talks, and numerous publications – a great influence on the intellectual life and culture of his time. While in Jena he enjoyed many successful ventures both domestically and professionally. At home his only child, a son, Immanuel Hermann von Fichte (1796–1879),¹⁷ was born, and in his career many students were proclaiming him to be their most beloved professor. He spoke in packed lecture halls and grew enormously popular among students. Fichte was also able to establish himself as a public figure who “wants to employ his philosophy to guide the spirit of his age.”¹⁸

With immense faith in his own powers and burning with a desire “to be and do something” in the world (GA I/8:72), he launched his academic career with the public lecture series on “Morality for Scholars,” which he began to deliver immediately upon his arrival in Jena. In these lectures, five of which were published in 1794 under the title *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation* (EPW 144–84 [GA I/3:25–68]), Fichte powerfully formulated his views on the topic of the moral improvement of society, much debated during the late eighteenth century. For him, only the moral perfection of the individual will bring society back to its wholeness. The role of the scholar in this process is to provide rational guidance toward those ends.

As his specifically philosophical goal, Fichte took it upon himself to reconstruct Kant's transcendental philosophy and to produce the first systematic formulation of his new system. According to Fichte, what was central to Kant's “critical spirit” is an uncompromising insistence upon the practical certainty of human freedom and a thoroughgoing commitment to the task of providing a transcendental account of ordinary experience that could explain the objectivity and necessity of theoretical reason (cognition) in a manner consistent with the practical affirmation of human freedom. Although Fichte attributed the discovery of this task to Kant, he believed that it was first accomplished successfully only in his new system, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, which he therefore described as the “*first system of freedom*” (EPW 385 [GA III/2, no. 282b]; see also GA III/3, no. 379).

The goal of his new system was threefold. The first, most fundamental goal, was to establish philosophy as a science; the second, more specific goal, was to redefine the self as a moral agent; and the third, more general yet culturally important goal, was to position philosophy at the center of a new configuration of knowledge so that it could validate its role as the moral arbiter for modern culture.

Fichte explicated the fundamentals of this theory in his first systematic work, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95) (WL [GA I/2:176–254]). As the title implies, the goal of this work was the presentation of the foundational principles of the system and not the entire system itself. Originally not intended for publication, this work was written as a synopsis of lectures for students attending Fichte’s private courses during his first two semesters in Jena and was supposed to be supplemented with oral explanations. While providing students with lecture outlines was a common practice in the German universities around that time,¹⁹ Fichte’s manuscript appeared to be thorough and systematic, to a much greater extent than could be expected from a text composed merely as a “handbook for the [course] listeners” (GA I/2:173). Thus, encouraged by his colleagues and students, Fichte decided to publish the manuscript in two volumes; the first appeared in 1794, and the second in 1795. A few months later, in 1795, Fichte published another – also originally conceived as a “handbook for his audience” – treatise titled *Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Wissenschaftslehre with Respect to the Theoretical Faculty* (EPW 243–306 [GA I/3:137–208]) that meant to further clarify some of the ideas originated in the *Foundation*. In those two texts, Fichte offered the initial presentation of the first principles of his Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Fichte’s attempt to provide a new foundation of the transcendental philosophy on the basis of the I – more specifically, the principle of the self-positing I – was met with virtually universal misunderstanding and led to numerous misinterpretations. The concept of the self-positing I was mistakenly interpreted along the lines of Berkeley’s idealism, as claiming that the world is the product of the absolute I. Fichte’s readers, friends, and critics alike were truly perplexed about the meaning of his first principle.

Stunned by this result and also recognizing some uncertainties in his initial presentation of the foundations of his system, Fichte almost immediately began working on a new exposition of the first principles and their deduction, which was eventually delivered as a lecture course on “The Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (*Wissenschaftslehre*) *nova methodo*.” He offered this course three times – in 1796–97, 1797–98, and 1798–99 – making only minor revisions to the content. In spite of Fichte’s intention to later bring out these lectures as a book, the project never came to realization.²⁰ Until his departure from Jena, Fichte continued reshaping his presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, only one of which – *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*

(IWL 1–118 [GA I/4:186–282]) – partially appeared in press in 1797–98, but he remained dissatisfied with all proposed versions.

As he continued revising the foundational principles of his Jena system, Fichte was also developing its specific parts and components. Within a few years he published the two-volume *Foundations of Natural Right according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1796–97) (FNR [GA I/3:291–460]), which focused on the issues of philosophy of law and social philosophy, and *The System of Ethics according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1798) (SE [GA I/5:1–317]), which dealt with questions traditionally discussed in moral philosophy. Composed as the revised versions of the lecture courses that Fichte had been offering at Jena in 1796–97, these works reflected the thinker's desire to present and elaborate the program of philosophy that could satisfy the ambitions of his quest for a system. Determined to demonstrate that, as derivatives of the same primal rudiment, all genuine philosophical sciences (*Wissenschaften*) had separate but equal truth status, he could not go Kant's route and distinguish between the rationality of the metaphysical faculty and the mere utility of the other faculties. Instead, he had to develop the rationally justified system of the philosophical sciences, where each of them could be shown to be self-contained while simultaneously complementing each other and thus contributing to the philosophical progress as a whole. In addition to presenting some details of philosophy of law, ethics, and social philosophy, Fichte also planned to elaborate on philosophy of religion. True to his newly adopted practice of publishing only after the ideas have been first tested in lectures, he announced a philosophy of religion course for the spring semester of 1799. But before he could commence this course, his career in Jena came to an abrupt end, and he was forced to resign his chair position, due to one of the most dramatic controversies he was embroiled in while at Jena.

The atheism controversy and other disputes

In spite of Fichte's extraordinary success as a teacher and his popularity with students, his tenure in Jena was plagued by numerous cases of intrigue, conflict, and personal and professional quarrels. While some of the resentment that Fichte encountered in Jena was provoked by his fame and quick successes, Fichte's own personality often fueled or further aggravated conflicts.²¹ In addition, his reputation as a political radical that was founded on his treatises from 1793 – *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought* and his piece on the French Revolution – also sparked confrontations and controversies in Jena. His lectures, which provoked listeners into thought and reflection, became another, even more substantial, basis for political altercations.

As the French Revolution was picking away at the ideologies of the time and dogmatism was becoming rampant, the conservatives greatly increased

in number. The hard pressure from the conservative elite forced a government censorship of all published lectures, so as to avoid the false ideologies of reason from penetrating the good hearts of the simpleminded public outside the high walls of the universities. This forced censorship was the equivalent of dehumanization for Fichte, who felt that without free communication there could never be moral perfection. Goethe and Voigt, the two men who represented the Weimar court and, as such, officially presided over the functions of the University of Jena, served as the mediators in this dispute, trying to tame Fichte while allowing a relaxation on the enforced censorship. This mediation eventually failed as Fichte opened himself up to a charge of atheism by publishing potentially provocative material on his conception of deification and reason. But even earlier, during still minor confrontations, Fichte's own reaction to Goethe and Voigt's efforts to resolve the conflicts was not always adequate.

The first minor conflict occurred during Fichte's very first semester in Jena when he was forced to defend himself against the accusation that he was a Jacobin who had declared in his public lectures "Morality for Scholars" that "in twenty or thirty years there will be no kings or princes anywhere."²² At that time Fichte still had the confidence of the court, and Voigt readily interpreted this rumor as "malicious slander," instigated by Fichte's political opponents. Yet Fichte, who was too proud for compromise, responded with a letter of self-defense and insisted that he would come to Weimar for a personal confrontation (GA III/2, no. 213). The conflict was settled when Fichte published the lectures that he had delivered up to that point in *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation* (EPW 144–84 [GA I/3:25–68]). After a few months, however, Fichte found himself embroiled in another series of altercations: the first was over his Sunday lectures, when Fichte's conservative critics accused him of seeking to replace the Sunday sermon with a "cult of reason," and the second had to do with Fichte's open opposition to the student fraternities, which grew increasingly violent and forced Fichte to flee Jena in order to escape physical assault.²³ That summer he spent in the village of Osmannstädt, near Weimar, bringing to completion Part II of the *Foundations* and preparing to publish his supplementary *Outline of the Distinctive Character of the Wissenschaftslehre with Respect to the Theoretical Faculty* (EPW 243–306 [GA I/3:137–207]). After receiving an official assurance of his safety and returning to Jena in the fall of 1795, he exercised caution and managed for the next three years to avoid serious quarrels, at least ones caused by his own, often unbearable, manner of behavior.

However, his inability to tolerate any differences in ideological or philosophical views inevitably led to conflicts. In June 1795, while in Osmannstädt, he became involved in one such controversy with Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), in connection with Schiller's newly founded literary, philosophical, and cultural journal, *Die Horen* (1795–97). Schiller invited Fichte to serve as

a coeditor of the journal and also to contribute articles on topics of mutual interest. In 1791, Schiller himself used the journal to publish his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which aimed to elaborate an aesthetic philosophy, largely motivated by his thorough study of Kant's *Critiques*. When in June 1795, Fichte submitted his first instalment of "A Series of Letters concerning the Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy" (GA I/6:333–61), Schiller rejected the manuscript as being unsatisfactory in both its form and its content. In his rejection letter, he charged Fichte with confusing the "enormously different concepts" of spirit in the arts and in philosophy (GA III/2, no. 291c). He also argued that Fichte's work substantially overlapped with his own *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Fichte was outraged, taking the rejection and critique as a personal insult. "You have done me an injustice, and I hope that you wish to rectify it, as it becomes any honest man to do," he wrote in his angry response to Schiller (EPW 393 [GA III/2, no. 292]). Only briefly discussing some specific comments that Schiller made in his review, he concluded his letter by requesting an apology:

You... have denied me the respect and the trust which I believe I could expect. From now on it seems, I can be no more to you than your humble follower and disciple, and that is not something which I wish to be. But I expect amends to be made at the proper time. (EPW 396 [GA III/2, no. 292])

Schiller refused to apologize, Fichte's manuscript never appeared in *Die Horen*, and he never brought his series to completion. Only a few years later, in 1800, did Fichte manage to publish the rejected first instalment of "A Series of Letters" in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* that he edited jointly with Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer (1766–1848).

This journal, however, became an epicenter of another much more serious conflict – the so-called *Atheismusstreit*, or atheism controversy – that erupted in 1798 and that, unlike the *Horenstreit*, found a huge public resonance leading to Fichte's dismissal from Jena. The controversy was sparked by publication in the *Philosophisches Journal* of two articles: one authored by Fichte's former colleague at Jena, Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770–1848), and another written by Fichte himself. In "The Development of the Concept of Religion,"²⁴ Forberg dismissed all theoretical discussion of religion as not having any independent status. For him, religion was no more than the practical belief in a moral world-order. When Fichte, as coeditor of the journal, reviewed the manuscript, he was struck by the apparent similarity between his own views and the ones presented by Forberg. Worried that, if published, Forberg's text would be thought to represent Fichte's own position on religion, Fichte requested that he withdraw it or at least allow for editorial emendations and additions

in footnotes. Forberg, however, rejected the very possibility of changes and refused to withdraw his submission. Fichte, who was an advocate of the right to publish, agreed to print Forberg's piece, but in order to minimize the damage and prevent the potential misunderstanding of his readers, he decided to publish his own chapter, "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World" (IWL 141–54 [GA I/5:347–57]), immediately preceding Forberg's. In his work, Fichte tried to avoid the religious skepticism introduced by Forberg. Instead, he identified God with the moral world-order, thus transforming the discussion of God and God's reality into the discourse about morality and moral action.²⁵

Once the two articles came out, they almost instantly became the object of public debate. But neither Forberg nor Fichte could have expected just how intense the controversy would be until the anonymously published *A Father's Letter to His Student Son about Fichte's and Forberg's Atheism* (GA I/6:121–38)²⁶ was brought into the public eye. In the *Letter*, a fictitious father counsels his son, explaining that both Fichte and Forberg were attempting to promote atheism while simultaneously advocating rebellion among the students at Jena. As a reaction to the *Letter*, the High Consistory, who advised the Catholic Elector Friedrich August III (1750–1827), accused Fichte and Forberg of "disseminating atheism" and requested a confiscation of all published journals containing the chapters.²⁷ A decree issued by Friedrich August proclaimed both the confiscation of the materials and punishment of the chapter authors, threatening harsh consequences for those Ernestine Dukes of Saxony who would disobey the order.

At this point, the *Atheismusstreit* became a major controversy, not only for Fichte but also for the intellectual and philosophical community at large. To be sure, it was not simply a theological debate.²⁸ There was also a concern for the ethical implications of transcendental idealism at the time, and specifically whether Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* promoted social anarchy and personal despair. In an attempt to clarify his own position, in 1799 Fichte published his widely distributed "Appeal to the Public" (AP [GA I/5:415–53]), as well as his combined effort with Niethammer, "Juridical Defense" (JD [GA I/6:26–84]), to be presented to the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, Karl August, and to the Court of the patrons of the University of Jena. In addition, Fichte wrote a letter to Karl August's privy-councilor Voigt, in which he threatened to resign if found guilty of the accusation of atheism. This rash act coupled with the unnecessary dissemination of the case to the public in the "Appeal" irritated the Ernestine Dukes, and they unanimously condemned Fichte and Niethammer. A reprimand was sent to Jena, including the official acceptance of Fichte's resignation. Although Fichte's students rallied to his aid, Karl August quickly dismissed their requests to reappoint Fichte, and he was forced to flee Jena.

The Berlin period (1800–1814)

The main setting for the remainder of Fichte's career was Berlin, where he arrived in the summer of 1799. At that time, the Prussian capital had no university, and Fichte supported himself and his family by giving private lessons and publishing works that were largely aimed at a wider, non-philosophical audience. Although Fichte was very productive in Berlin, he never regained as strong an influence as he had during his time in Jena. The *Atheismusstreit* profoundly altered his reputation among the public, while also affecting his financial well-being.

After the atheism dispute ended, the two philosophers whom Fichte sincerely admired for their analytic minds, Kant and Jacobi, published open letters, both from 1799, with highly critical attacks against Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, further adding to the damaged public opinion of his system. While Kant criticized the *Wissenschaftslehre* for foundational and methodical problems, such as the attempt to infer substantive philosophical knowledge from logic, Jacobi accused Fichte's system of nihilism, of being the "philosophy of absolute nothingness."²⁹ Observing that idealistic speculation results in a purely "logical enthusiasm" and "chimerism," Jacobi claimed that Fichte's idea of an absolute movement of the I (*Ich*) and his concept of a pure absolute suggested only a movement "from nothing, to nothing, for nothing, into nothing."³⁰ Furthermore, Jacobi pointed to the irreconcilable conflict between idealistic speculation and life³¹ and expressed his skepticism concerning Fichte's desire to replace "natural belief," which is fundamental in ordinary life, with "science."³² As a result of these harsh criticisms, Fichte came to realize that these objections and his forced exodus from Jena were largely due to the public's inability to understand his philosophical project and ambitions. The atheism controversy and its aftermath became the first real test of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which motivated his greater focus on terminological concepts and religious convictions as a product of his own system.

In attempt to clarify his own position, in 1800 Fichte completed *The Vocation of Man* (VM [GA I/6:150–312]), which is perhaps Fichte's greatest literary work. Intended as an indirect response to Jacobi's damaging critique of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and addressed to the wider public audience, this book presents a more accessible version of Fichte's philosophical system, defending his position on questions of morality and religion. Here Fichte provides an analysis of the relation between theoretical and practical philosophy, and between philosophy and life, while remaining true to the conceptual position laid out in "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World."

Fichte's ongoing effort to defend his philosophy against misunderstanding is also depicted in another publication, titled *Sun-Clear Report to the Public at Large concerning the Actual Character of the Latest Philosophy: An Attempt to Force the*

Reader to Understand (1801) (GA I/7:167–274). Intended as a more direct response to Jacobi and written as a popular introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the *Sun-Clear Report* points to “the opposition between speculation and life,” thus emphasizing the special character of the philosophical standpoint that requires rational contemplation and scientific presentation of its results (EPW 439 [GA III/3, no. 443]).

During the Berlin period, Fichte continued to revise the *Wissenschaftslehre*, rearticulating the foundations of his system and refining some of its elements. He produced more than half a dozen different presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, delivering new versions every year or two, right up until his death. Yet with the exception of the extremely condensed “*Wissenschaftslehre* in Its General Outlines” (1810) (GA I/10:325–46), none of the revised versions were published during Fichte’s lifetime.³³ Highly discouraged by the public reception of the early presentation of the foundation of his system and afraid to be misunderstood again, he was reluctant to publish them, and he limited their presentation to public talks, private lectures, and other modes of open conversation with his contemporaries.

One such “conversation” was a heated exchange of letters (1800–1802) with Schelling. Making the “difference” between their philosophical systems the focal point of discussion, each was attempting to attack his opponent so as to demonstrate his mastery over Kant’s philosophy. Both philosophers argued for a geometric model of philosophical system that would proceed from postulates and derive theorems from the first principles known with certainty. Yet they could not agree on the concept that could provide a solid foundation for the system constructed in this manner. Fichte focused his attention on the Kantian notion of thought as a synthesis of concept and intuition, which was conditioned by the self-consciousness of the I (or the intuition). Schelling, on the other hand, felt that the two, concept and intuition, were on equal ground, with neither taking precedence over the other, but instead resolving themselves in a synthesis meeting in indifference as reason-intuition, universality-particularity, and so on. The disagreement remained largely unsettled. While for Fichte the intellectual intuition still resides in the subjective, for Schelling the true place of the intellectual intuition is in the objective, but in either case the issue of how best to understand this intuition is still to be resolved.³⁴

In 1805, Fichte was appointed as professor at the University of Erlangen, but returned to Berlin after only one semester. He was soon forced by the French occupation to move to Königsberg in 1806 and to Copenhagen in 1807. Although this pattern of fleeing removed Fichte from his family for long periods of time, he still found it within himself to continue working, completing, in 1806, three vastly popular and well-received lecture series. The first, *On the Essence of the Scholar* (GA I/8:42–140), is a reworking of the same themes that he addresses in his lectures on “Morality for Scholars” in 1794. The second,

The Characteristics of the Present Age (GA I/8:147–398), extends his “system of freedom” into the philosophy of history. The third, *Initiation to the Blessed Life* (GA I/9:14–212), which is written in an almost mystical style, discusses how speculative philosophy, morality, and religion are related. While popular, these three works provide further important insights into Fichte’s philosophical inquiry and how to apply it.

Not until the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 was Fichte able to return to Berlin, where he was often unwell. In the winter of 1807–8, he delivered his celebrated *Addresses to the German Nation* (AGN [GA I/10:17–298]). While these lectures are often associated with a significant shift in Fichte’s social and political thought, transforming his cosmopolitan view into a more nationalistic position, it is an overhasty claim. The *Addresses*, which are mainly concerned with the issues of national identity and national education, are consistent with the chief ideas of Fichte’s practical philosophy, in particular with his recognition of the importance of cultural identity for the formation of individuals and societies, and thus for the possible realization of a moral order in civil and political life. It would also be a mistake to read Fichte’s notion of patriotism introduced in the *Addresses* as purely nationalistic. This notion is instrumental to Fichte’s discussion of the vocation of man: shaping himself and his particular interests so that he can realize himself by serving a greater (moral) good. This self-realization is a journey of *Bildung*, an intricate process of self-cultivation, which necessarily involves enculturation to allow individuals to bring themselves into accord with their society and the world. Thus it would perhaps be more appropriate to read Fichte’s *Addresses* (along with some of his other later writings) in the context of the tradition of German humanism and to understand them as an attempt to offer a more elaborate account of *Bildung* – the task that he began in Jena in collaboration with Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt – in order to specify and further promote ideas of his practical philosophy.

Fichte’s interest in pedagogical issues led him to assume, along with Humboldt, one of the leading roles in planning a new university that was finally opened in Berlin in 1810. Although the proposal that Fichte put forward was rejected in favor of the plan drafted by Humboldt, Fichte was offered an important administrative position. He became the dean of the philosophical faculty and the first elected rector of the newly established university. He continued lecturing on the *Wissenschaftslehre* and producing new writings, mainly focusing on practical philosophy, including ethical theory, doctrine of right, and doctrine of state.

When in 1813 the Prussian uprising against Napoleon began, Fichte canceled his lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* so that he and his listeners could enlist in the War of Liberation. He joined the militia, but served only a few weeks, contracting a fatal infection from his wife Johanna, who had volunteered in a

military hospital. Fichte died on January 29, 1814 from a typhoid fever (typhus) and was buried near the University of Berlin, where he rests next to Hegel.

Notes

1. This painful sensitivity was present in Fichte even after he rocketed into celebrity. In 1794, after receiving a prestigious professorship at Jena, he continued evoking the rural world of his childhood, telling his younger brother, Samuel Gotthelf, that even after graduating from the university he felt that he still had “some peasant-like manners.” After such a long time, he still could not tell “whether they are completely eradicated” (GA III/2, no. 214).
2. It is worth recalling that Kant, who was born into an artisan family of modest means, rose to intellectual prominence and became the central figure in modern philosophy. For more on Kant’s life and origin, see Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24–60; as well as Chapter 1 of this volume.
3. See Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 32–34.
4. “An Maria Verkündigung” (1786), in GA II/1:53–66.
5. “Ueber die Absichten des Todes Jesu” (1786), in GA II/1:75–98.
6. Fichte expressed very similar sentiments in a letter that he drafted a few months after his first encounter with Kant’s writings. Here he declared that in the Kantian philosophy, he “found the antidote for the source of [his] trouble, and happiness enough in the bargain” (EPW 360 [GA III/1, no. 70a]).
7. In his letter to Weißhuhn written in September of 1790, Fichte openly recognizes that he has “been living in a new world ever since reading the *Critique of Practical Reason*.” He continues: “Propositions that I thought could never be overturned have been overturned for me. Things have been proven for me which I thought could never be proven – for example, the concept of absolute freedom, the concept of duty, etc. – and I feel all the happier for it. It is unbelievable how much respect for mankind and how much strength this system gives us” (EPW 357 [GA III/1, no. 63]).
8. Kant’s own *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* appeared about a year later, in 1793.
9. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*, trans. Garrett Green, ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). The original German title of the work is *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*.
10. Goethe had great respect for Fichte’s philosophical views. This is what he wrote in retrospect about Fichte’s stature around the time that he arrived in Jena: “He was one of the most capable figures ever to have been seen, and his views were, in a higher sense, irreproachable” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe, 14 vols., ed. Erich Trunz, 14th ed. [München: Beck, 1989], 10: 440–41).
11. Ironically, Karl August was one of “Europe’s Princes” whom Fichte harshly criticized in his *Reclamation* of 1793.
12. Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 155. Förster provides a brilliant analysis of both Reinhold’s criticism of Kant and Reinhold’s own philosophy, which sets the agenda for Fichte’s attempt to find the single principle

- on which to establish philosophy. See Förster, *Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, esp. 153–58.
13. Published anonymously in 1792, the book had a long yet informative title: *Aenesidemus; or, Concerning the Foundations of the Elementary Philosophy Issued by Professor Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defense of Skepticism against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason* (Reprint – Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1911). The unnamed author of the book was Gottlob Ernst Schulze (1761–1833). For excerpts from *Aenesidemus* in English, see G. E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus* (excerpts), trans. George di Giovanni, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 104–35.
 14. As Dieter Henrich points out, contrary to Reinhold, who saw the task of philosophy in its broad practical application, Schulze sought to limit philosophy to the description of facts of consciousness, which resulted in a sort of philosophical phenomenalism. See Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 150–51.
 15. Fichte's review appeared in the three consecutive journal issues in February 1794. See EPW 59–77 (GA I/2:41–67).
 16. Fichte first reported his discovery in a letter to his friend Heinrich Stephani in December 1793: "I have discovered a new foundation, on the basis of which it will be easy to develop the whole of philosophy." In the same letter, he also gives some justification for his attempt to reconstruct Kant's philosophy: "Kant's philosophy, as such, is correct – but only in its results and not in its reasons" (EPW 371 [GA III/2, no. 171]). Interestingly, Schelling expressed a similar idea in a letter to Hegel on January 6, 1795: "Philosophy is not yet at an end. Kant has given results, yet the premises are still missing. And who can understand results without premises?" (*Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Karl Hegel, 2 vols. [Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1887], 1:14.)
 17. Named after Kant and his maternal grandfather, Immanuel Hermann Fichte edited his father's works, wrote a biography of him, and also did original philosophical work.
 18. This is how Fichte was described by his colleague F. K. Forberg, who contrasted him with his predecessor Reinhold. See F. K. Forberg, *Fichte in vertraulichen Briefen seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. Hans Schulz (Leipzig: Haessel, 1923), 43–44.
 19. The 1817 edition of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* was composed as a summary of his philosophy for students attending his lectures in Heidelberg.
 20. There are two full (the Krause and the Halle) and one partial (the Eschan) student transcripts of Fichte's lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* that are published in Germany. For the Halle transcript from 1797–98, see GA IV/2:2–267; for the Eschan transcript from 1796–97, see GA IV/3:143–196; for the Krause transcript from 1798–99, see GA IV/3:307–534. The English edition of both the Halle and Krause transcripts – translated by Daniel Breazeale – is in NM.
 21. Discussing Fichte's difficult situation in Jena, Rudolf Steiner argues that "the reason for all of the conflicts was that Fichte alienated people through his personality before he could make his ideas accessible to them." He believes that the root of Fichte's problems was his inability "to put up with everyday life" (Rudolf Steiner, "Sieben Briefe von Fichte an Goethe. Zwei Briefe von Fichte an Schiller," *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 15 [1894]: 49).

22. C. G. Voigt to Gottlieb Hufeland, Weimar, June 13, 1794 (quoted in EPW 23).
23. For a detailed and thoughtful discussion of the two controversies, see EPW 24–26.
24. F. K. Forberg, “Development of the Concept of Religion,” in *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, trans. Curtis Bowman, ed. Yolanda Estes (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010), 37–47. For the German edition of the chapter, see F. K. Forberg, “Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion,” in *Die Schriften zu J. G. Fichtes Atheismustreit, 1798–1800*, ed. Hans Lindau (Munich: Müller, 1913), 37–58.
25. A more detailed discussion of Fichte’s views of religion at the time of the *Atheismustreit*, can be found in Estes and Bowman, *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute*, 4–9, 17–20.
26. English translation: G, *A Father’s Letter to his Student Son about Fichte’s and Forberg’s Atheism*, in *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute*, 57–75.
27. The Saxon Letter of Requisition to the Weimar Court, dated December 18, 1798, explicitly stated that in their chapters Fichte and Forberg “did not shrink from acknowledging that they have expressed principles that are incompatible with the Christian religion, and indeed even with natural religion, and that they are openly intended to disseminate atheism” (*J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute*, 83).
28. Estes and Bowman, *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute*, 4–9.
29. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “Open Letter to Fichte, 1799,” trans. Diana I. Behler, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 2003), 127 (GA III/3, no. 428.I).
30. *Ibid.*, 129, 127 (GA III/3, no. 428.I).
31. In his open letter of March 3, 1799, Jacobi wrote: “We therefore both want, with similar seriousness and zeal, that the science of knowledge – which in all sciences is one and the same, the World-soul in the world of knowledge – become perfected; with only one difference: that you want it so that the basis of all truth, as lodging in the science of knowledge, reveal itself; I, so that this basis be revealed: the true itself is necessarily present outside of it” (Jacobi, “Open Letter to Fichte,” 125 [GA III/3, no. 428.I]).
32. Jacobi, “Open Letter to Fichte,” 126 (GA III/3, no. 428.I).
33. All other Berlin versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* appeared only posthumously. Some were published, in altered form, in the collection of Fichte’s works edited by his son, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, and most of them are now being published in *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe* (GA), the historical-critical academic edition of Fichte’s works produced by *Die Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (the Bavarian Academy of Sciences).
34. For an enlightening discussion of the context, the form, and the content of the dispute between Fichte and Schelling in 1800–1802, see Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood, introduction to *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)* by J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling, trans. and ed. Michael G. Vater and David W. Wood (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 1–20.

14

A Philosophy of Freedom: Fichte's Philosophical Achievement

Günter Zöller

Fichte is the prime philosopher of freedom. On the basis of Kant's Copernican revolution in theoretical philosophy and Kant's Rousseauian turn in practical philosophy, Fichte seeks a unified account of self and world that has freedom be the condition and purpose of nature and culture alike. In particular, Fichte argues for the eminently practical character of the human mind and the status of the natural and cultural world as the arena for the exercise of human freedom. Following Kant and Rousseau (by way of Kant), Fichte conceives of freedom as self-legislation or autonomy, thereby joining self-determination and self-limitation in the free enactment of the rule of reason. This chapter outlines Fichte's achievement by pursuing the foundational and final status of freedom in his philosophy.

In scope and character this chapter is designed to surround and supplement the more thematically specific contributions in this section of the volume devoted to Fichte's philosophical method, his theory of subjectivity and objectivity, his account of natural right, and his philosophy of religion with a more general account of the gist and goal of Fichte's philosophy. In particular, the present piece combines a look at Fichte's overall philosophical project with more detailed attention to those of its features that transcend the particular parts and disciplinary divisions of his philosophy.

Given that work on Fichte in English is, for the most part, limited to presentation and analysis of the publications from his first phase, while he was holding a professorship at the University of Jena (1794–99),¹ the chapter will forego specific scholarly reference. The comprehensive perspective of the present chapter is based on the author's own extensive earlier studies on the overall character and successive development of Fichte's philosophy.² Even on an international scale, Fichte's later philosophical work, especially that from his final four years, is still little known and understood, largely due to the fact that many of these previously unpublished writings only recently have been made available (GA II/9–17, GA IV/4–6) and are beginning to receive scholarly

and critical attention.³ In the now completed edition of his *Collected Works*, Fichte emerges as a philosopher whose stature and scope rivals that of his two successors, namely, Schelling and Hegel.⁴

Fichte's philosophical achievement lies in several interrelated areas. To begin with, as an enormously influential teacher, widely published writer, and highly visible intellectual, Fichte single-handedly moved professional philosophy after Kant from its consideration in limited academic circles into the larger arena of public dispute, artistic innovation, and political argument (Section 1). Moreover, as a close follower of Kant and a keen observer of the post-Kantian debates, he first fused the still separate edifices of natural philosophy and moral philosophy left behind by Kant into a single system of philosophical thought centered around the conception and realization of freedom (Section 2). Finally, as a relentlessly self-critical searcher, he subjected his core concerns in philosophy to ever changing and ever new modes of presentation and communication, effectively transforming philosophy from a product into an activity and from a body of methods and doctrines into a spirit meant to animate people's thoughts and lives (Section 3).

Practical philosophy

With Fichte, philosophy – post-Kantian philosophy and, to a large extent, philosophy ever since – gained existential import and vital significance, while retaining its established claims to intellectual rigor and rational standards. To be sure, Fichte's immediate influence, although wide ranging, was short-lived. He became the single most important source of inspiration behind the major movements in literature and philosophy at the time: the shift from the consolidated classicism of Goethe and Schiller to the nascent literary romanticism of Friedrich Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Hardenberg (pen name "Novalis"); and the transition from the orthodox or heterodox immediate post-Kantians to the philosophical systems of Schelling and Hegel. But Fichte's indirect effect reached well beyond his immediate contemporaries, close followers, and critical students. From Marx through Heidegger to Habermas, Fichte has been a secret source of inspiration behind the social, existential, and communicative turn in many past and recent philosophical developments.

The single feature that predestined Fichte's philosophical thinking for immediate influence and long-term effect was its sustained focus on freedom in all shapes and forms – on intellectual freedom from prejudice, political freedom from oppression, economic freedom from exploitation, legal freedom from injustice, ethical freedom from narrow interest, religious freedom from superstition, philosophical freedom from dogmatic belief. The positive conception of freedom underlying Fichte's pervasive philosophy of liberation is the freedom of self-determination – of a life led on the basis of careful deliberation and

considerate decision informed and guided by impartial reason. Moreover, the self-determination called for by Fichte as essentially required for a dignified human life is not exhausted by the freedom of arbitrary choice but crucially entails the rule of law, and of a law given by the rational human beings onto themselves at that.

Fichte's normative conception of rational legislative authority – of the law being authored by human reason as such and hence binding all rational human beings alike – follows the Kantian idea of the autonomously free will, a will that issues the very law (“moral law,” *Sittengesetz*) under which it places itself. Kantian autonomy is, in turn, informed by the political, specifically republican system of self-governance, as revitalized by Rousseau, according to which a politically united people is free if it stands only under its own laws, that is, under laws that it has given to itself independent of foreign influence or domestic domination.⁵ In Fichte's uptake of Kant and Rousseau, human autonomy loses its narrow, moral or political character and merges with the broader Kantian conception of independent law-governed agency or “spontaneity” that marks the human intellect in its freedom from sensory sources and natural determination.

In Fichte's revolutionary transformation, the Kantian double agenda of practical autonomy and theoretical spontaneity takes on the unitary character of a world-historical project of emancipation that encompasses nature and culture alike. According to Fichte, human cognition imposes order and purpose on a previously chaotic manifold of nature. For Fichte, who here follows Kant's transcendental-idealist account of the order of nature, the lawful structure of the natural world is essentially a product of human cognitive efforts, which bring forth such an order as a reflection of the mind's own independent principles. The human creative force further comes to the fore in the progressive transformation of pre-given nature into human-made culture, effectively replacing the natural world with the human world.

Fichte's philosophy of freedom further features the educative effect of rationally refined cognition and volition that human beings can and should exercise on each other. In Fichte's comprehensive vision, humanity is involved in an extended process of self-improvement that is to lead from the antagonistic pursuit of narrow interests to the collaborative achievement of a socio-political order marked by peace and prosperity. In the process, the limited, individual self is to be replaced by an encompassing, communal self. Drawing on a key term from the philosophical discourse of the German Enlightenment, *Bestimmung*, meaning “destination” as well as “determination,” Fichte describes the human condition as one of being “destined to determine [oneself]” (GA IV/23:140), thereby indicating the cultural task of replacing the given with the made in a process that is marked by the threefold status of freedom as the origin, the instrument, and the end of human development.

The firm focus on freedom that permeates Fichte's philosophy also shapes his view of philosophy's status, function, and purpose. For Fichte, philosophy is not a subject of instruction and indoctrination but a vehicle of emancipation from prejudice and ignorance. In essence, the philosopher offers a train of thought for consideration and examination. The intended transmission of philosophical insight presupposes on the part of the recipient the very freedom that is the subject and substance of philosophy itself. Faced with the widespread misunderstanding of the scope and character of his philosophy, Fichte came to see that a philosophy born of freedom and geared toward freedom is intelligible and interesting only to those who are willing and able to place their own thinking and doing under the theoretical and practical demands of freedom and who assume full responsibility for their thoughts and acts. Accordingly, Fichte's communicative practice is that of challenge, solicitation, and summons, in an effort to awaken the listener and reader to cognitive and conative self-determination.

Fichte's radical revision of the practice of philosophy finds expression in the very term he coins to replace the old appellation "philosophy," the neologism being *Wissenschaftslehre*, literally "Doctrine of Science" or "Science of Knowledge." The novel term combines an attitude of modesty with an assertive claim. On the one hand, philosophy in Fichte no longer lays claim to rendering its adepts wise (Greek, *sophos*) but seeks to challenge them to their own, independent, self-sought, and self-taught formation of mind and character. On the other hand, Fichte proudly replaces philosophy's ancient self-understanding as a pursuit rather than a possession ("love of wisdom") with the redefinition of philosophy as the eminent science – a mode and method of knowledge superior in truth and certainty to all other knowledge, which in turn is based on the meta- and super-knowledge that is philosophy.

The overall practical character of Fichte's philosophy also manifests itself in the integration of the *Wissenschaftslehre* proper – a first philosophy in the tradition of Aristotle's metaphysics as much as Kant's transcendental philosophy – into an entire architectonic of philosophical subdisciplines and further fields. To begin with, Fichte prepares the stage for his core philosophy by way of formal introductions and other propaedeutic pieces on methodological, logical, and psychological matters that are to lead the listener of his lectures and the reader of their subsequent fixation and publication from the common world view ("standpoint of life") to the philosophical world view ("standpoint of speculation") (GA I/4:211n).

Moreover, the general foundational work of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as such (*Wissenschaftslehre in specie* [GA II/8:376]) is succeeded by its application to the diverse domains of nature and culture, resulting in the double project of a philosophy of the natural world in terms of its physical laws and a philosophy of the human world together with its moral laws or laws of freedom. For Fichte

the two worlds so grounded are not parallel universes inhabited by different beings that are indifferent to each other. Rather the natural world, on Fichte's account, is the arena for the exercise and enhancement of the "culture toward freedom" (GA I/1:243), and the cultural world shapes and changes the natural world into an extension of human life and its exercise in freedom.

Due to external circumstances, Fichte did not manage to provide a detailed philosophy of nature, which would soon be supplied by his successor-competitor, Schelling, albeit in a form that Fichte continued to criticize for its inadequate consideration of freedom. But Fichte provided and published extensive scholarly works in the philosophy of law (*Foundations of Natural Right*, 1796–97) and in ethics (*The System of Ethics*, 1798), supplemented by more popular works on the philosophy of history (*Characteristics of the Present Age*, 1806) and the philosophy of religion (*Initiation to the Blessed Life*, 1806) that showed him as a rigorous writer as much as a skilled orator.

Fichte carried the practical propensity of his philosophy even farther by addressing contemporary political issues and events: from a mitigated defense of the French Revolution (*Contribution to the Rectification of the Public's Judgment of the French Revolution*, 1793–94) through the plan for a peaceful international order based on economic isolationism (*The Closed Commercial State*, 1800) to the anti-Napoleonic call for a cultural and political revolution that was to arise from the populace of the militarily defeated German lands (*Addresses to the German Nation*, 1808) and his late partisan portrayal of world history as the progressive provision of legal equality (*The Doctrine of the State*, lectures from 1813, posthumously published in 1820).

A further form under which Fichte's thoroughly practical philosophy manifests itself is its focus on the pedagogical purpose of the philosopher. For Fichte the philosopher is – or rather, is to be – a teacher-educator of humanity, immediately so in a university setting, in which the philosopher *qua* professor addresses the academic youth, and indirectly so in a broader civic-social setting, in which the philosopher *qua* preacher turns to the wider populace. The main message is the same in both scenarios: the call for a life led in freedom for the sake of freedom. Fichte devoted three complete cycles of lectures to the vocation or mission of the scholar in general and the practical philosopher in particular, which were given and published at the beginning, in the middle, and toward the end of his philosophical career. On Fichte's understanding, the scholar-philosopher is to be not only knowledgeable about the freedom that matters in life but also skillful in the implementation of philosophical knowledge for the enhancement of freedom on a societal scale. As a practical philosopher, Fichte's philosophical scholar and scholarly philosopher, in addition to being an intellectual ("scholar"), is also an artist – to be precise, a "free artist" strategically aiming at the future of humanity (GA II/16:34).

Fichte's accomplishment of turning philosophy practical and making it address itself to a wider audience and to a larger range of issues had a lasting effect on the public presence of philosophers outside of academia. Of special significance is the orientation toward the future that Fichte's practical turn brought into philosophy. Neither the reconciliation with the actual present, as in Hegel, nor the nostalgia for the recollected past, as in Schelling, animates Fichte's thinking, but the concern for a future to be made and shaped by human beings in an attempt to improve and increase the condition of freedom and the rule of reason. To be sure, the called-for establishment of the reign of freedom and reason proved open to different and even contradictory interpretations, involving already Fichte himself and more so those succeeding him in their pursuit of human emancipation and socio-political emendation into controversies and competition. If, with Fichte and thanks to Fichte, philosophers began immersing themselves in practical matters and addressing political issues, they also started forming factions and fighting each other over the theory underlying the practice and the practice corresponding to the theory.

The system of freedom

The eminently practical character of Fichte's philosophy is not limited to the latter's intended import on human thinking and doing. The very fabric of Fichte's philosophy is primarily practical – manifestly so in Fichte's focus on the will as the core feature of human existence and structurally so in his activist conception of mental life. On Fichte's considered view, the practical, including volition, has primacy over the theoretical, including cognition, since originally all thinking is a kind of doing and involves the exercise of spontaneity.

But the primacy of the practical maintained by Fichte goes beyond the generic activist or spontaneous character of thinking and turns cognition and its object domain – the realm of nature – into an extension, even an integral part of volition and its object domain – the realm of freedom. According to Fichte's own formula for the pervasive presence of the practical, his philosophy is a "system of freedom" and the historically first one at that (GA III/2:298, 300). Fichte's claim might seem surprising, given the status of freedom in the philosophy of Fichte's immediate predecessor and main source of inspiration, Kant. In fact, the very phrase "system of freedom" already figures in the self-description of Kant's philosophy (A815/B843).

But there is an importance difference to note between the systematic status of freedom in Kant and in Fichte. For Kant freedom is the "capstone" (Ak 5:3) of philosophy that serves to unite its different domains into a single edifice. In particular, the concept of freedom in Kant serves to connect natural philosophy

and moral philosophy. Under the idea of freedom the restriction of theoretical cognition (“knowledge”) to objects in space and time (“appearances”) is joined with the extension of practical cognition, under the guidance of moral obligations, to a supra-natural order (“kingdom of ends”). Moreover, in Kant entities that elude the grasp of knowledge, chiefly the objects of traditional metaphysics (soul, God), receive their validation as practically affirmed objects involved in moral willing (“moral faith,” “rational faith” [A828/B856; Ak 5:144]). Still, in Kant the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of freedom, while being subject to integration and unification, form originally distinct domains with specifically different principles governing them.

By contrast, Fichte’s formula of his philosophy being the “first system of freedom” announces the priority of freedom over nature and the subordination of nature under freedom. In order for freedom to serve as the principle of all philosophy, the knowledge of nature, too, has to be governed by the conception of freedom. On Fichte’s assessment, nature is not a sphere opposed to freedom but the latter’s extension from practice into theory. In particular, nature functions as the arena for the exercise and realization of freedom under moral constraints. Accordingly, nature for Fichte is not opposed to freedom and morality, but is joined with the latter as the sphere of their efficacy. Moreover, Fichte’s assimilation of nature to morality holds not only for outer nature or the physical world, which is viewed as, in principle, amenable or even hospitable to ethical action. The mitigated naturalism of Fichte’s concrete ethics also holds for nature within – the very sphere which Kant had opposed to the rule of freedom and the demands of morality and placed under the designation “inclination” (Ak 4:413n).

But not only is freedom for Fichte the principle underlying the natural and the moral world. The very constitution of practical, intelligent beings, able to think and act on their own, is contingent upon their potential for freedom and the latter’s actualization. The task of traversing the modal difference between possible freedom and actual freedom introduces into Fichte’s system of freedom a profoundly historical dimension. Individually and socially, freedom is the result of focused formation involving education and enlightenment that human beings are to impart to each other. Accordingly, Fichte’s systematic account of freedom is centered around the purposive development of freedom, a development not based on natural factors alone but on the engagement of the very freedom at which it aims. In Fichte’s developmental perspective on freedom, philosophy takes on the traits of a history of self-consciousness that prepares the way for Schelling’s and Hegel’s similarly structured enterprises of a phenomenology of mind or spirit.

For Fichte the systematic development of freedom occurs in two separate but interrelated spheres, namely, those of law and of ethics. In laying the philosophical foundations of law, Fichte envisions an original scene involving the

encounter of an already emerged free rational being and a being only potentially so constituted (GA I/3:340–48). In order to bring out the latter's still dormant potential for free acting, Fichte has the human being be challenged to engage in free self-determination. In line with the freedom to be preserved and provoked by this act, the solicitation must not consist in the exercise of sheer physical force. Rather, the original call to freedom has to open up the very space in which the intended exercise of freedom is to take place.

The conceptual space of free interaction to be opened up by the challenge to freedom is one of mutual regard for the freedom of everyone involved. The latter's justificatory basis consists in the equal qualification of every human being for acting freely and rationally. On Fichte's construal, the mutual regard for each other's freedom ("recognizing," "recognition" [GA I/3:353–54]) is not a specifically moral relation along the lines of the respect for personhood maintained by Kant. Instead the relationship of reciprocal recognition, as detailed by Fichte, is based on the cognition of external indicators for a being's potential for free and rational conduct, chiefly among them the human face. Moreover, Fichte considers it a matter of practical intelligence that beings who owe their awakening to freedom and rationality to the recognitional conduct of others toward them should treat those others in a like manner, and consistently so.

But Fichte is enough of a realist about the human condition to know that the rational thing to do is not always what is being done. In order to assure the continued recognition of a free being as such by other such beings, a system needs to be in place that monitors the compliance of all parties involved. On Fichte's account, the concept governing reciprocal recognitional conduct among free beings is that of right, originally the right to free acting and derivatively the plural rights to the latter's requirements and consequences. More specifically, under the rule of right the freedom exercised by anyone has to be framed and tamed by the systematic consideration of the equal right and rights of everyone else involved in the community of right and its institutional framework, namely, political society or the state.

The freedom underlying the order of right as the latter's principle as well as object is essentially external freedom, or the freedom from physical and social hindrances that impede the efficacy of an already formed will in its outward manifestation and realization. In addition to the external freedom regulated by the framework of juridical law, Fichte's philosophical system of freedom also countenances an inner law that shapes the very formation of the will in the pursuit of freedom. According to Fichte, who here follows Kant, the law governing a free will as such is the moral law. Yet unlike Kant, who had placed free willing under the formal qualification of universal legislation ("categorical imperative"), Fichte has moral willing be determined by the supreme goal of freedom itself – of absolute freedom or freedom for its own sake. More

specifically, the freedom pursued by moral willing and its ensuing acting is the complete independence of the practical intelligent being from any and all foreign determination. To be sure, such freedom is an infinitely remote state of practical perfection.

For Fichte moral willing and acting as the pursuit of perfect freedom is marked by the will's increased and intensified independence from foreign factors. Yet the free will that is more and more liberated from obstacles and limitations also possesses less and less content in its infinitesimal approach to total freedom. In practical terms, the project of completely self-sufficient, absolutely independent willing and acting leads to a system of ethical freedom in which everyone pursues the same formal end – freedom for its own sake. Accordingly, the kind of community envisioned in Fichte's ethics of internal freedom is radically distinct from the juridical society of externally free agents, who are free to pursue their own, self-chosen ends provided they do not interfere with the like freedom of everyone else. In Fichte's ideal ethical community, by contrast, freedom does not result in the diverse but compatible conduct of plural individuals but aims at a deindividualized manner of willing and acting in which everyone does the same thing because all agree in the ultimate, if unreal end of absolute freedom (GA I/5:211).

The specifically different principles and conditions that distinguish law and ethics as the two spheres of freedom in Fichte lend his practical philosophy a dual character. In terms of his account of external freedom under the principles of juridical law, Fichte's philosophy of freedom shares the liberal outlook of much of modern philosophy that stresses the existential independence and original primacy of the human individual. With regard to the forms and norms of inner freedom subject to moral principles, Fichte partakes in a counter-movement to liberal modernity that treats the individual as a mere means or "vehicle" (GA I/5:210) for the establishment and advancement of an ethical organism that is to exceed its members' individual limitations and enhance their affinities to a larger, social self.

While Fichte maintains throughout the distinct but complementary status of the twofold order of outer and inner freedom, he also, like Kant, subjects the legal sphere to a specifically ethical mode of further validation by making lawful conduct, in addition to a juridical obligation, an ethical requirement. Moreover, unlike Kant, Fichte places the entire juridico-political sphere ("state") in a teleological perspective that treats law and politics as means for purposively approaching and eventually achieving a form of sociality that lies beyond the state and in which the constraint of external laws and the enforced compliance with them eventually is to be replaced by entirely voluntary obedience. Fichte's historically informed term for the praeter-political order that supersedes the juridical state is the "realm," or more precisely the "realm of right" or the "realm of freedom" (GA II/16:49, 53).

The spirit of the system

The dynamic and developmental trait that characterizes Fichte's philosophy as a system of freedom also manifests itself in Fichte's own practice of philosophy. The system of freedom conceived by Fichte was not realized all at once. Nor did it stay stable and unchanged. On the contrary, Fichte devoted his entire professional career, which lasted from 1793 through 1814, to the writing and rewriting of his first philosophy, in the process authoring some fifteen different versions of it. Except for the very first one, none of the successive presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* were brought to publication during Fichte's lifetime. But all of them were presented to academic, public, or private audiences, and all came about for the purpose of such oral delivery based on a written text. The continually changing presentation of the system of freedom was due to Fichte's vaulting ambition of imparting methodical form and scientific treatment to a subject matter that constitutively defied a presentation through static doctrinal concepts: the status and function of the unconditional and infinite – freedom – in finite, conditioned existence.

In the earliest presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte built on Kant and some early post-Kantians by grounding the system of freedom on a triple set of principles inspired by the Kantian first principle of apperception, according to which the universal proto-thought, "I think," must be able to accompany all one's cognitive mental acts ("representations") (B 131–32). In an effort to lend universality to the Kantian principle of apperception, Fichte expanded its range to comprise the principal enabling of all kinds of mental activity, including volition and feeling. In so doing, he substituted the specific terms employed by Kant, "thinking" and "intuiting," with the generic term, "positing," intended to capture the spontaneous, though originally unconscious mental activity underlying all conscious mental acts. Fichte also followed Kant's lead in designating the subject manifesting itself in conscious as well as preconscious mental activity by means of the nominalized personal pronoun of the first person singular, "the I."

In Fichte's original presentation of the system of freedom, the I was not only the origin and basis of self-consciousness but also the ground of all other consciousness. In particular, Fichte undertook the derivation ("deduction") of the objects ostensibly encountered in experience from the original bringing forth – by the "positing" I – of a produced, "posited" not-I, out of which the entire world of objects was to have arisen. Fichte's terminological coinage for the I's twofold originary constitution – as the origin of self-consciousness (subjectivity) and of the consciousness of objects (objectivity) – was "subject-object" or "subject-objectivity" (GA I/4:255). The initial, published version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* – presented in 1794–95 – met, in part, with an unsympathetic and distorting reception in which Fichte was charged with solipsism and

(subjective) idealism. In response to those misunderstandings Fichte undertook a novel presentation (*Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*) centered around the philosophical narration of the emergence of self- and world-awareness in a practically intelligent being like us (“pragmatic history of the human mind” [GA I/2:365]).

As the misunderstandings and misrepresentations of his published views persisted, Fichte became increasingly skeptical about giving a final form to his continuing work in philosophy. Instead he adopted the practice of presenting his core philosophy (*Wissenschaftslehre*) always in a novel or different outward form, offering, on average, a new presentation every year during the fourteen remaining years of his life. The only writings Fichte published during his later years, which he mostly spent in Berlin, were his lecture series in the philosophy of history, philosophy of religion, philosophy of education, and philosophy of culture, which sought to divulge the *Wissenschaftslehre* by substituting systematic form with popular presentation. The coalition of scholarly and popular works in Fichte’s later philosophy was philosophically motivated. For Fichte, philosophy was not a self-absorbed academic undertaking but essentially involved the gathering of insights informed by natural and social reality and intended to aid in acting on the latter in an effort of improvement guided by the general goal of freedom.

Fichte’s favored term for the pre-philosophical origin of philosophical insight as well as for its praeter-philosophical purpose was “life.” The term as used by Fichte was not meant in a narrow, specifically biological sense. Rather it served as an appellation for that independent, inherently dynamic domain that was to be the object of philosophy’s sustained reflection (“speculation”). For Fichte, philosophy was to give an account of life in an effort to direct and redirect the course of life toward increased and enhanced freedom.⁶

The developmental curve of Fichte’s later philosophy was shaped by his increasing awareness of the fundamental discrepancy between philosophical speculation about life and life itself – a tension that seemed to inhere in the very conception of a “system of freedom,” with its intent of lending free activity a systematic form. Rather than presenting his philosophical thoughts as lessons to be learned, Fichte regarded and offered them as thoughts that his listeners (and readers) would have to appropriate for themselves and generate on their own. Especially for the later Fichte, philosophy was not some knowledge, no matter how extraordinary and superior, to be possessed and passed on, but a way of seeing things that was to inform the philosopher’s entire being, and by extension that of his listeners and readers. On the whole, then, philosophical knowledge was to come alive in one’s thinking and doing in a process that was to turn acquired cognition into lived wisdom.

The major move toward the later presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* was taken in 1804–5 with no less than five successive presentations, of which the

second lecture course from the year 1804 proved the most accomplished (GA II/8). The later Fichte gave up the earlier emphasis on the I, replacing it with a two-tiered account of knowledge as deriving, unconditionally or absolutely, from an elusive founding dimension (“the absolute,” “absolute being,” “being,” “God” [GA II/8:10, 114, 118, 242]) and in turn grounding the world of objects to be known and acted upon. According to the later Fichte, the basic move from primary being itself to knowledge as the latter’s appearance involved a conditional necessity, hence a contingency. While it had to be considered a contingent matter, not to be deduced from any rule or regulation, that the absolute manifested itself or “appeared,” the appearance, once brought about, was to unfold itself according to norms that were to govern and guide the absolute’s appearance as dynamic knowledge rather than static being.

The outright metaphysical, not to say theological, language (“God,” “revelation”) that is encountered in the later Fichte is likely to have been chosen in an effort to match and meet the conceptualities of his philosophical contemporaries and competitors (Jacobi, Schelling). The changed language and imagery of the later works has often been taken as in indication of major doctrinal changes over the course of Fichte’s philosophical development. Not a few readers past and present have detected in the later Fichte evidence and elements of mysticism, alternatively attributed to Fichte with an expression of praise or blame. To the impartial reader, though, who takes into account Fichte’s works in their entirety, Fichte emerges as quite consistent in his positions and coherent in his development. In particular, the “absolute I” that figured prominently in Fichte’s early work, where it addressed the absolute or unconditional character underlying the finite I, rather than a distinct entity of its own, prepared the way for the subsequent featuring of knowledge’s unconditional, absolute ground as “the absolute.”

In his later works Fichte insisted on the intimate connection between “the absolute,” which he considered to show itself (“appearance”) under the guise of knowledge, and knowledge itself, which he considered as absolute in its own way, due to knowledge’s basic feature as objectively valid cognition, holding independent of the mental and physical conditions and circumstances of its occasional articulation. In particular, Fichte consistently maintained that his philosophical insight centered around the intuitive grasp of the reciprocal need that links thinking and being as well their object domains, that is, the real and the ideal. According to Fichte, this intimate relationship indicated an underlying original unity that served as the basis both for differentiation and unification and that was absolute, or “the absolute,” to the extent that it did not depend on anything else. The early and the later Fichte shared a core concern with the very possibility of knowledge and the latter’s unfolding into a five-part structure of knowledge domains and their correlated standpoints. Based on his earlier elaboration of a fivefold systematic set-up of knowledge

(“synthetic periodical structure” [GA IV/3:500; GA IV/2:247], the later Fichte delineated an ascending row of standpoints that stretched from nature through (juridical) law, ethics, and religion to the culminating, comprehensive standpoint of philosophy (GA II/8:418; GA I/9:146).

Compared with the elaborate expositions to be found in the earlier presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the later presentations, with their focus on the absolute and its appearance, that is, knowledge, tended toward a monothematic focus and repetitive insistence. The later Fichte effectively reduced his first philosophy to a limited set of principal propositions, ultimately arriving at the “single thought” that the absolute alone has being (“is”) and that knowledge is the “appearance” of the absolute. But the later Fichte also continued his concern with the existential effect of philosophical insight, typically sending off his listeners (and, by extension, his readers) with words of encouragement and exhortation such as this: “Now that you have knowledge, become wisdom” (GA II/12:299).

Moreover, in the later presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte undertook a pointed return to the earlier focus on the absolutely positing I by figuratively attributing to the absolute itself an urge (“drive”) to appear under the guise of knowledge. To be sure, the absolute was not to manifest itself as such, in its absolute being, but always only approximately so and under the guise of knowledge, especially philosophical knowledge of the absolute. Eventually Fichte joined the account of knowledge in terms of the absolute and its appearance, to be found in the later presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, with the consideration of knowledge in terms of the I, to be found in the earlier presentations. More specifically, the final Fichte reintroduced the I as the form (“I-form” [GA II/11:185]) under which the absolute appears as knowledge. In addition, the inclusion of the I in the latest presentations was centered around the practical nature of the I in general and its basic character as will in particular (GA II/13:175), thus reaffirming the profoundly practical perspective of Fichte’s philosophy as a philosophy of freedom in spirit, if not in letter, throughout.

Notes

1. See Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Wayne M. Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte’s Jena Project* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1997); Günter Zöllner, *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gunnar Beck, *Fichte and Kant on Freedom, Rights, and Law* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2008); David James, *Fichte’s Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte’s Early Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2. See Günter Zöller, *Fichte lesen* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013), esp. 112–16.
3. See Katja V. Taver, *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre von 1810. Versuch einer Exegese* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999); Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso, *Vom Wissen zur Weisheit. Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre 1811* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); and Helmut Girndt and Jacinto Rivera de Rosales, eds., *Die Wissenschaftslehre von 1807 "Die Königsberger" von Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Eine kooperative Interpretation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).
4. See Wolfgang Janke, *Die dreifache Vollendung des Deutschen Idealismus. Schelling, Hegel und Fichtes ungeschriebene Lehre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).
5. On the republican background of classical German political philosophy, see Günter Zöller, *Res publica: Plato's "Politeia" in Classical German Philosophy* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2014).
6. For an account of Fichte's ingenious joining of life and philosophy, see Günter Zöller, "Life into Which an Eye Has Been Inserted: Fichte on the Fusion of Vitality and Vision," *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* (forthcoming in 2014).

15

Fichte's Methodology in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95)

Frederick Neuhouser

In an eighteen-month period spanning 1794–95 Fichte published the two texts that make up the core of the first and most influential version of his philosophical system, the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The earlier text, *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre* (hereafter, *Concept*), appeared just before Fichte began his first teaching post at the University of Jena. Its purpose was to communicate the aims and method of his new philosophy to prospective students. The second and more important text, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*¹ (hereafter, *Foundation*), was also addressed to Fichte's students and written as a supplement to his lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre* in 1794–95.

In interpreting the views expressed in Fichte's first presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* it is essential to keep in mind two facts about its main text. First, the *Foundation* was written under extremely disadvantageous conditions. By the time professional circumstances forced him to start lecturing on his new philosophical system, Fichte had only begun to work out the general outline of his position. The text that came to be regarded by the philosophical world as a definitive statement of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is nothing more than a collection of student aids written and distributed in installments during Fichte's first two semesters at Jena. It is at best a hurriedly written sketch of the ideas that a young and enthusiastic Fichte hoped could be developed into a comprehensive system of philosophy. The second fact worth remembering is that many features of the first *Wissenschaftslehre*, including some of its best known doctrines, are completely absent from the version of the system that Fichte presented less than two years later, the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*.² The conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that it is unwise to approach the *Foundation* as if it were a unified work whose every part were worthy of careful study. As Fichte admitted two years after its publication, the *Foundation* "gives off sparks of spirit; but it is not a *single flame*" (EPW 417 [GA III/3, no. 354]). Still, among those sparks are a number of ideas of sufficient

originality to make study of the first presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* philosophically rewarding.

In this chapter I will focus on Fichte's understanding of the tasks and method of philosophy as set out in these early texts. Although they are informed by a clear understanding of philosophy's tasks, it is much more difficult to figure out by what method Fichte means to accomplish those tasks. I will argue that, despite some indications that Fichte envisioned using a Kantian method in the *Foundation* (transcendental argumentation), the method he actually employs is fundamentally different. More precisely, in this first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte employs a *dialectical* method, invented by him, which is very close to the method later used by Hegel in his *Science of Logic*. As I will explain below, the method is dialectical because it proceeds "synthetically" (WL 120 [GA I/2:283]) via the "unification of opposites" (WL 113 [GA I/2:274]). In this respect the *Foundation* is crucial to understanding the profound changes German Idealism went through between Kant and Hegel.

The idea of a system

In a prefatory note to his "First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*" of 1797, Fichte makes a startling statement concerning the relation between his philosophy and Kant's: "I have always said ... that my system is none other than the Kantian system. I.e., it contains the same view of the subject, though it proceeds in a manner that is entirely independent of Kant's presentation" (IWL 4 [GA I/4:184]).³ The puzzle posed by this statement is why, if the *Wissenschaftslehre* merely repeats the Kantian position, there is a need for it at all. Why care so much about how Kant *presents* his philosophy?

In focusing on Kant's mode of presentation, Fichte's concern is not simply about the obscurity of Kant's doctrines. (And, as any reader of the *Foundation* quickly learns, the suggestion that Fichte's contribution lies in bringing clarity to Kant's ideas is implausible in the extreme.) Rather, the new presentation Fichte envisions is, above all, a *systematization* of Kant's philosophy. The reason Fichte takes this to be philosophy's most urgent task lies in his conviction that giving systematic form to Kant's doctrines – making them into a science, or *Wissenschaft* – is essential to defending them against a host of objections to which critical philosophy in the form given it by Kant is vulnerable. More specifically, a systematic reconstruction of Kant's philosophy – a *Wissenschaftslehre* – should be able to demonstrate the autonomy and self-transparency of reason in its critical function as well as refute the skeptical challenges raised against Kant's theoretical and moral philosophy. In what follows I hope to make clear how Fichte – and with him, an entire generation of philosophers – could pin such weighty hopes on philosophy's achievement

of systematicity. First, though, we need to examine what Fichte in this early period takes philosophical systematicity to consist in.

The feature of a system that Fichte emphasizes most is its starting point: philosophy must begin with a single principle. In this phase of Fichte's thought this requirement seems to spring from two distinct philosophical needs. The first is the need for certainty. If philosophy is to provide us with genuine knowledge, it must begin with a principle that itself possesses absolute certainty, independently of the system that follows from it (EPW 103, 108–9 [GA I/2:114, 120–21]).⁴ Such a principle cannot be proved (for then the premise of that proof would be the first principle) but must be self-evident. Moreover, the first principle has the task of conferring its certainty on the propositions derived from it so that each of them possesses the same degree of certainty as it has. But Fichte also thinks of the first principle as satisfying the need for systematic coherence: "A science possesses systematic form. All its propositions are joined together in a single first principle, in which they unite to form a whole" (EPW 101 [GA I/2:112]). Fichte's idea is that philosophy strives to be more than a collection of unrelated propositions: it seeks not only to achieve certainty but also to know the relations among its parts. The interconnectedness of philosophical knowledge can be established, Fichte thinks, by exhibiting the dependence of all such knowledge on one first principle, and this is to be achieved by deriving all propositions as links of a continuous chain of arguments proceeding from one starting point. The underlying idea here is that, when united under such a principle, philosophical propositions acquire properties they lack in isolation: first, by being derived from a certain starting point such propositions acquire a firmer foundation than they have on their own; second, unifying them within a single chain of arguments establishes their relations to the other philosophical truths in the system.

The second feature of a philosophical system concerns its scope: it strives to be comprehensive, or complete. As Fichte formulates it in a later text, the *Wissenschaftslehre's* task is to show that from the first principle one can derive "the entire system of our necessary representations – not merely our representations of a world in which objects are determined by... [theoretical] judgment, but also our representations of ourselves as free, practical beings subject to laws" (IWL 31 [GA I/4:205]). Thus, philosophy achieves systematicity by deriving all of our non-contingent representations (what in the theoretical realm Kant called the *a priori* elements of experience) from its first principle.

A third feature of the system Fichte envisions is its method. As I have suggested, it is not immediately clear in the first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* what method Fichte intends to employ in moving from its first principle to "the entire system of our necessary representations." The *Concept* is surprisingly silent about how the *Wissenschaftslehre* proceeds once it has discovered its first principle, and the *Foundation*, too, fails to address that question clearly. It is

tempting to look ahead to the second version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (NM) in order to answer this question because in his introductions to that system Fichte says clearly how the system is to be derived from its first principle:

[The *Wissenschaftslehre*] proceeds...by showing that...the first principle...is not possible unless something else occurs as well, and that this second thing is not possible apart from the occurrence of some third thing. It continues in this manner until all the conditions of the first principle have been completely exhausted and its possibility has become completely comprehensible. It proceeds in an uninterrupted progression from what is conditioned to the condition of the same. (IWL 31 [GA I/4:205])

Fichte's idea in this text is that systematic philosophy consists in a series of transcendental arguments in which each new proposition is deduced as a necessary condition for the possibility of the preceding one. For a number of reasons one might assume that this describes his method in the *Foundation* as well. First, this would represent just one more respect in which Fichte would be continuing in the footsteps of Kant, for whom transcendental argumentation plays an important role, especially in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Second, it is easy to see how this conception of the *Wissenschaftslehre's* method fits in with the requirement that the first principle confer its certainty on the rest of the system, for if an already established *X* can be shown to rely for its possibility on the condition expressed in a succeeding proposition *Y*, then *Y* must be accorded the same degree of certainty as *X*. Finally, some remarks even in the *Foundation* seem to suggest that its method is transcendental (WL 95, 96, 99, 103 [GA I/2:257, 258, 261, 265–66]).⁵ As I will show, however, most of the argumentation in the *Foundation* does *not* consist in moving from some fact or principle to the conditions that make that fact or principle possible. Instead Fichte proceeds dialectically, by “unifying opposites” or resolving contradictions.

Aims of systematic philosophy

Understanding Fichte's concern to achieve systematicity requires examining the problems he thinks critical philosophy faces in its unsystematized form, which fall into two categories: Kant's failure to provide a critique of reason adequate to reason's nature as an autonomous and self-transparent faculty, and skeptical challenges to Kant's accounts of knowledge and morality. One of the issues that most disturbs Kant's followers is his failure, in their eyes, to realize his own goal of putting metaphysics on a scientific footing through a critique of pure reason. It is a basic presupposition of Kant's project that reason in its critical function is capable of surveying its own mode of

operation – determining its principles and their scope – with complete transparency. Kant claims repeatedly that, because critique is nothing more than reason's investigation of itself, it must be able to deliver a comprehensive account of its own principles. Indeed, Kant takes this point so seriously that he makes the very success of critique depend on its achieving both completeness and systematic unity (Axiii, Axx, Bxxiii–xxiv). Moreover, Kant's critical project presumes reason to be an autonomous, or self-grounding, faculty in the sense that reason is able not only to ascertain what its principles are but also to establish their legitimacy (Axi).

In the theoretical sphere Fichte's objection amounts to the claim that Kant fails to provide a genuine deduction of the *a priori* elements of experience. Before spelling out Fichte's specific charges, however, we should note where in the first *Critique* he thinks Kant succeeds in laying the groundwork for a deduction of the required sort, his transcendental deduction of the pure categories of the understanding. Kant's argument there is that without the application of the categories to the objects of experience there could be no self-identical subject of knowledge. Thus, the categories are deduced in the sense that they are shown to be necessary conditions of what Kant calls "the highest principle" (B136) of the understanding: the subject's consciousness of its necessary unity. The first of Fichte's criticisms is that Kant fails to give this kind of deduction for all *a priori* elements of experience. This is because the arguments establishing space and time as the *a priori* forms of sensible intuition proceed not from some basic feature of subjectivity itself (such as its self-identity) but from the merely factual existence of geometry and arithmetic, two sciences whose synthetic *a priori* character points to the *a priori* nature of the pure intuitions of space and time on which they are based (EPW 73 [GA I/2:61]). While Fichte grants Kant's success in establishing that space and time are necessary features of experience for human subjects, he insists that Kant fails to demonstrate their necessity in a more substantive sense: since they are not deduced as conditions of the basic unity of the subject, space and time can appear to Kant only as contingent – as simply the forms of intuition we happen to have – rather than as necessary relative to some more basic feature of subjectivity. Thus, Kant's failure to deduce space and time from the same principle that grounds the proof of the categories prevents him from exhibiting not only their relation to the most basic feature of subjectivity but also the origins they share with the categories of the understanding and, indeed, with the entire faculty of reason.

A second charge concerns the categories themselves: although Kant deduces them in the sense that he establishes the necessity of pure concepts if experience is to be possible, he fails to deduce each individual category. The focus of this criticism is not the transcendental deduction but the metaphysical deduction of the categories that precedes it (A70/B95–A83/B109). There Kant undertakes

to specify which categories belong to the pure understanding by taking the various forms of judgment recognized by logic (for example, categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive judgments) and associating with each a concept (substance, cause, and reciprocity) that is therefore accorded a status as an *a priori* category. To this procedure Fichte responds:

[How can the critical philosopher] who does not derive the presumed laws of the intellect from the very nature of the intellect... know that those laws are precisely these, substantiality and causality? ... It is of no help to borrow them in some roundabout way from logic... [for this] does not provide us with any understanding of... why [the intellect] must act in precisely this way. In order to obtain an understanding of this, we must specify some property that can belong only to the intellect, and the laws of thinking must then be derived from these premises. (IWL 27–28 [GA I/4:201–2])

It is worth noting that Kant himself recognizes that his metaphysical deduction must be able to show “why just these concepts, and no others, have their seat in the pure understanding” (A81/B107). Fichte’s complaint, then, must be that arriving at the categories as the metaphysical deduction does simply pushes the question “Why these and not others?” back onto the forms of judgment. What Fichte thinks is needed to answer that question is a series of proofs that derives the individual categories from a single first principle that articulates a fundamental feature of the subject.

The third charge has to do with the relation between theoretical and practical reason. Fichte’s dissatisfaction stems from his belief that Kant delivers two distinct accounts of reason, in two separate critiques, but fails to bring them together into a unitary account of reason in general. Fichte’s task here can be articulated in the same terms used to describe the supposed unity between sensibility and the understanding: can the principles of theoretical and practical reason be derived from a common first principle? Here, too, Fichte sees himself as merely following up on a suggestion made by Kant himself, namely, that it may one day be possible “to attain insight into the unity of the whole pure rational faculty (theoretical as well as practical) and to derive everything from one principle” (CPrR 5:91). In attempting to find a chain of arguments that links the highest principle of the first *Critique*, transcendental apperception, with that of the second, the categorical imperative, Fichte intends not only to derive the principles of the two employments of reason within a single system but also to reveal their underlying structural affinity. What Fichte hopes to show is that reason in both its employments carries out a single function, or more precisely, that there is an isomorphism between the unity bestowed by the theoretical subject on its representations and the unity (or consistency) of will that the practical subject is called on to realize by

morality. Fichte's understanding of this task is summed up in an unpublished passage from 1793:

Sensibility, understanding, reason, the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of desire – can one demonstrate... the necessity of all these? More specifically, can the whole of philosophy be constructed upon a single fact? ... Is it possible to think of a path from the unity of apperception up to the practical legislation of reason? (GA II/3:26)

The urgency with which Fichte pursues his goal of systematicity is not wholly explained by his views about what critical philosophy must deliver if reason is to satisfy its own standards. That urgency also springs from his conviction that systematization holds the key to refuting skeptical challenges raised against Kant's accounts of both knowledge and morality. In the theoretical realm these challenges focus on Kant's doctrine restricting human knowledge to appearances and asserting the unknowability (for us) of things in themselves. Even if Kant's arguments in the first *Critique* are sound, the skeptic objects, the most they can establish is the subjective necessity of the forms of intuition and the categories. Thus, Kant's critique might show that *we* must experience the world as spatial, temporal, and causally ordered, but it cannot tell us whether such features pertain to things independently of our cognizing activity (EPW 73 [GA I/2:61]). But, according to the skeptic, only the latter counts as genuine knowledge, as opposed to knowledge of how the world must appear to us.

In struggling to answer Kant's skeptical critics⁶ Fichte concludes that the source of their skepticism lies in their unexamined commitment to an untenable conception of things in themselves. More precisely, they presuppose both the coherence of conceiving of the thing in itself as "a thing that has reality and distinctive properties independently... of any and every intelligence" (EPW 73 [GA I/2:61]) and the concomitant epistemological thesis that correspondence to things in themselves is the proper standard by which to judge our knowledge (EPW 73 [GA I/2:61]). Thus, Fichte comes to believe that the only way to turn back the skeptical challenge is to combat the view that behind appearances are independently constituted things that ground sense experience (by furnishing the content of sensation) and are the proper objects of knowledge.

Fichte's reasons for wanting to eliminate the thing in itself are easy to grasp. As long as a distinction is maintained between objects as we experience them and the things in themselves that ground them, our cognition of the former must appear to fall short of genuine knowledge. The most important part of Fichte's rejection of the thing in itself centers on his conviction that Kant's vulnerability to the skeptical challenge is a result of his failure to have provided a systematic account of theoretical reason:

[Because] Kant did not trace the pure forms of intuition...back to one first principle...these forms of intuition could appear...as merely the forms of the *human* faculty of representation, [and thus] it remained possible...to entertain the thought of how things might be for some nonhuman faculty of representation. And Kant himself, with his...distinction between things as they appear to us and things as they are in themselves...authorized this thought. (EPW 73 [GA I/2:61])

Fichte recognizes here that Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves rests on the possibility of distinguishing *our* cognitive faculty from other, merely possible intellects such as that of a divine or unconditioned knower. His claim is that as long as a critique of reason fails to provide a proper deduction of the pure forms of intuition – as long as it is constrained to regard them as contingent features of the cognitive faculty humans happen to have – the possibility cannot be ruled out that the world could be known differently, and perhaps more adequately, by knowers with a different cognitive make-up, thereby leaving critical philosophy open to the skeptical charge that our knowledge of the world falls short of what knowledge ought to be.

Fichte's (supremely ambitious) response to this problem is to suggest that the possibility that fuels the skeptical objection can be ruled out by a system that derives space and time from a first principle of the appropriate kind. If the starting point of philosophy expresses a truth so fundamental that it must hold for any subject whatsoever – if the categories and forms of intuition are derived from a starting point that articulates what is basic to *any* relation between knower and known – then the question of how things might appear to differently constituted knowers no longer arises. If it can be shown, however, that our categories and forms of intuition are those that any possible knower must employ, then the skeptical objection loses its force. Indeed, Fichte boldly asserts that “from this it would follow...that the thing is actually constituted in itself in just the way in which it must be thought...by any conceivable intelligent I” (EPW 74 [GA I/2:62]). Fichte's identification of the thing as it is in itself with the thing as it must be thought by any intellect is based on the idea that the proofs he envisions would undermine the skeptic's charge. For what sense would it make to say that we know things as any knower must but, alas, are unable to know them as they are independently of all cognition? To take this position is to expect our knowledge to fulfill an incoherent demand: to know its objects as they would be apart from all knowing of them.

The skeptical objections that concern Fichte are also directed at Kant's attempt to ground, in practical reason, our beliefs in morality and freedom. Fichte's efforts here are prompted by the widely shared view that Kant's argument that we are obligated by morality rests on a dubious appeal to a “fact of reason,” described as an undeniable awareness, given in the feeling

of respect for duty, of the moral law as binding on us (CPPr 30–31). Fichte's objection is that merely pointing to the presence in consciousness of a feeling of respect for the moral law is insufficient to establish that we have an *obligation* to follow it. What disturbs Fichte about Kant's fact of reason is that it gives no answer to the moral skeptic who, while perhaps admitting that moral respect is an undeniable "fact of consciousness," will still ask how we can know that the belief this feeling gives rise to – that we have moral obligations – is not illusory. The full significance of this objection becomes apparent when we recall that in the second *Critique* it is not only the validity of the moral law that rests on the fact of reason but also our belief in our own freedom. Since Kant's defense of freedom there presupposes the validity of the moral law as established by the fact of reason – our belief in freedom is a presupposition without which moral obligation would be incoherent – his defense of freedom turns out to be on no less shaky ground than the fact of reason. One goal Fichte hopes to achieve with his new system, then, is to give a more rigorous defense of the validity of the moral law and hence of human freedom than the second *Critique* provides.

Philosophy's first principle

If Fichte is to make critical philosophy into a system, he thinks he must begin by finding the principle that is explanatorily basic to all of experience.⁷ The principle he proposes as the foundation of all philosophy is identified in the *Foundation's* opening paragraphs: "The I originally and unconditionally posits its own existence" (WL 99 [GA I/2:261]). What precisely, though, does this principle express? Very generally, its claim is that the subject's basic feature is its *self-positing* activity and that this activity is fundamental to (a condition for the possibility of) all consciousness (WL 93 [GA I/2:255]). Whatever else it may mean to locate the I's nature in its self-positing, the claim is clearly intended to imply that the subject is absolute, or self-grounded (WL 97 [GA I/2:258]) and unmediated (undetermined) by anything other than itself (WL 99n [GA I/2:261n]).

One task facing Fichte's readers is to determine what he means to say about the subject in claiming it to be self-positing and absolute. Although a full account of the I's self-positing lies outside the scope of this chapter, understanding Fichte's method requires a brief sketch of its two basic claims. The first is that the subject is essentially *self-relating*; it consists in a kind of activity it directs at itself, one intimately related to its own self-consciousness. The second is that the subject is *self-constituting*; its existence depends only on its own activity (of self-positing).

The first thesis asserts that *reflexivity* is an essential feature of subjectivity and that this essential self-relatedness consists in a special kind of awareness

the I has of itself. What Fichte isolates as the subject's fundamental activity is its apprehension of its representations as belonging to itself, as being the representations of a single, self-identical subject. Thus, the awareness involved in self-positing is self-referring in the sense that through it representations are grasped as belonging to a single subject. Following Kant, Fichte understands this unity among its representations to be something the subject brings about rather than a given, already existing fact it discovers. Since this identity of the subject is established through the spontaneity of thought rather than given in sensible intuition, Fichte sometimes calls it "intellectual intuition." It is now clear why Fichte regards the awareness involved in self-positing as fundamental to consciousness: as an activity that brings empirical representations into a single consciousness, it establishes one of the conditions without which experience of an objective world would be impossible.

One implication of this thesis is that the self-awareness involved in self-positing differs fundamentally from the consciousness of objects. In self-positing what one is aware of is not a fact independent of that awareness but something that is first brought about through it; what makes a representation mine is my *apprehending* it as such. This thought leads to the second thesis mentioned above, namely, that the self-positing subject is self-constituting (or a *Tathandlung*, a "fact-act").⁸ The claim implicit in this term is that the I's *facticity* (or being) consists in – is nothing more than – its distinctive *activity*, that of intuiting its representations as its own. Thus, to intuit diverse representations as one's own (as belonging to a single consciousness) is to be a subject, and being a subject consists in nothing beyond such self-awareness: "*to posit oneself* and *to be* are, as applied to the I, perfectly identical" (WL 99 [GA I/2:260]).

It is now possible to understand why Fichte conceives of self-positing as intellectual intuition and regards the self-positing subject as absolute. If "intellectual intuition" denotes not simply a non-empirical mode of awareness but also one that *brings about* the objects it intuits, then it is a fitting term for the I's self-positing. For although intellectual intuition does not *produce* a subject that then exists, like a material thing, independently of all consciousness of it, such intuition does give existence to the I, if "existence" is understood in the sense appropriate to subjects. If to be a subject just is to be aware of oneself as a self-identical bearer of representations, then the subject acquires existence (in the only sense a subject can exist) simply by apprehending its representations as its own. The claim that the subject is absolute depends on this point. Fichte does not mean to assert that the I is absolute in the sense of being either the cause of or identifiable with all of reality. Rather, the subject is absolute, or self-grounded, in the sense that it is a self-constituting being: its existence depends on nothing other than its own self-positing activity.

Second and third principles: Fichte's dialectical method

Section 2 of the *Foundation* begins with the surprising statement that its second principle, like the first, cannot be proved from anything more fundamental than itself. This is surprising because it appears to contradict Fichte's claim that systematic philosophy can have only one underived principle. The claim becomes even more puzzling when one considers that Fichte appears to have the resources for carrying out the very derivation he denies is possible. The second principle – "A not-I is unconditionally posited in opposition to the I" (WL 104 [GA I/2:266]) – expresses the idea that the subject is always directed at something other than itself, at an object it takes to be distinct from itself (a not-I). It would seem that this principle could be derived from the first by means of the following (transcendental) argument: if the intellectual intuition involved in self-positing is simply an awareness of the "mineness" of my representations, then in order for it to occur there must be representations present to be recognized as my own. In order to be referred to a subject, however, those representations must have some content beyond their mere subject-relatedness; there must be something there for me to grasp as my own. Thus, my self-awareness would appear to be possible only on the condition that my awareness also be directed at an object other than myself.

Although Fichte would endorse the claim that the subject's self-awareness presupposes a consciousness of something other than itself, in emphasizing the underivability of his second principle he means to draw attention to a separate point, namely, that the mental activity picked out by the second principle – "counterpositing" – is qualitatively distinct from self-positing. Each of these activities is *sui generis* and in this sense underivable from its counterpart. When joined with the claim that self-awareness is inseparable from the consciousness of a not-I, this point translates into a thesis about the irreducibly dual structure of subjectivity. Consciousness is a unity of two distinct activities: an outward, other-directed awareness of objects and an inward, self-referential awareness that relates each representation to one and the same subject.⁹ In characterizing the not-I as posited by the I Fichte is not asserting that the subject *produces* the objects of consciousness or even its representations of them. His claim, rather, is that the object's status within consciousness as a not-I – its status as something counterposed to the subject – depends on the I's *taking it* to be distinct from itself (WL 103 [GA I/2:265–66]). Thus, Fichte's second principle gives expression to the claim that awareness of an object involves an act of interpreting it as something other than the subject, an act that has its ground in the subject itself rather than in the given contents of consciousness. That the object is something other is a judgment the I makes, a relation it establishes.¹⁰

It is in the introduction of the third principle that we encounter the first instance of derivation (or proof) in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Moreover, there

can be no doubt that the third principle is derived not transcendently but by showing it to be necessary in order to resolve an apparent contradiction between the first two principles. Fichte lays out this contradiction in two propositions he takes to be implied by his arguments thus far:

1. Insofar as the not-I is posited, the I is not posited; for the I is completely nullified (*aufgehoben*) by the not-I. ...
2. The not-I can be posited only insofar as an I is posited in the I (in the identical consciousness) to which it (the not-I) can be counterposed. (WL 106 [GA I/2:268])

It is difficult to figure out precisely what the contradiction is that the third principle is to resolve. Proposition (2) simply repeats the claim, implicit in the second principle, that the positing of the not-I depends on there being an I in contrast to which it can be taken as an other. According to (1), however, the not-I also completely nullifies the I. Thus, the contradiction must be located in the (alleged) fact that the not-I both requires the I and does away with it. But why should the positing of a not-I imply the I's nullification?

One way of making sense of this claim is to focus on the I's status as absolute and to view the contradiction as arising between the *Foundation's* first two principles: a contradiction between the subject's absoluteness and its finitude (its necessarily being related to something other than itself). It is possible to formulate the contradiction in these terms if we interpret the first principle as asserting not merely that the subject posits its own existence but also that *nothing* exists (*nothing is posited*) other than the subject. On this reading, the very presence in consciousness of something distinct from the I is incompatible with the I's absolute self-positing. It is indeed plausible to construe the first principle as identifying the I with all that is (with all that is posited) if we bear in mind Fichte's remarks in §1 that part of what qualifies the subject as absolute is its being fully "self-identical" – its being an awareness in which subject and object are one (an awareness in which "I = I").¹¹ For an absolute subject as characterized in §1, to posit something is to be that which is posited. A contradiction arises between the first two principles, then, because to posit a not-I is by definition to posit something beyond the I, something that therefore constitutes a limit to the I's existence. Thus, the I's positing something other than itself – its according reality to the not-I – nullifies the I in the sense that it conflicts with the I's nature as absolute.

Although this reconstruction of the contradiction in §3 is suggested by remarks made in §4, it does not seem to be the route that Fichte takes in his derivation of the third principle. In §3 Fichte characterizes the contradiction at issue as arising out of the second principle itself rather than from a tension

between the I's finitude and its absoluteness, for *both* of the conflicting propositions set out in (1) and (2) above are said to be contained in the second principle (WL 106 [GA I/2:268]). This implies that, abstracting from the I's character as absolute, there is something directly contradictory in supposing that the I posits a not-I. But what could this be?

A clue to Fichte's answer is provided by one formulation of the task to be accomplished by the third principle in which no mention is made of the I's absoluteness: "How can A and -A, being and not-being, reality and negation, be thought together without mutual elimination?" (WL 108 [GA I/2:269]). In making sense of this question it is helpful to recall that one of the *Wissenschaftslehre's* aims is to derive the basic categories of thought, those presupposed in any attempt to know the world. In accordance with this "logical" aspect of Fichte's project,¹² we should think of each stage of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as having at its disposal only a limited set of conceptual resources consisting only in those categories derived in previous stages. Before the introduction of the third principle, then, only two categories – corresponding to the activities of positing and counter-positing – are available in attempting to conceive of the subject and its relation to the world, namely, *reality* (WL 100 [GA I/2:261]) and *negation* (WL 105 [GA I/2:267]), or *being* and *not-being*. With this in mind it is possible to see why the second principle must appear self-contradictory: to say of a not-I that it is posited is to say that it *is* (just as, in the first principle, to say that the I is posited is to say that it *is*). What, though, is implied by the not-I's existence? Thus far the not-I has been defined merely as a negation of the I; however, since our conceptual resources are restricted here to the categories of being and not-being, the only kind of negation of the I that can be attributed to the not-I is a simple negation of the I's being. (Hence Fichte's statement: "Insofar as the not-I is posited, the I is not posited.") At this stage – of what must be called a "dialectic" – asserting "the not-I is" implies "the I is not," and thus positing a not-I amounts to the I's nullification. This, however, threatens the coherence of the second principle because, as is asserted by (2) above, positing a not-I requires an I in contrast to which the not-I can be defined as such.

Fichte claims to find the key to resolving this contradiction in the idea of mutual *limitation*, where "to limit" means to negate a thing's reality *partially* rather than to nullify it completely (WL 108 [GA I/2:270]). Limitation, then, presupposes the concept of divisibility (or quantifiability) since for a thing to be only partially negated it must be divisible. This thought is expressed in the third principle: "Both the I and not-I are posited as divisible" (WL 108 [GA I/2:270]) or, equivalently, "the I and not-I...limit each other" (WL 122 [GA I/2:285]). This means that being is ascribed to both I and not-I and that each is now taken to constitute only a part of all that is real. The I is what the not-I is not, and vice versa. In using the concept of limitation to resolve this contradiction Fichte takes himself to have derived a new category of thought

that provides a further resource for conceiving of what is. It is important to see that, on this interpretation, the method Fichte actually employs in the *Foundation* is not that of transcendental arguments. For the third principle is not deduced in response to the question: what further condition (beyond those set out in the first two principles) makes it possible for the I to posit a not-I? Rather, the third principle results from asking: what conceptual resources are required to conceive of the not-I and its relation to the I coherently? The latter question concerns the adequacy of our philosophical concepts and how they must be revised in order to provide a coherent and comprehensive account of the subject and its world. Understood in this way, Fichte's method appears closer to the dialectical arguments of Hegel's *Logic* than to the transcendental method of Kant.

Once we have arrived at the third principle, to predicate being of some X need no longer imply that X is the whole of reality; rather, it can now mean that X has a finite (or partial) existence that both limits and is limited by the existence of another finite being. But Fichte means to extract more than just this point from how the third principle resolves the contradiction posed by the second. This is made clear by his calling the newly derived category "determination" (WL 119 [GA I/2:282]) and by his statement that only now can both I and not-I be thought of as "something" (WL 109 [GA I/2:271]), that is, as beings with determinate (specific) qualities. In asserting a connection between limitation and the possession of determinate qualities, Fichte espouses Spinoza's dictum "all determination is negation," according to which ascribing a determinate quality Y to a being always involves situating that being in relation to what it is not (in relation to not-Y) and hence requires the "negation" of something other than itself. Thus, the conception of being that issues from the first three principles is not captured simply in the idea of the quantity of reality being divided up among different beings; it is also a conception of what might be termed "determinate being."¹³ According to this conception, to say that something "is" is to say both that it is a determinate part of what is real and that it depends for its determinations on its opposition to – its being distinguished from – something that is not itself. What the third principle tells us, then, is that the I can be what it is only in relation to an object (to something not itself) to which it ascribes determinate qualities.

As formulated above the third principle appears unsatisfactory as a response to the contradiction posed by the second, for the solution it proposes seems to be incompatible with the system's first principle, which asserts the absolute, self-positing character of the I. For if the I is now posited as limited by the not-I, how can it still be entirely self-constituting? Answering this charge depends on noting that toward the end of §3 Fichte brings into a single formula all that he takes to have been established thus far, namely: "I posit within the I a divisible not-I in opposition to the divisible I" (WL 110 [GA I/2:272]). Later the same

composite principle is expressed as: “Both the I and the not-I are posited, in and through the I, as capable of *mutually limiting one another*” (WL 122 [GA I/2:285]). The importance of these formulations is that, in uniting all three principles into one, they reassert the I’s absoluteness in a way that incorporates the third principle and thereby *transforms our understanding of what it means for the I to be absolute*. Both formulations reassert the subject’s absoluteness in that they regard the I as what posits both itself and the not-I; thus, it remains the case that all reality is posited by the I and within the I (within consciousness). The crucial development is that, once the first and third principles are united in this way, it is no longer possible to think of the I’s positing as having the simple, unmediated character suggested by the first principle alone, for the I’s relation to itself is now taken to be inextricably bound up with – “mediated by” – its relation to the not-I. Fichte’s summary of the *Foundation’s* first three principles can be understood as a first attempt at fulfilling a task that, in one form or another, will stand as a challenge to the system until its end: to find a way of conceiving of subject and object such that the I’s necessary relation to its other is compatible with its status as absolute.

What is most striking about the formulas that bring together the first three principles is that they reconcile the absolute and finite natures of the subject by dividing it into two parts: an absolute I that remains the unconditioned source of all positing and a finite I whose being is limited by its opposite and whose qualities are defined only in relation to that opposite. This solution requires, then, that the I be thought of as having a dual nature (of what seems to be a different sort from the dual structure of subjectivity referred to above). It is helpful to think of this Fichtean doctrine as corresponding to Kant’s distinctions between the transcendental and empirical subjects (in the theoretical sphere) and the noumenal and phenomenal subjects (in the practical sphere). Hence the finite I (the I insofar as it is has determinate qualities in relation to a not-I) should be taken to include both the theoretical subject with its manifold empirical representations and the practical subject with its particular desires. It is more difficult to determine how Fichte conceives of the absolute I when, as in the present context, it is contrasted with the finite I. Defined as the subject insofar as it is undetermined by anything other than itself, the clearest Kantian analogues to this conception of the absolute I are the spontaneous activities of the theoretical subject and the practical subject’s autonomous legislation of the moral law.

Unfortunately, this means that the *Foundation* uses “absolute” in ways that are not obviously related. In discussing the first principle we located the I’s absolute character in its being self-constituting in the sense that it depends on nothing other than its own spontaneous activity for its existence. But other uses of “absolute” can be found throughout Part I. As we saw above, in §3 the I’s claim to be absolute is understood as a claim to be all of reality, to be

completely unlimited with respect to its existence. At other places the I's absoluteness seems to consist in its being the source of the preconscious activities of synthesis that secure the conditions for the possibility of experience. And at the end of Part I Fichte introduces what appears to be yet another conception of the absolute subject, one that emphasizes the idea of complete self-determination and therefore figures prominently in the discussion of ethical themes that dominate later sections of the work. This conception is spelled out as an I "whose consciousness has been determined by nothing outside itself" and that instead determines everything through its consciousness (WL 115 [GA I/2:277]).

Although Fichte does not say this explicitly, it is reasonable to regard the *Foundation's* first three principles – which precede the division into theoretical and practical reason – as an attempt to give an abstract account of the fundamental structure of subjectivity in all its forms. If understood in this way, the bifurcation of the subject into an absolute and a finite I implies a revision of the "dual structure of subjectivity" thesis I attributed to Fichte above, according to which the subject is always consciously related both to something other (an object) and to itself (as a self-identical subject of consciousness). What results when the third principle is joined with the first two is a view of subjectivity that regards the subject's self-relation not simply as an immediate self-positing but as a more complex relation between the I's absolute and finite aspects, where the latter is determined by, and hence dependent on, its relation to a not-I. It is difficult to say how such a structure might be attributed to theoretical reason, but in the practical sphere this account translates into a picture of the existential situation of agents who, like us, are both finite and unlimited (at least aspirationally). The central practical task facing such beings can be characterized as bringing the two aspects of the I's nature into agreement. On this model, the I's self-relation consists, first, in an awareness of a disparity within itself between its finite and absolute aspects and, second, in a perception of the need – expressed through the moral 'ought' – to bring the empirical I in line with the ideal of complete self-determination implicit in its nature as absolute. Thus, Fichte's account of the basic structure of subjectivity leads him to a view for which the I's central feature is a practical *striving* to overcome its finitude and achieve absoluteness.

Theoretical and practical reason

The *Foundation's* accounts of theoretical and practical reason are even more obscure, and have been less influential, than the doctrines set out in Part I. Part II, "The Foundation of Theoretical Knowledge," begins by dividing the principle established at the end of §3 into two parts: "The I posits itself as determined by the not-I" (WL 123 [GA I/2:287]) and "The I posits itself as

determining the not-I" (WL 219 [GA I/2:386]). The first of these sub-principles serves as the starting point for the account of theoretical reason, for it is natural to think of knowledge as a relation between subject and object where the latter determines the former (since knowledge must be adequate to the object known rather than determined by the subject's needs or desires). Part II is an attempt to reconcile (dialectically) the theoretical subject's apparent passivity and dependence on an object with its absolute character, which requires it to be wholly active and self-determining. Its most prominent move is the introduction of the faculty of imagination in response to the contradiction implicit in the founding principle of Part II, namely, that the theoretical subject is taken to be both determined by the not-I and at the same time wholly self-determining. (Imagination becomes crucial for Fichte's account of theoretical reason because in conjunction with the "check [*Anstoß*]" it supplies consciousness with the sensible content of intuition and is therefore essential to explaining the possibility of representing empirical objects.)

The aim of the *Foundation's* theoretical part, then, is to account for the features of theoretical consciousness by explaining them as due to the subject's own nature rather than to that of the object (thus giving expression to the I's infinitude), while at the same time doing justice to the belief of ordinary consciousness that in knowledge the subject is determined by the object (and is therefore *finite*). It is here that we return to the issue of the thing in itself, for this undertaking is best understood as a rejection of Kant's position that viewed the subject's activity as the source of the formal elements of empirical knowledge but regarded the content of that knowledge as a result of the subject's passive affection by an object (a thing in itself). Thus, in order to make the I wholly self-determining, Fichte must rid philosophy of the thing in itself by showing that the subject plays an active role, not merely with respect to the formal aspects of cognition, but in generating the content of knowledge as well.

Despite his argument that the matter of sensation has its source in the subject's imagination, Fichte makes clear that the theoretical part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot do full justice to the I's absoluteness (WL 137–38 [GA I/2:301]). While the doctrine of the check makes it possible to go farther than Kant in accounting for the content of empirical knowledge in terms of the subject's activity, from the perspective of theoretical philosophy there always remains an element of knowledge that cannot be traced back to the subject's spontaneity: although the check can explain *how* the I represents its object as due to the I's activity (WL 220 [GA I/2:386]), it cannot explain the fact *that* the I represents as having its source in the I alone, and so there remains a respect in which the theoretical subject must be seen as determined by something other. But this dependence on the not-I contradicts the I's claim to be absolute, which (in this context) requires that "the I, in all its determinations, ... be absolutely posited by itself and therefore wholly independent of any possible not-I" (WL 220 [GA I/2:387]). The

realization that this contradiction cannot be resolved within a framework that regards the subject as only a knower brings the account of theoretical reason to an end and necessitates the transition to practical reason in Part III.

This transition is the site of Fichte's long-sought deduction of practical reason, which depends on showing that only practical reason can eliminate the contradiction between theoretical philosophy and the first principle's assertion of the I's absoluteness. The argument's strategy is set out as follows: "The *dependence* of the I... must be eliminated, and this is conceivable only on the assumption *that this hitherto unknown not-I* to which the check is attributed... *be determined by the I itself*" (WL 220–21 [GA I/2:387]). In other words, the first principle would be satisfied if the I could be regarded as having determined or caused the check required for empirical representation. For in this case, what the I depended on in knowledge would be nothing but the (absolute) I's own product, and the I would remain fully self-determining, even though its self-determination would be mediated by what ordinary consciousness takes to be an independent object.

This resolution of the contradiction engenders a further contradiction, this time with the I's finitude expressed in the second principle. If the second principle claims that the I requires a relation to something distinct from itself in order to be an I, then the solution just sketched is untenable. The I cannot be the cause of the check, for if it fully determined the not-I, the latter would no longer truly be a not-I. All difference between subject and object would be eliminated and the second principle negated. But, Fichte reminds us, the opposition between I and not-I cannot be eliminated, because without it the I would cease to be an I (WL 225 [GA I/2:391]).¹⁴ Thus, the problem that practical reason is supposed to solve is reconciling the I's absoluteness with its finitude by finding a way to conceive of the I's activity such that it remains absolute without at the same time annihilating the not-I. Fichte finds the solution to this problem in the idea of *striving*. Rather than postulate a complete determination of the not-I by the I, Fichte now takes the absolute I's activity to be "a *striving* towards determination" of the not-I (WL 231 [GA I/2:397]). The goal of this striving is the I's complete independence from the not-I, understood here to mean that the determinations (properties) of the object are to depend wholly on the subject (WL 230 [GA I/2:396]). Thus, the striving subject is absolute with respect to its goal (that the not-I conform only to itself), but its activity is "mere" striving because it can never attain its goal of complete independence. In other words, the principle of striving takes into account the ineradicable finitude of the subject while attributing to it an absoluteness that, by the end of the *Foundation*, is no longer understood as a *fact* about the subject but as a *demand* the I makes upon itself and its world. Fichte's final move is to identify this striving with practical reason: what the moral law demands, on this view, is that the subject act on the world in order to make it conform to

a law the subject gives to itself in accordance only with its own nature. What practical reason gives us is an ideal of complete self-determination that enjoins us to modify the world in accordance with our conception of how it *ought* to be, an ideal that our nature as subjects requires us to strive to realize, even though it can never be fully attained.

It is important to note that the actual structure of Fichte's argument does not cohere with his most prominent descriptions of what the deduction of practical reason is supposed to establish. In some places Fichte says that he deduces practical reason transcendently, as a condition of the possibility of theoretical subjectivity.¹⁵ But this misleadingly implies that the deduction of practical reason relies on nothing more than an analysis of the necessary conditions of knowledge. In fact, however, the I's striving is introduced not to explain how knowledge is possible but rather to show how the relation of the knowing subject to its object can be rendered compatible with the subject's nature as self-determined. Fichte's argument, then, does not deduce practical reason as a necessary condition of either theoretical self-consciousness or the knowledge of objects but, rather, dialectically, as the only subjective activity that can reconcile the I's theoretical capacities with its claim to be absolute.

The facts that many of the *Foundation's* doctrines turn out to be unsatisfactory and that conflicting concepts of absoluteness seem to be invoked in its arguments should not blind us to the genuine interest and fertility of Fichte's text. Despite its often careless execution, the *Foundation* articulated a philosophical project – and in that context developed a new, dialectical method – that determined the shape of German philosophy for several decades and continues to exert its influence on us today.¹⁶

Notes

1. In English as *Science of Knowledge* (WL), a translation of *Wissenschaftslehre*.
2. In English as *Fichte: Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy* (NM).
3. I have amended slightly the published English translations of almost all citations from Fichte's texts.
4. Although Fichte later abandons this position, he clearly believes in the need for a certain starting point in this text. For an account of this development in Fichte's thought, see Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 53–65.
5. Some confusion stems from the fact that Fichte's moves from "A = A" to the first principle and from "–A is not equal to A" to the second principle are couched in transcendental terms: we appear to arrive at the first principle, for example, by investigating the conditions under which "A = A" as a fact of consciousness given with certainty is possible (WL 99 [GA I/2:261]). Once the system begins, however, later principles are generally not derived as conditions of the possibility of earlier ones (though Fichte does sometimes speak of the transition from theoretical to practical reason as though it involved a transcendental argument "showing that reason

cannot even be theoretical if it is not practical; that there can be no intelligence in man if he does not possess a practical faculty" [WL 233 (GA I/2:399)]).

6. See Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte on Skepticism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (July 1991): 427–53.
7. Fichte arrives at his view of the fundamental feature of consciousness via a critique of K. L. Reinhold's first principle, the "principle of consciousness." See Daniel Breazeale, "Between Kant and Fichte: Karl Leonhard Reinhold's 'Elementary Philosophy,'" *Review of Metaphysics* 35, no. 4 (June 1982): 804–21; and Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*, 70–75.
8. For more on the *Tathandlung*, see Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity*, 102–16.
9. Later Fichte will say that the nature of consciousness is to be a "double series" (IWL 21 [GA I/4:196]).
10. Robert B. Pippin, "Fichte's Contribution," *Philosophical Forum* 19, nos. 2/3 (1987/88): 89.
11. Here the I's being identical to itself – its having no object of awareness that is not itself – is not equivalent to the sense of "self-identical" employed in discussing the first principle. There calling the I self-identical meant only that it was a single, numerically identical subject of consciousness.
12. The project is logical in a sense that echoes both Hegel's science of logic and Kant's transcendental logic, for both attempt to set out the fundamental categories in terms of which reality must be comprehended.
13. This category is a forerunner of what Hegel's *Science of Logic* calls *Dasein*.
14. For an interpretation that makes plausible the claim that the I requires a not-I, see Allen W. Wood, "Fichte's Philosophical Revolution," *Philosophical Topics* 19, no. 2 (fall 1991): 12–16.
15. See note 4.
16. I thank William Bristow for his insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

16

Fichte's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense

Matthew C. Altman

Fichte's almost singular focus on consciousness has fueled the charge that he is a subjectivist, and, bolstered by the self-serving characterizations of the *Wissenschaftslehre* by Schelling and Hegel, this has led to Fichte's relative neglect among contemporary philosophers. If we study Fichte's philosophy on its own terms, however, we can correct this caricature. As Fichte understands it, the *Wissenschaftslehre* carries out the philosophical implications of Kantianism. Critics of Fichte often mistake his transcendental inquiry as a series of metaphysical claims. Thus they assume that realism is correct, and they see Fichte as reducing the world itself, rather than the world as representation, to consciousness. However, if we position the *Wissenschaftslehre* in its philosophical context, it becomes clear that his focus on consciousness is not a reduction of the world to the self, but a transcendental inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of experience, and specifically objective representations.

In the following chapter, I will attempt a qualified defense of Fichte's philosophy, and in particular the theory of subjectivity and objectivity that he develops during the Jena period (1794–99). If we accept the Kantian claim that we understand the world and ourselves only in terms of our own epistemic conditions, then philosophical reflection is limited to the study of how these things appear to consciousness. Understood in this way, Fichte's supposed subjectivism is not a philosophical liability, but something that we must accept when we encounter nature as "the sum total of all appearances" (B163). That is, Fichte follows Kant in claiming that we can know only appearances and never things in themselves, which is all that Kant's transcendental idealism amounts to (A369). Fichte's philosophy is an account of subjectivity and our representation of the world, without attempting a god's-eye view of things as they are apart from our way of knowing them.

Two possible systems: Idealism and dogmatism

Fichte is typical of Kant's successors in attempting to complete the critical project, which, they claim, fails to achieve a systematic account of the subject in its relation to the object, and of the different parts of the subject. The spontaneity necessary for objective judgments (theoretical reason) is treated separately from the capacity for autonomous self-determination that makes us moral agents (practical reason), and the activity of consciousness is distinguished from the givenness of the thing in itself. Kant himself concedes that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a "*propaedeutic* (preparation)" rather than a "system of pure reason (science)," and philosophers such as Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel take up the challenge of achieving a completeness in their work that Kant, by his own admission, is unable to achieve (A841/B869).¹

Despite their shared aim, their approaches are quite different: Reinhold analyzes the faculty of representation, Schelling investigates the origin of mind and matter in the Absolute, and Hegel chronicles *Geist's* historical realization that the subject and the object are ultimately synthesized in the absolute Idea. By contrast, Fichte focuses on the kind of subject that I must be – or, more precisely, the kind of activity that I must engage in – in order for self-consciousness and consciousness of things to be possible. Fichte's theory of subjectivity, then, plays a more central role in his philosophy than it does for the other German Idealists, and it forms the starting point from which the other elements of his philosophy are derived as implications.

Fichte claims that the purpose of philosophy is to explain experience, and specifically the convergence of the two elements of experience: the subjective activity of self-consciousness and what the subject is conscious of, including the contents of inner sense and the objects of outer sense, or representations "accompanied by a feeling of necessity [*Gefühle der Nothwendigkeit*]" (IWL 8 [GA I/4:186]; NM 88 [K 12]). As Kant has shown, subjective activity is necessary for me to have objective representations: perceptions must be actively organized according to our epistemic conditions (the pure forms of sensible intuition and the categories), and the "I think" must accompany all of my representations as a condition for successive perceptions to be held together as persisting objects (in space and time) (B131–32; see also IWL 86 [GA I/4:253]). Objective experience is made possible by subjective activity. Of course, Kant also says that the content of experience must be given by a thing in itself, and only the form of experience is contributed by the subject. So he cannot give a systematic account of the subject and the object; the former is self-determining and governed by epistemic (and ethical) norms, and the latter simply exists as a fact.

Kant speculates that the “two stems of human cognition ... may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root” (A15/B29), but, according to Fichte, Kant fails to establish the critical philosophy as a science because he concludes that thinking and the thing in itself are opposed to one another. Among other things, Fichte claims that such a dualistic philosophy could not explain how, if they are radically different kinds of things, one element of experience could affect the other, such that consciousness and the givenness of experience together form representations. Therefore, we must give a unified explanation of what stands behind both consciousness and objects – which, after all, are two parts of a shared world. In developing a science of knowing, then, we face a choice between realism/dogmatism and idealism/criticism: *either* a substance causes both subjective activity and given perceptions, and consciousness is an epiphenomenal manifestation of material processes; *or* subjective activity makes possible consciousness and both the form and content of its objective representations.

According to Fichte, not everyone will be able to recognize the truth of idealism and its superiority as an account of experience (WL 162n [GA I/2:326n]; EPW 323–24 [GA I/3:254]; IWL 20 [GA I/4:195]). Although no arguments could convince a person who is incapable of reflecting freely on his or her own consciousness,² Fichte gives several reasons why idealism is justified over dogmatism, and these serve as confirmation of the decision that the idealist philosopher makes to sacrifice the self-sufficiency of the thing to that of the I (IWL 17 [GA I/4:193]).³ Two of those reasons are most important for our purposes. First, dogmatism conceives of self-consciousness as just another caused thing. However, following Kant, Fichte claims that self-consciousness is not a representation, but an activity that makes representations possible (by, among other things, applying the category of causality). The “I think” accompanies the series of material causes rather than being reducible to it. Dogmatism cannot explain “this *immediate* unity of being and seeing,” so the dogmatist misconstrues what consciousness is (IWL 20–22 [GA I/4:195–97]). As Robert Pippin writes, “[spontaneity] alone, for Fichte, forecloses the possibility of realist and empiricist epistemologies, and in a more attenuated way, materialist or determinist metaphysics.”⁴ The second reason why idealism is justified over dogmatism is because dogmatism cannot make sense of the normativity of empirical judgments. If we are merely physical stuff in relation to other physical stuff, then we react to other events in the world, but it would not make sense to say that we judge things rightly or wrongly. We need to be responsible for our judgments in order for objective claims, *qua* claims, to be possible in the first place.⁵ Therefore, idealism, not dogmatism, is capable of accounting for the representation of objects, because only idealism can explain the activity and normativity of judgment.

Fichte's denial of the thing in itself

The dogmatist explains experience by claiming that mind-independent objects affect our sense organs and cause impressions in our (passive) minds. However, Kant shows that empiricism cannot explain what it claims to explain – namely, how subjective sensations (“in our heads”) become objective representations (“out there”). We distinguish objective representations from consciousness by making judgments about our perceptions according to the categories and by situating them in space.

Fichte describes this as the I's act of positing (*setzen*) the not-I in opposition to itself, or taking there to be something that is external to consciousness. Because any object is the product of the I's representational activity, external objects are merely objects for consciousness rather than things in themselves. Although representations that are accompanied by a feeling of necessity seem not to be up to me, this resistance is due to the I's activity, first by positing itself as determinable (in response to a feeling – more on that later), and then by positing determinations within consciousness (WL 180–90 [GA I/2:345–56]). Things cannot affect the I unless the I posits itself as determinable by things and takes there to be things that affect it. Thus the matter of experience, and not only the form (as Kant claims), must be posited by the I in order for it to exist for consciousness.

Fichte insists that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is true to the spirit if not the letter of Kant's philosophy (EPW 289, 376 [GA I/3:190; GA III/2, no. 189]; IWL 63–64n [GA I/4:231–32n]), but the philosophical tenet about which there is clearest disagreement regards the thing in itself: Kant is committed to it as the source of representational content, while Fichte considers such a thing, as the cause of representations, to be a remnant of dogmatism. Many people dismiss Fichte because of his denial of the thing in itself, which seems to reduce all of reality to the subject's consciousness.⁶ If we resist our presupposed empiricism and fully appreciate the implications of transcendental idealism, however, then Fichte's argument against the thing in itself becomes compelling.

In order to conceive of a thing in itself as giving me the matter of experience, I must take it to be a thing, to be distinct from consciousness, and to be affecting me. Yet each of these is the result of a judgment on my part, applying, respectively, concepts of unity, existence, and causality (EPW 369 [GA III/1, no. 135]; IWL 67 [GA I/4:235]). Jacobi, Schulze, and Schopenhauer make similar criticisms of Kant's thing in itself,⁷ but Fichte is not merely trying to point out a problem with Kant's philosophy. Instead, he is trying to establish that any supposed mind-independent thing, conceived of as the source of sensations in us, cannot in fact be a mind-independent thing. By conceiving of the thing in itself as a thing, I must be making a judgment – this

is straight out of Kant – and, using Fichte’s terminology, positing a thing out there *as* a thing that affects me: “the Critical system...shows that the thought of a thing possessing existence and specific properties *in itself* and apart from any faculty of representation is a piece of whimsy, a pipe dream, a nought [ein Nicht-Gedanke]” (EPW 71 [GA I/2:57]; see also EPW 74 [GA I/2:62]). Literally, a thing in itself cannot be thought, because as soon as I conceive of something as a thing, it ceases to be a thing *in itself* but is rather a product of consciousness. Fichte thus rejects Kant’s distinction between *knowing* the thing in itself by means of the categories (which we cannot do) and *thinking* the thing in itself through the categories (which, Kant says, we can do). A thing in itself is, as Fichte defines it, a thing as it exists apart from human consciousness and apart from our conditions of understanding what it is, not as an object of thought. So, he concludes, there is no thing in itself for the transcendental idealist.

Critics of Fichte claim that this amounts to subjectivism, because the object depends on the I for its existence, and so the world has no independent existence apart from consciousness. However, Fichte is not denying the existence of a mind-independent world, only extending Kant’s claim that, in order for perceptions to become objects for consciousness, they must be synthesized through the activity of judgment. If the world that we inhabit is merely an appearance, then what is represented by consciousness should not be confused with the world as it is in itself.

We cannot conceive of the thing in itself through the categories without making it into an object of thought rather than a thing in itself, and so any true thing in itself is beyond human understanding and is thus unavailable to philosophical scrutiny. In his early work, Kant’s commitment to the thing in itself seems, at least in some passages, to follow from the illegitimate application of the categories in conceiving of it: for example, Kant says that “we are not acquainted with this thing [in itself] as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearance, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something” (A538/B566; see also ID 2:397; C 10:130–31; A19/B33, A494/B522–23; Pro 4:314–15). But in most of Kant’s critical and post-critical work, the thing in itself is not conceived as a cause of sensations at all. Although it is thought through the categories, the *Ding an sich* serves merely as a placeholder to define the bounds of sense: the thing in itself is just whatever exists (or does not exist) apart from our epistemic conditions.⁸ In the *Opus postumum*, for example, Kant hews closely to Fichte: “The thing *in itself* is not an object given outside representation, but merely the position of a thought-entity [*die Position eines Gedankendinges*] which is thought of as corresponding to the object” (OP 22:31; see also Pro 4:316–17). Fichte calls such a thing “an absolute not-I which is free and independent of all of our laws”; because it “can be represented only as expressing these laws,” it can never be understood

absolutely, as it is, but “always to a finite degree” – that is, by construing it according to our ways of thinking, to a greater or lesser extent (EPW 135 [GA I/2:151]; see also GA II/3:65 [*das absolute Nicht-Ich*]). If we follow through on the implications of the critical philosophy, then it does not make sense to describe something as real apart from our conceiving of it as real, and thus the thing in itself becomes an unrepresentable absolute, merely a “thought-entity” that is put forward (or posited) by the subject as the ground of experience.⁹

When explaining representations, which are necessarily related to consciousness, we assume that there must be some thing in itself that causes sensations in us, but by thinking such a thing as the cause, it ceases to be a thing that is distinguished from consciousness. Kant's philosophy has shown that objects are only possible in relation to consciousness, so when Fichte refers to “all reality,” he equates it with “reality... *for us*”: “all reality – *for us* being understood as it cannot be otherwise understood in a system of transcendental philosophy” (WL 202 [GA I/2:368]). Fichte notes rightly that we have only perceptions, some of which are accompanied by the feeling of necessity. To make sense of this, we conceive of some thing that gives those perceptions to us, but that conception depends on the activity of consciousness (NM 163–64n [K 62n]). Thus, Fichte says, I take there to be a mind-independent cause of appearances, but that cause must be posited by consciousness: “This fact, that the finite spirit must necessarily posit something absolute outside itself (a thing in itself), and yet must recognize, from the other side, that the latter exists only *for it* (as a necessary noumenon), is that circle which it is able to extend into infinity, but can never escape” (WL 247 [GA I/2:412]). The “circle” is that I conceive of experience as given to me by a thing in itself, but by conceiving of my experience in this way, the thing in itself becomes (like the represented object) posited by me as such, and thus it ceases to be a thing in itself, but is rather what Fichte calls a “noumenon” (IWL 68 [GA I/4:236–37]; WL 213, 247 [GA I/2:380, 412]; NM 260–62 [K 124–25]). I then think that there must be a mind-independent world behind that, but that also must be posited by and for consciousness, and so on – a “circle” that we “can never escape.” Thus Fichte concludes that “the chief maxim of transcendental idealism” is: “{nothing outside of me,} no alleged ‘thing in itself,’ can be an object of {my} consciousness; the only object for me is I myself” (NM 332 [GA IV/2:163]; see also AP 99 [GA I/5:423]).

Fichte is not a subjectivist in the sense that he denies the existence of a mind-independent world. What he denies is the philosopher's ability to appeal to the thing in itself in giving an account of experience.¹⁰ This is what it means for us to confront a not-I rather than the thing in itself. Fichte concludes that, because a thing in itself can mean nothing to consciousness, then it is off-limits, philosophically speaking, whether or not such a mind-independent reality actually exists.

The two standpoints; or, empirical realism and transcendental idealism

To explain the ambiguity of the term *Ding an sich*, Fichte distinguishes two possible “standpoints [*Standpunkte* or *Gesichtspunkte*]” from which we understand the world: the ordinary standpoint and the philosophical standpoint.¹¹ From the ordinary standpoint, I as a finite subject judge there to be objects outside of the mind that affect me, and they seem to be things in themselves that are simply given to consciousness. I can “never escape” this assumption, even when, from the philosophical standpoint, I discover that what I take to be the cause of my experiences is posited by consciousness *as* a thing: “All rational beings (even idealists and egoists, so long as they are not standing behind a lectern) continuously affirm the existence of an actual world” (NM 78 [K 3]; see also IWL 38n [GA I/4:211n]; EPW 439 [GA III/3, no. 443]). This is the sense in which Fichte, like Kant, is an empirical realist: the empirical world has an independent existence from me considered as a finite subject who occupies the ordinary standpoint. Idealism, however, is the only viable philosophical account of experience, so the standpoint of philosophical speculation illuminates and gives us knowledge (*erkennen*) about life (EPW 434–35 [GA III/3, no. 440]). A philosophical explanation of the seeming givenness of the object in terms of the I’s activity is required by the critical philosophy, no matter how strange it seems to us in our everyday lives.

In the Refutation of Idealism, Kant argues that our remembered experiences can only have a temporal order if we can correlate them with mind-independent objects (B274–79). Fichte agrees: from the ordinary standpoint, the subject must take there to be a thing in itself by which the content of experience is given temporally to finite consciousness. But the philosopher recognizes the mind-dependence of such a “taking to be,” and thus he denies that there is such a thing. He can never escape the “circle” of consciousness. In this way, the philosopher and the ordinary individual are referring to two different things when they talk about the thing in itself:

The idealist observes how there must come to be things for the individual. Thus the situation is different for the individual than it is for the philosopher. The individual is confronted with things, men, etc., that are independent of him. But the idealist says, “There are no things outside of me and present independently of me.” Though the two say opposite things, they do not contradict each other. For the idealist, from his own viewpoint, displays the necessity of the individual’s view. When the idealist says “outside of me,” he means “outside of reason”; when the individual says the same thing, he means “outside of my person.” (NM 105–6 [K 25–26]; see also IWL 68n [GA I/4:236n]; EPW 434 [GA III/3, no. 440])

Kant calls this the difference between an “empirical distinction” and a “transcendental distinction”: the transcendental idealist understands the object that causes our sensations to be an appearance, while ordinarily we call it a thing in itself (A45/B62–A46/B63). Empiricists such as Locke distinguish variable qualities of objects as they appear to different observers from the object as it really is,¹² and Kant agrees with this distinction in the sense that objective claims can be made only about spatiotemporally located perceptions, with (primary) qualities such as extension (in space). But this empirical distinction should not be confused with the transcendental distinction between objects that are located in space and things in themselves, because the bearer of Lockean primary qualities is also a representation for consciousness. Like Kant, Fichte too insists that empiricists are correct so long as we limit their claims to how things appear to the finite subject: “[we can speak of] the effect of the thing on the I, or the ‘physical influence’ of the Lockean. ... From the present standpoint – but only from this standpoint – such talk is completely justified” (EPW 290 [GA I/3:192]). Once the not-I has been derived from the activity of the I – that is, once the object is a thing that appears to the finite subject – the claim of causal influence is justified, but that applies only to the thing as an appearance rather than a thing in itself.

Fichte says that only the philosopher can make the transcendental distinction. Even if, from the ordinary standpoint, it seems that objective representations are given to us by something that is distinct from consciousness, the critical philosopher shows that, as something that we conceive of as the cause of appearances, the supposed thing in itself is a rational construction (or noumenon) whose existence for consciousness (as a cause of sensations) depends on subjective activity. In short, there is a thing in itself for the finite subject, but for the absolute I, such a thing is nonsense, since the activity of judgment is a condition for the possibility of something being a thing for the I.

As Terry Pinkard puts it, what it means to posit a not-I is to give up the authority to form objective judgments to an independent object – to, as it were, allow for content to be given to the I from without, or to “*take it up as data*.”¹³ Contrary to Pinkard, however, there is nothing for us to relinquish our epistemic authority *to* unless we first posit it as a thing. The “authority” (or the feeling of necessity) that it seems to have from the ordinary standpoint is ultimately attributable to the I *instead of* the thing; that is the essence of idealism, as the alternative to dogmatism. Any empirical determinations that are given to consciousness must adhere to the form of determination, or the laws of thinking that are legislated by the I. None of this means that there is no thing in itself, only that one cannot know what it is like and that it cannot determine the content of our objective judgments. Thus, Fichte says, the critical philosopher concedes to the Humean skeptic that *a priori* concepts apply only to objects as appearances, but also “limits the demands that the

skeptic...makes concerning knowledge of the thing in itself, and he does this by showing that these demands are unfounded" (EPW 290 [GA I/3:191]). The skeptic cannot claim that, because we can know only appearances, objective validity is lacking. The thing in itself cannot in principle be an object (for consciousness) because, as a thing in itself, it is not organized according to the categories. Cognition of objects is necessarily limited to cognition of objective representations. Any discussion of the thing in itself from the perspective of the transcendental philosopher, as opposed to the empirical/ordinary standpoint, is a non-starter.

The failure to distinguish the ordinary standpoint from the philosophical standpoint has led to some confusion in the secondary literature regarding Fichte's position on the thing in itself. For example, Tom Rockmore insists that we cannot be aware of anything unless there is a real world that is ontologically independent, even as it is epistemically dependent on consciousness in order to be represented as an object.¹⁴ This is true only if the first claim (that representations depend on a thing in itself) is about the ordinary standpoint and the latter claim (that the world must be related to the I) is about the philosophical standpoint. And Wayne Martin says that "the fact that things in themselves lie outside the *explanandum* of a transcendental enquiry does not show that they must be excluded from the *explanans* as well."¹⁵ That is, even though the thing in itself cannot be explained philosophically, it can be used to explain what our beliefs are about. Again, the latter claim is true only from the ordinary standpoint (of the empirical realist), not the philosophical standpoint (of the transcendental idealist).

In the classical sense, metaphysics is an inquiry into things as they are apart from consciousness. Such a thing is an oxymoron, however, because positing a ground of the content of experience necessarily relates it to subjective activity as a condition for the possibility of existence for consciousness. Thus Fichte redefines metaphysics as the study of what we know, or how we come to believe in objects of knowledge: "metaphysics... does not have to be a theory of the so-called things in themselves, but may be a genetic deduction of what we find in our consciousness" (EPW 97 [GA I/2:159]). Critical philosophy collapses the distinction between metaphysics and epistemology, thus transforming metaphysics into what Kant calls "ontology as *immanent* thinking," which identifies what exists with our epistemic conditions (C 11:314). Kant and Fichte establish the objective reality of concepts (what Fichte calls the laws of thinking) in their "immanent" use but not their "transcendent" use – that is, with regard to nature as the sum total of appearances rather than with regard to "real things" (A643/B671). Although in ordinary consciousness we assume (and the "transcendent dogmatist" continues to assume [EPW 268–69 (GA I/3:168–69)]) that we are affected by a thing in itself, the critical philosopher shows that, in response to a feeling, we posit a cause behind it *as*

a thing – thus making it a limitation posited by the I rather than a thing in itself, properly speaking.

The first principle: I am

Objective representations are attributable to my judging activity in response to a feeling, not a thing in itself. According to Fichte, there is no thing in itself, only an “intellect in itself [*Intelligenz an sich*]” (IWL 11 [GA I/4:188]) or an “I in itself [*Ich an sich*]” (EPW 290 [GA I/3:192]; IWL 13 [GA I/4:190]) from which we derive both subjective consciousness and the objects of perception. Like Kant, Fichte asserts that thinking is judging; I am essentially a claim-maker. Perceptions become objective representations for consciousness by being set in opposition to consciousness – that is, by my making judgments about the feeling of resistance. The I thus relates itself to the not-I. Since both the subject and the object are posited by the I, Fichte distinguishes what he calls “the absolute I [*das absolute Ich*]” – unconditioned, self-positing activity – from finite consciousness and the object that limits it in ordinary experience (see, for example, EPW 134–35, 290–91, 411 [GA I/2:150–52; GA I/3:192; GA III/2, no. 307]; WL 98–99, 109, 117, 220–22 [GA I/2:259–61, 271, 279, 387–89]).¹⁶

The idea that there is a third term through which the subject and object are distinguished from one another is common among the German Idealists. However, Fichte's absolute I is more Kantian and less mysterious than Schelling's Absolute and Hegel's *Geist*, in that Fichte is merely trying to distinguish the consciousness that I have as a particular subject, which is situated in time and spatially in relation to external objects, from the activity that makes representations possible: “I have posited *myself* as a *knower* who is present in the knowledge of *this* object, of a second object, of a third, etc. Abstracting from the particular features of every act of knowing, I posit myself as the knower as such [*das Erkennende überhaupt*]” (EPW 329 [GA I/3:259]; see also EPW 204 [GA II/3:329]; IWL 11, 40 [GA I/2:188, 212]). What Fichte calls “the knower as such” cannot be represented in consciousness (EPW 65, 276 [GA I/2:48; GA I/3:176–77]; WL 93 [GA I/2:255]; NM 84 [K 10]), because, as Günter Zöller says, “the absolute I is not a specific I but an I in the generic sense of a structure or a set of formal conditions.”¹⁷ In Kantian terms, apperception is distinct from the thoughts and feelings of inner sense; the former makes the latter possible. But Fichte's distinction also can be rendered in Heideggerian terms, in that he distinguishes my existence as a being (*das Seiende*) from “that which determines beings as beings,” namely Being (*das Sein*) itself.¹⁸

In the *Grundlage* of 1794, Fichte begins with the law of identity, “A = A,” a purely formal principle whose truth is universally acknowledged (WL 94–99 [GA I/2:256–61]). It is formal because A, whatever it is, may not exist, and yet whether A exists does not affect the truth of the claim that, *if* A exists,

then it must be equivalent to itself. For the truth of the law of identity to be asserted (or posited), there need not be an A, but there must be someone who claims that it is so. I advance the proposition “A = A” as a judgment, and for it to be a judgment, I must take responsibility for asserting it. Therefore, in taking A to be equivalent to itself, I also posit my existence: “A = A” has led me to “I = I,” in that, when I posit “A = A” as a judgment, I identify myself as an I (“I am I”) who can be held accountable for his judgment. To use Pinkard’s terminology, I give myself a “normative status,” such that what is true for consciousness must be held to be true by me through the activity of judging.¹⁹ In other words, in order to be under the grip – a normative grip – of a law of logic, a proposition such as “A = A” would have to represent a kind of assertional performance, one that I, as a cognitive agent, could (and should) enact. On Fichte’s view, propositional content itself is constituted by judgmental actions, thereby implicating a self-active, conscious agent. Paul Franks explains why making such logical inferences implies that the I exists:

the reflexive actuality is an existential commitment with respect to oneself as the agent engaged in making existential commitments, predications, or inferences. Unlike other existential commitments, *this* one is necessarily presupposed by the capacity for rational agency. Indeed, any other existential commitment is an exercise of rational agency, and must necessarily presuppose existential commitment by the rational agent to herself as the positing agent.²⁰

The conclusion of this meditation on the formal law of identity, then, is the claim that I exist as an I, or “I am,” which is not merely a formal claim (as “A = A” is), but provides content by proving that I exist – not as a thing that judges, to be sure, but as the activity of judging.

The I posits itself

To explain the spontaneity of judgment in having objective experience, we must appeal to an absolutely free act. I encounter a given world from the ordinary standpoint, but seemingly²¹ given objects (the not-I) are posited by absolute activity, and thus depend on the I for their existence as representations. According to Fichte, we must conceive of this absolute I as unconditioned by prior events; otherwise it would reduce merely to a caused thing, and we would revert to dogmatism. Thus the I must come into being by its acting, and it is that activity that forms the first principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: “*That whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing, is the I as absolute I. As it posits itself, so it is; and as it is, so it posits itself*” (WL 98 [GA I/2:259–60]). The I comes into being and defines itself through its activity.

Borrowing a term from Kant, Fichte says that I intellectually intuit my activity – or, more properly, myself as activity – because only intellectual intuition captures the immediacy of self-consciousness as well as the idea that the I comes to be through its own activity. Kant contrasts intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) with sensible intuition. Sensible intuitions are passively received by means of the senses, and they are apprehended in space and time (the pure forms of sensible intuition). Intellectual intuition is both “non-sensible,” an immediate apprehension of things as they are in themselves (A249, B307); and it is creative (*ürbildliches*), in that the intellect (as *intellectus archetypus*) creates the thing that it apprehends through the act of cognition (C 10:130).

Kant claims that only a divine being would be capable of intellectual intuition, since finite beings must passively receive the matter of experience through the senses, as given by the thing in itself. However, Kant's theory of self-consciousness faces a problem that Fichte solves with his appeal to intellectual intuition. On the one hand, Kant claims that all knowledge, even self-knowledge, is representational (B67–69). We know ourselves in inner sense as a series of thoughts and feelings that are located in time, and thus I am conscious of myself merely as an appearance. However, Kant also believes that an immediate self-consciousness – the “I think,” or the transcendental unity of apperception – is not given passively to consciousness. Instead, it is the activity of attributing successive representations to a single self-consciousness that makes representations possible, and thus it is “prior to all thinking” (B132). According to Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank, Fichte's “original insight” is his rejection of the “reflection theory” of self-consciousness – the idea that self-consciousness is the same kind of thing as consciousness of objects, such that the self is a thing that we are conscious of rather than (or in addition to) being the subject of consciousness. Instead, Fichte claims that there is a nonrepresentational self-relation (self-positing) that allows us to be conscious of ourselves in a way that precedes reflection.²² In Kantian terms, we are able to apprehend ourselves in inner sense because of an immediate self-conscious activity (apperception) that makes such representations possible. Thus, despite Fichte's claim to the contrary (EPW 205 [GA II/3:330]), Kant and Fichte disagree on how we relate to ourselves in the “I think”: Kant calls this immediate self-relation a thought, and claims that it is a formal condition for the possibility of experience, whereas Fichte calls it an intuition, and claims that it is a (non-discursive) relation to the self (NM 119–20 [K 34]).

Fichte plays on the ambiguity of intellectual intuition by employing it to indicate a kind of creative activity and an immediate form of apprehension. It is used to signify both the foundational act by which the I comes into being and the awareness of this act that the philosopher achieves through reflection and abstraction (IWL 46–51 [GA I/4:216–21]). It is as if the philosopher discovers

something through the method of transcendental philosophy that she then recognizes has always been there, something that the dogmatic thinker is unprepared to recognize in herself. Still, Fichte follows Kant in denying that this self-relation amounts to metaphysical knowledge of myself as a thing. Like Kant, Fichte claims that this is an insight into the fact *that* I am active rather than a cognition of *what* I am: “Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act” (IWL 46 [GA I/4:216–17]; see also IWL 56 [GA I/4:225]). In intellectual intuition, I am because I act, but I do not exist as an object of cognition. Fichte thus transforms the meaning of *intellektuelle Anschauung*, and he follows Kant in rejecting the possibility of knowing things in themselves (which is how Kant defines intellectual intuition [ID 2:396–97; B307–9; LDR 28:1051–53]).

Despite his linguistic divergence from Kantian orthodoxy, Fichte has two reasons for calling this self-relation an intellectual intuition, corresponding to the two parts of Kant’s definition. First, it is an intuition in the sense that it is immediate – that is, it is not organized by the understanding according to concepts (SE 50 [GA I/5:60]). On this point, Fichte agrees with Kant, who claims that the “I think” is an “empirical proposition” because we are conscious of ourselves through an “indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception [*Wahrnehmung*].” Like Fichte, Kant is trying, awkwardly, to describe this self-relation as an underived kind of intuition (“purely intellectual”) rather than an experience, because, unlike experience proper, it is not judged according to the categories (B422–23n). Calling my self-relation an intellectual intuition captures the fact that I relate to myself immediately in apperception, not as a represented, determined thing.

The second reason why Fichte calls it an intellectual intuition is that self-consciousness is productive rather than receptive, active rather than passive. A divine intellect would create its objects of cognition by thinking of them. Similarly, thinking brings about the I, since the I is defined by its activity. I know that I act because I act, not because I perceive some fact that is given to me empirically. Hence Fichte refers to this absolute act of self-positing as a *Tathandlung*, a term that combines the act (*Handlung*) and the product of that act (*Tat*) (EPW 64 [GA I/2:46]; WL 97 [GA I/2:259]). The I’s activity simultaneously brings the I into existence as a fact: “I am posited, *because* I have posited myself. I am, *because* I am” (EPW 125 [GA I/2:139]; see also EPW 73 [GA I/2:62]; WL 94–96 [GA I/2:256–59]). In this sense, Fichte diverges from Kant’s account of apperception (and Zöllner’s account of the absolute I), or perhaps elaborates on an idea that is only inchoate in Kant: for Kant, apperception is “a form of representation” without content (A346/B404), but he also says that “the ‘I think’ is... an empirical proposition, and contains within itself the proposition ‘I exist’” (B422n). Fichte makes the latter point explicit by conceiving of intellectual intuition as a nonrepresentational relationship

with content – namely, an immediate awareness of my activity and of my existence as activity.²³

This claim, that the I is self-positing (*selbstsetzung*), is at the heart of Fichte's theory of subjectivity. In fact, he says that "the nature of the I consists simply and solely in the fact that it posits itself" (WL 163 [GA I/2:326]; see also IWL 108 [GA I/4:272]; NM 97 [K 18]). The I's essential characteristic is its choosing, through its own unconditioned act, to be for itself, as opposed to mere things, which exist as objective representations for another (i.e., for consciousness). Sartre would later adopt similar language in distinguishing a mere object (being-in-itself) from a free being who creates herself through her own activity (being-for-itself) (cf. IWL 21 [GA I/4:196]).²⁴

For critics of Fichte, the claim that the I posits itself reveals the explanatory limits of his subjectivism. On the face of it, it seems not to make sense. I must exist in order to do anything, so the idea that I would bring myself into existence suggests both that I exist already as an agent (in order to act at all) and that I am the result of my own act of positing. If the I comes to be through the act of self-positing, then it is both the originating cause and the resulting consequence of its own activity. How could I posit myself into existence if I do not yet exist to do the positing?

The claim only seems confusing, however, if we assume that the I must be a thing in order to act, rather than making the existence of things (for consciousness) dependent on the I's activity, as it must be under transcendental idealism. That is, only if we assume materialism from the beginning, such that only things can act – or, more precisely, can be part of the causal series of events – is self-positing activity impossible. From the ordinary standpoint, we conceive of ourselves as bodies that do things, so self-positing seems nonsensical; however, the critical philosopher traces the existence of the body, and even the existence of my own inner sense, to the synthesizing activity that makes those things possible as objects for consciousness. I cannot appeal to things to explain consciousness – for example, claiming that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of material processes in the brain – because, from the transcendental perspective, those processes only become material processes through the activity of judgment, by my representing them as objects (according to the categories): "All *being*, that of the I as well as of the not-I, is a determinate modification of consciousness; and without some consciousness, there is no being" (FNR 4 [GA I/3:314]; see also IWL 25–26 [GA I/4:199–200]). This is why Pippin says that, for Fichte, spontaneity rules out both (epistemological) empiricism and (metaphysical) materialism.²⁵ The subject and object are both derived from the I's activity, and the I must posit itself as their condition. Otherwise, objective representations would precede the activity that makes such representations possible, which is "self-contradictory" (EPW 74 [GA I/2:62]).

This still may not sound like an explanation of the I's self-positing because, from the ordinary standpoint, we tend to conceive of ourselves as representations, be it in inner sense (as ideas and feelings) or outer sense (as bodies). However, if pure activity is not a representation that is caused by another representation, then we cannot give a causal explanation of its existence; the concept of causality does not apply to the spontaneity that makes conceptual judgments possible. And so I cannot be brought about by something other than my own activity. That is, I am not an existing thing at all, but activity that makes things possible as representations. Therefore, I arrive at the "I think" not by discovering it as a thing in consciousness, but simply by thinking: "What was I, then, before I came to self-consciousness? The natural reply is: I did not exist at all; for I was not an I" (WL 98 [GA I/2:260]).²⁶ Anticipating Jaako Hintikka, Fichte reveals that Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") is not an inference that I make from thinking to being, but a performative utterance that produces the I through the act of thinking itself: *sum, ergo sum* ("I am, therefore I am") (WL 100 [GA I/2:262]; cf. B422–23n).²⁷ Free activity is something that can only exist insofar as one acts, which is why "immediate self-consciousness ... cannot be proven to anyone. Everyone must freely generate it within himself" (IWL 14 [GA I/4:191]). Someone else cannot act for me; it ceases to be *my* activity if it is caused by something outside of me. For my activity to take place, I must act. That is the only appropriate explanation.

Feeling and the *Anstoß*

The dogmatist cannot account for the spontaneity of judgment that makes experience possible, but he can explain the givenness of sensible intuitions: the thing in itself affects me. By contrast, the activity of consciousness is at the heart of Fichte's idealism, so his challenge is to explain how objects seem to be given to me from without, accompanied by the feeling of necessity. To explain this, Fichte appeals first to a feeling (*Gefühl*) in the I. The I encounters a resistance to its freedom and conceives of this resistance as a thing external to its activity, an object that confronts the subject as a limitation on its activity. I thus become conscious of myself as a subject by reflecting on a perceived limit to my freedom. Although the presence of feeling in the I is "dependent upon freedom" insofar as "I must surrender myself to the feeling" (NM 220–21 [K 99]), it is also passive in that the feeling is not simply posited by the I: "the I cannot conjure up feelings in itself" (WL 268 [GA I/2:433]; see also GA I/4:245). The basis of representations in this felt resistance is not attributable to the I's activity, even though conceiving of the given as objective representations depends on the activity of judgment. Thus Fichte can say both that "all representations, and specifically, those representations that are accompanied by the

feeling of necessity, are products of this representing subject" and that, although "the *representing subject* is whatever it is only by means of *self-activity*... this proposition should not be taken to suggest any creation of representations..." (NM 96 [GA IV/2:24]). The feeling is original to the I and it depends on the I's activity for its presence to consciousness as a representation.

Fichte refers to a feeling rather than a sensation, as Kant does, but this is not a merely terminological difference. A feeling need not refer to an object, but a sensation is assumed to have been caused by something independent of consciousness. Thus the idea that the I begins with a feeling allows Fichte not to assume a thing in itself from the outset, but rather to explain the derivation of the object from the I's activity, in response to the feeling: "All of our cognition does indeed begin with an *affection*, but not with an affection *by an object*" (IWL 74 [GA I/4:241]).²⁸ In the practical part of the *Grundlage*, Fichte describes this feeling as an *Anstoß* ("check"), an original limit to the I's activity:

The check [*Anstoß*] (unposited by the positing I) occurs to the I insofar as it is active, and is thus only a check insofar as there is activity in the I; its possibility is conditional upon the I's activity: no activity of the I, no check. Conversely, the activity of the I's own self-determining would be conditioned by [*bedingen durch*] the check: no check, no self-determination. (WL 191 [GA I/2:356])

The paradox that Fichte confronts here has to do with how the *Anstoß* becomes a limitation for the I. On the one hand, the check cannot simply restrict the I's activity on its own, or else it would amount to a thing in itself that determines the I. This would be a form of dogmatism. On the other hand, Fichte has to explain how the absolute I comes to be limited, and to do that he has to introduce an impulse for the I to determine itself (SE 97 [GA I/5:101]). Thus there must be a check on the I's activity, but the check has to be in the I itself: Slavoj Žižek calls it "the primordial foreign body that 'sticks in the throat' of the subject."²⁹ Fichte must simultaneously claim that the I is passive insofar as it is given the task of limiting itself, and that it is active insofar as it posits this limit as a constraint on its own activity. There is a resistance within the I to any attempt at a totalizing subjectivism. The absolute I posits the not-I in opposition to the I as a result of this rift.

Fichte's appeal to the *Anstoß* precludes the common picture of the Fichtean subject as a kind of godlike creator of reality. The I posits the object in order to explain a feeling of resistance that is not ultimately attributable to the I. As Daniel Breazeale describes it, "the ultimate basis of our positing a realm of independent reality is precisely the presence within the I itself of a kind of determinacy for which the I is simply unable to hold itself responsible."³⁰ Thus Fichte's theory of subjectivity gives us what I have elsewhere called a "fractured

self," a subject whose activity is problematized from the beginning, such that the goal of being purely rational is necessarily unreachable.³¹ We can only strive (*streben*) to achieve it.

Explaining the feeling of necessity

The objects in the world are not things that I decide to produce as a matter of choice. There is a difference between the chair that I bump into and the unicorn that I conjure in my imagination. To explain the feeling of necessity that accompanies some of my representations, Fichte claims, first, that the *Anstoß* is in some sense not the I's doing; and, second, that there are certain ways of reasoning given the nature of rational activity, and when we act in these ways – ways that are not up to us per se, but are a result of how we must act given the nature of rational activity – then the things that we posit as objective representations seem not to be up to us. At least they are not up to us in the way that subjective impressions are (such as the unicorn) when we call them up, freely, in our minds:

The intellect acts; but, as a consequence of its very nature, it can act only in a certain, specific manner. If one considers the intellect's necessary modes of acting in isolation from any [actual] acting, then it is quite appropriate to call these the "laws of acting." Hence there are necessary laws of the intellect. – At the same time, the feeling of necessity accompanying these determinate representations is also made comprehensible in this way: For what the intellect feels in this case is not, as it were, an external impression; instead, what it feels when it acts are the limits of its own nature. (IWL 26 [GA I/4:200])

Kant shows that we make sense of experience by means of the categories of the understanding, and Fichte extends this idea: given the nature of thinking, there are certain ways of positing objects as representations for consciousness. How we respond to the feeling is a result of our laws of acting, so it becomes something for us only by being construed in certain ways. Fichte calls this position "critical idealism" or "transcendental idealism," which he distinguishes from "transcendent idealism"; that latter presupposes an intelligence that is completely unconstrained (IWL 26–27 [GA I/4:200]). That sense, that the world must be represented in particular ways, manifests itself in our ordinary experience as a feeling of necessity.

Fichte's idealism attributes the entire object, not just its formal properties, to the activity of the subject. The object only exists because it is posited by us as existing. In fact, because the categories define the object for us, it does not make sense to talk about anything other than its form:

We know very well that the thing does indeed arise through an instance of acting in accordance with these laws. The thing is nothing whatsoever but *the sum of all of these relations as combined by the power of imagination*, and all of these relations, taken together, constitute the thing. The object is indeed the original synthesis of all of these concepts. Form and content are not two separate elements. Form in its entirety is the content, and it is only by means of analysis that we first obtain individual forms. (IWL 28 [GA I/4:202])

What Fichte asks here is: What are the properties of the object? It has a size and shape. Those qualities are defined by its spatial location, and Kant already showed that space is a pure form of sensible intuition. It has properties that we attribute to the object, but that attribution is possible only by means of the category of inherence and subsistence. That is how it becomes a substance for us: by being conceived of as a substance. The object is real or imaginary, affects other things or is affected by them, and so on. But all of these qualities are attributed to the object by us in response to a feeling in the I:

“This object is hard” means that in a certain *series of acting*, between two determinate members of this series, I feel a determinate resistance. – “It becomes soft” means that in the same series of acting I feel a change in the resistance I encounter at the same place. And this is the case with all the predicates of things in the sensible world. (SE 96 [GA I/5:100])³²

There are feelings present to consciousness, and we attribute independent existence to the causes of those feelings by means of the categories. Thus the object is conceived of as an object by our thinking about it in a certain way, in response to the *Anstoß*. So, when we imagine a so-called thing in itself, we are conceiving of something out there in terms of our own intellectual categories. It becomes a thing for us by our taking it to be a thing. This is why Fichte thinks of himself as merely extending Kantian principles to their logical conclusion. Kant retained the thing in itself, but one cannot appeal to such a thing in order to explain representations, because nothing can be represented except insofar as it is subject to our conditions for the possibility of experience, or the forms of thinking that make objectivity possible in the first place.

Again, this may seem like an insane kind of subjectivism – that our own laws of thinking explain why objective representations seem to be given by mind-independent things. However, consider the empiricist's explanation (which is also Kant's explanation) of how the world came to be the way that it is, or how the sensations that I associate with a particular object came to be perceived by me. I perceive a chair, and the question is: Why is there a chair there? Assuming that this is not a question about what prior event in space and time caused the chair to be there (which is empirically discoverable), or about why

someone would have put a chair there (which is answered with reference to individual purposes), and setting aside the metaphysical question about why God would have created the chair (which is unanswerable), the empiricist can say only that the chair is there because it is there. That is, if we think of the chair (or what stands behind our perception of the chair) as a thing in itself, then there is no explanation for why a chair appears there. We can only say that it appears there because the thing in itself is the way it is.

That is no real explanation, and yet critics of Fichte – including, most notably, Josiah Royce – assume that he must have some clear explanation for why the nature of subjectivity necessitates that there be a chair in front of me.³³ Fichte is not claiming, however, that the *Wissenschaftslehre* can provide such an explanation. It is not that this (rather than that) kind of object appears to me because of the nature of the I; rather, a particular object can only appear to me as an object because of the nature of the I. In other words, the I explains the particularity of an object's determinacy – how an object must appear to me as a substance located in space and structured by the laws of thinking – but not an object's particular determinacy. For example, Fichte is explaining why a chair must be a particular thing, but not why it is the particular thing it is – why it is a chair instead of a table, or why it is brown instead of green. What makes me perceive this thing (a chair) as opposed to something else (a table) is that I respond to the givenness of the *Anstoß* according to the laws of thinking. That explains the determinacy of the object, and it also explains why different subjects exist in a shared world: we all operate under the same laws of thought and thus posit the same set of objects.

The answer Fichte gives as to why some things exist rather than others is similar to and just as unsatisfying as the empiricist's explanation. In neither case can we explain why the chair exists, or why the world is as it is. The difference is that Fichte recognizes this fact and precludes speculation as to how the world is apart from the conditions for the possibility of experience, and so recognizes that philosophy can give no answer as to why things are as they are, even to the point of not knowing the ultimate ground of the givenness of experience (the absolute not-I). For Fichte, there is no answer for why things are as they are, other than to say that things are as they are because the I and the *Anstoß* are as they are. He merely changes the basis of explanation from the thing in itself to the I in itself, along with its check. We have to be careful not to hold Fichte to a higher standard than we do the metaphysical realist.

We must remember too that Fichte is not denying that there is a thing in itself, but that, from the perspective of philosophical abstraction and beginning with a certain first principle, we can only talk about an *Anstoß*. Going beyond that to a mind-independent thing is impossible, so we cannot appeal to the way things are apart from human consciousness in order to explain the way that

the world is. Neither can the specific objects of the world be explained in terms of the I's activity, so that Fichte could somehow explain "why ... I create a world that has a belt of asteroids in it between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter," which is what Royce demands of him.³⁴ Fichte's claim here is more basic and more philosophically interesting: when we assume that there is a subject-object distinction because of the nature of things, we dogmatically overlook the role of subjective activity in construing the object as distinct from the subject – which, again, is a Kantian insight, but one that goes beyond Kant and anticipates Hegel.

The I makes content possible as external stuff by means of its formal constraints. In this sense, the matter of our experience depends on the laws of thinking that we use to make judgments about experience. However, the laws of thinking do not dictate the specific feelings that result from the original limitation on the I (the *Anstoß*), so it is more proper to say that consciousness dictates material content only insofar as it is an object (*Gegenstand*, in its meaning as "standing against"). That is, the I, through its formal constraints, determines only the otherness of empirical objects, or their opposition to consciousness. Thus philosophy is limited in what it can say about things, and Fichte claims that natural science has an important role in discovering the objects and causal relations that constitute the external world. Philosophy must explain *a priori* why experience of a natural world in general is necessary in order for subjective self-consciousness to be possible. In this sense, it is a closed system: Fichte deduces the world from the I, and then discovers the activity of the I again in our representation of the world. The natural sciences, however, discover objects and the specific laws that govern the relation of objects. Scientists can always perform additional experiments to determine how the not-I happens to appear to us, and in this sense the natural sciences are "infinite" (EPW 119–22 [GA I/2:133–37]). That is, natural science does not form a closed system, like philosophy does. Its claims – theories and hypotheses, but even individual observations about what is the case – are constantly open to revision. For Fichte, then, the existence of a particular chair with particular qualities is discovered *a posteriori*, just as it is for the realist.³⁵

Conclusion: Between Kant and us

Throughout the Jena period, Fichte claims that he adheres to the spirit of the critical philosophy, even if he and Kant disagree on some of its implications. As I have shown, this is a plausible and defensible claim, despite the objections of Fichte's detractors, and even Kant himself. Like Kant, Fichte shows that spontaneity is a condition for the possibility of experience, and he explains why we cannot account for this activity in terms of causally determined representations.

The *Wissenschaftslehre's* appeal to self-positing, then, does not transform the human being into a god, but rather explicates what consciousness must be like in order for us to have objective representations. The subject is responsible for the form of determinacy, and only this form can be philosophically investigated. The source of the feelings that give rise to representations is unavailable to us because it is absolutely distinct from consciousness, so we can only talk about the feelings themselves, which are already in relation to consciousness. The elimination of the thing in itself from the philosophical standpoint is not an attempt to make all of existence dependent on the I, but an attempt to explain objective representations from the perspective of the representing subject. This kind of project would be taken up later by Husserl, Heidegger, and others in the phenomenological tradition.

Without being able to appeal to a thing in itself, Fichte explains otherness in terms of the *Anstoß*, a kind of resistance that is inherent to subjectivity. The theory of subjectivity that results gives us a subject for which self-alienation can never be overcome. This conception of a fractured self informs much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy, including the work of Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, and Butler. There are many fruitful points of convergence between contemporary philosophy and Fichte's theory of subjectivity, which attests to the fact that, although Fichte was clearly a product of his time, the ideas that he develops in the *Wissenschaftslehre* remain philosophically compelling.³⁶

Notes

1. In his famous "Declaration concerning Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*," Kant denies that the work of the critical philosophy needs to be completed and claims that the *Critique of Pure Reason* in fact forms a complete system (C 12:370–71).
2. This means that idealism has a practical starting point, which I have elsewhere identified as the immediate sense of moral constraint (Kant's "fact of reason"). See my "Idealism Is the Only Possible Philosophy: Systematicity and the Fichtean Fact of Reason," *Idealistic Studies* 31, no. 1 (winter 2001): 1–30.
3. On the relation between Fichte's claim that "the kind of philosophy one chooses...depends upon the kind of person one is" (IWL 20 [GA I/4:195]) and his claim that idealism is philosophically superior to dogmatism, see Daniel Breazeale, "How to Make an Idealist: Fichte's 'Refutation of Dogmatism' and the Problem of the Starting Point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Philosophical Forum* 19, nos. 2–3 (winter-spring 1987–88): 97–123. Despite Breazeale's defense of Fichte, there is a tension between Fichte's claim that the choice between idealism and dogmatism is based on faith or interest and his claim that a scientific philosophy depends on a self-evident first principle. It is not self-evident because only people who are educated in a particular way are capable of insight into their own activity, from which idealism follows as a worldview (IWL 20 [GA I/4:195]; SE 78 [GA I/5:84–85]).
4. Robert B. Pippin, "Fichte's Contribution," in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 46.

5. On Fichte's attempt to bring the entire object "within the space of reasons," see Paul Franks, "Fichte's Position: Self-Awareness and the Space of Reasons," <http://americanclass.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Fichtes-Position.pdf>; Robert B. Pippin, "Fichte's Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147–70; and Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105–30.
6. For example, Bertrand Russell summarily dismisses Fichte by saying that he "abandoned 'things in themselves,' and carried subjectivism to a point which seems almost to involve a kind of insanity" (*A History of Western Philosophy* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945], 718).
7. See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus* (New York: Garland, 1983), 209–29; G. E. Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie*, ed. Manfred Frank (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), 184; and Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), 1:436. For Fichte's praise of Jacobi's critique of the thing in itself, see IWL 66 (GA I/4:235).
8. See Otfried Höffe, *Immanuel Kant*, trans. Marshall Farrier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 105–6; Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 50–73; and Graham Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant: A Commentary on the "Critique of Pure Reason"* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 706–7.
9. Although Hegel rejects the idea that the thing is posited by the individual subject, Hegel closely follows Fichte in claiming that the thing in itself is put forward as a mere abstraction, and that the thing as a cause of representations is the result of thinking. See, for example, PhG §§73–89 (HW 3:68–81); SL 41, 93–94, 423–30 (HW 5:59–60, 129–30; 6:129–39); EL §§123–24.
10. Franks, quite rightly, calls Fichte's denial of the thing in itself "a methodological thesis disguised as a metaphysical truism" ("Fichte's Position," 25).
11. For an examination of the two standpoints and how Fichte's approach to them changes over the course of the Jena period, see Daniel Breazeale, "The 'Standpoint of Life' and the 'Standpoint of Philosophy' in the Context of the *Jena Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–1801)," in *Transzendentalphilosophie als System. Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen 1794 und 1806*, ed. Albert Mues (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989), 81–104. Despite his thorough treatment of this topic, Breazeale does not relate the two standpoints to transcendental idealism and empirical realism, as I do here.
12. See John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 132–43.
13. Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 117.
14. Tom Rockmore, "Fichte, German Idealism and the Thing in Itself," in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 17–20.
15. Wayne Martin, *Idealism and Objectivity: Understanding Fichte's Jena Project* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 68.
16. In quotations from the Heath-Lachs translation of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), "self" (for *Ich*) has been replaced with "I," which is a more accurate translation and is more commonly used in the primary and secondary literature on Fichte.

17. Günter Zöller, "From Transcendental Philosophy to *Wissenschaftslehre*: Fichte's Modification of Kant's Idealism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2007): 253.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 5.
19. Pinkard, *German Philosophy*, 115.
20. Franks, "Fichte's Position," 16.
21. This "seemingly" is not meant to imply that there are no given objects, only that they are felt as given and that, philosophically, we can say nothing beyond that.
22. Dieter Henrich, "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht," in *Subjektivität und Metaphysik: Festschrift für Wolfgang Cramer*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Hans Wagner (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1966), 188–232; and Manfred Frank, "'Intellektuale Anschauung': Drei Stellungnahmen zu einem Deutungsversuch von Selbstbewußtsein: Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin/Novalis," in *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik*, ed. Ernst Behler and Jochen Hörisch (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), 96–126. See also Yolanda Estes, "Intellectual Intuition: Reconsidering Continuity in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling," in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, 165–77.
23. John Taber, "Fichte's Emendation of Kant," *Kant-Studien* 75, nos. 1-4 (Jan. 1984): 442–59.
24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1956).
25. Pippin, "Fichte's Contribution," 46. See also Lance P. Hickey, "Fichte's Critique of Dogmatism: The Modern Parallel," *Philosophical Forum* 35, no. 1 (spring 2004): 65–80.
26. The passages in Fichte that make this point are particularly striking: for example, "The I is not something *that has capacities*, it is not a capacity at all, but rather is *active*; it is what it does, and when it does nothing, it is nothing" (FNR 23 [GA I/3:334]); "Idealism considers the intellect to be a kind of *doing* and absolutely nothing more" (IWL 26 [GA I/4:200]); and "Our philosophy is acquainted with something that is even higher than any being. ... our A [the absolute I] neither *is* nor *is not*; in no possible sense is 'being' a predicate of this A" (IWL 137 [GA I/4:466]).
27. Jaako Hintikka, "Cogito, Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance?" in *Meta-Meditations: Studies in Descartes*, ed. Alexander Sesonske and Noel Fleming (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1965), 50–76. See also Béatrice Longuenesse, "Kant's 'I Think' versus Descartes' 'I Am a Thing That Thinks,'" in *Kant and the Early Moderns*, ed. Daniel Garber and Béatrice Longuenesse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9–31.
28. Claude Piché, "The Role of Feeling in Fichte's Rejection of the Thing in Itself," *Idealistic Studies* 28, nos. 1/2 (winter/spring 1998): 71–82.
29. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 44–45. See also Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 174–75.
30. Daniel Breazeale, "Check or Checkmate? On the Finitude of the Fichtean Self," in *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 95. See also Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte's Abstract Realism," in *The Emergence of German Idealism*, ed. Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 99–115.
31. Matthew C. Altman and Cynthia D. Coe, *The Fractured Self in Freud and German Philosophy* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). See also my "Fichte's Anti-Hegelian Legacy," in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, 275–85.

32. Fichte's argument is parallel to Berkeley's argument that the object has no primary qualities because those qualities are entirely defined by secondary qualities – color defines a thing's shape, and so on. However, Fichte's distinction is between the form and matter of the representation, not its primary and secondary qualities. See George Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 106.
33. Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 166–67.
34. *Ibid.*, 167.
35. In fact, for Fichte, everything that is discovered is discovered *a posteriori*, including the I. Among these (discovered) things, something is considered *a priori* when it is deducible from the I. The philosopher establishes the existence of the not-I *a priori* after she has discovered the I *a posteriori*, through the process of abstraction. See EPW 352 (GA I/4:309–10). Here again, Fichte distinguishes between the ordinary standpoint and the philosophical standpoint.
36. I am indebted to Cynthia D. Coe, Michael Fletcher, and Kienhow Goh for reading drafts and suggesting promising directions for this chapter.

17

How “Natural” Is Fichte’s Theory of Natural Right?

David James

Despite giving his main work on what would today be described as legal and political philosophy the title *Foundations of Natural Right* (*Grundlage des Naturrechts*), Fichte at one point in the same work announces that “there is no natural right [*Naturrecht*] at all in the sense often given to that term, i.e. there can be no rightful [*rechtliches*] relation between human beings except within a commonwealth and under positive laws” (FNR 132 [GA I/3:432]). This claim signals that natural right “in the sense often given to that term” is in some way misleading or even mistaken, because relations of a certain type between human beings are only possible given the existence of two artificial, and thus non-natural, entities: the type of legal and political community designated by the term “commonwealth” and the laws that govern such a community. In this respect, Fichte provides a negative answer to a question that he himself poses in the *Foundations of Natural Right*: the question as to “whether a genuine doctrine of natural right is possible, by which we mean a science of the relation of right [*Rechtsverhältnis*] between persons outside the state and without positive law” (FNR 92 [GA I/3:395]).

Fichte nevertheless attempts to provide “a science of the relation of right” even if this relation does not form the object of a “genuine” doctrine of natural right because it is not something natural but is instead a legal and political construct. The fact that Fichte speaks of “foundations” of natural right implies, however, that he does not have in mind some form of legal positivism, which views right as nothing more than what the state declares it to be in the shape of specific laws. Rather, the philosopher has the task of discovering foundations that generate normative constraints on which laws can (or cannot) count as legitimate expressions of right. The full title of the work, *Foundations of Natural Right according to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, indicates that the foundations in question are, like all the other principles discovered by the philosophical science that Fichte terms the *Wissenschaftslehre*, to be found in pure reason. This is confirmed by Fichte’s

statement that the concept of right itself "should be an original concept of pure reason" (FNR 9 [GA I/3:319]).

Since the foundations or principles of right are located in pure reason, they are not natural in the sense of being ultimately derived from observable natural properties or features of human beings, whether taken individually or in relation to each other, or of the world in which they live. Thus once again it is misleading to speak of "natural" right. Fichte claims, however, that "the state itself becomes the human being's natural condition [*Naturzustand*], and its laws ought to be nothing other than natural right realized" (FNR 133 [GA I/3:432]). The idea that the laws of the state realize natural right implies that natural right in some sense exists independently of these specific laws, in which it finds its realization. This idea is compatible with the notion of certain normative constraints that determine what laws may count as rightful ones. At the same time, it raises the question as to how exactly these constraints exist independently of the laws that embody them; and, as already indicated, the answer to this question is that these constraints are found in pure reason.

Since Fichte himself suggests that there is something misleading about the title that he gives to his main work of legal and political philosophy insofar as it contains the word "natural," the question arises as to why Fichte included this word in the title. Answering this question requires gaining a better understanding of what Fichte means by the noun that the adjective "natural" qualifies, namely "right." In what follows, I discuss Fichte's theory of right with the intention of determining the extent to which it makes sense (if at all) to speak of it as a theory of natural right. I argue that, although Fichte's theory of right has certain features in common with the modern natural law tradition, its artificiality and emphasis on the concept of freedom make the use of the term "natural" misleading. I begin with a general account of Fichte's main aims in developing a theory of right and how they relate to the idea of sociality.

Fichte's Foundations of Natural Right and the idea of sociality

Some clues as to the main aims of Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right* are provided by his *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation*, which was published a couple of years before. In his second lecture, Fichte states that the following questions must be answered if a well-founded theory of natural right is to become possible: By what right does a human being call a particular part of the physical world his or her body? And how does a human being come to assume the existence of other rational beings like him- or herself? Fichte immediately reformulates the second question as follows: How can a human being come to recognize the existence of other rational beings when they are not immediately present to his or her own pure self-consciousness? (EPW 153 [GA I/3:34]).

The *Foundations of Natural Right* aims, then, to do something more than identify the foundations or principles of right. It also seeks to address certain skeptical problems concerning the subject's relation to his or her own body – that is, the problem of what can justify the subject's ascription of a particular physical object to him- or herself as his or her body – and the existence of other persons. In the second case in particular, Fichte explicitly rules out any appeals to experience, on the grounds that experience can tell us only that we have representations of rational beings outside of us, but not that anything exists independently of these representations that corresponds to them. To this extent, it is we who introduce, or “posit” as Fichte likes to say, such beings outside of us in order to explain certain experiences that we have (EPW 154 [GA I/3:35]). Presumably, a similar problem arises in the case of one's own body insofar as it is conceived to be something more than a representation, namely, a physical object existing in space.

Given that a well-grounded theory of right cannot rest on experience, it must be based on other foundations, and, as we already know, these foundations are provided by certain principles of pure reason. Fichte's attempt to provide his theory of right with the status of a science of pure reason is inextricably linked with an attempt to show how the concept of right and its various modifications, such as property, are necessary conditions of self-consciousness. As conditions of self-consciousness, and by implication of all conscious experience, the concept of right and its various modifications cannot themselves be explained in empirical terms; rather, as conditions of self-consciousness, which is itself a condition of all conscious experience, they are principles that must lie outside the realm of the experience that they condition. This transcendental project of identifying and demonstrating the conditions of experience at the same time seeks to meet the skeptical problems mentioned above by showing how both the body, as an instrument of rational agency in the external world, and the existence of rational beings outside of oneself must be included among the necessary conditions of self-consciousness. In other words, they are representations whose necessity and objective status is demonstrated by the way in which we must “posit” them as essential moments in a chain of mental acts generated in the course of reflecting on the conditions of self-consciousness and thus of experience in general.

Another central feature of Fichte's theory of right concerns his attempt to address the second of the skeptical problems mentioned above. He claims that the problem of the existence of other persons can only be solved from a practical standpoint rather than from a purely theoretical one. This problem can, in short, only be solved by giving an account of rational agency, which requires being able not only to think a concept consistently (that is, to think it in such a way that it harmonizes with the logical principles that govern thought in general), but also to will the realization of this concept outside of oneself. The

concept in question can be more properly described as a self-conception, that is, the conception of oneself as a rational being capable of purposive activity which brings about changes in the world. This type of activity depends on freedom because it involves subjecting oneself to principles of action as opposed to being determined only by natural laws, in which case one's activity would be a purely mechanical one determined by external forces. This transcendental freedom cannot itself, however, become a direct object of consciousness, since it is a condition of any consciousness of oneself as a rational agent. Yet one can become indirectly conscious of this freedom in the negative sense of being "conscious of no cause for a certain voluntary determination of my empirical I other than my will itself" (EPW 155 [GA I/3:36]). Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right* seeks to explain how this consciousness of oneself as free is possible, and, as we shall see, in so doing it shows how the freedom in question can become an object of consciousness, if only indirectly.

Although Fichte's theory of right is concerned with explaining the conditions of self-consciousness and experience in general and, more specifically, the conditions of the experience of oneself as a free and rational agent capable of effecting changes in the world, it also seeks to explain the possibility of a more determinate type of experience. This experience concerns the peaceful coexistence of individual human beings. This relation between human beings differs from the relation of human beings to animate or inanimate nature. For example, according to Fichte human beings either employ nonhuman animals for their own purposes or flee from them if this is not possible because they feel threatened by them. This viewpoint cannot, however, be applied to other human beings, since the assumption that human beings must either subjugate and exploit each other or flee from each other would contradict experience:

We will assume that this would be the case: then surely no two human beings would be able to live in proximity to one another; the stronger would enslave the weaker if the latter did not flee as soon as he saw the former. But, if this happened would they have ever entered into society, would the earth have become populated through them? Their relation would have been exactly as Hobbes described it in the state of nature: a war of all against all. And yet we find that men agree with one another in a social alliance. The reason for this phenomenon must lie in the nature of man himself: in the primordial nature of man a principle must be discernible which makes him behave differently toward others of his own kind than he behaves toward nature. (OL 121–22 [GA I/3:99–100])

In this passage from "On the Linguistic Capacity and the Origin of Language," which was published roughly a year before the first part of the *Foundations of Natural Right*, Fichte implies that peaceful coexistence is a sufficiently general

feature of human relations that its possibility needs to be explained by identifying and demonstrating its transcendental conditions. These conditions are to be sought in human nature itself, or, to be more precise, in the nature of a finite rational being whose free agency sets it apart from the rest of nature and in some kind of rational principle found in such a being.

From what has been said above, the *Foundations of Natural Right* can be said to aim to provide a response to certain skeptical problems concerning the existence of one's own body and the existence of other individuals of the same general type as oneself. It also seeks to provide an account of certain necessary conditions of self-consciousness and free rational agency. In fact, Fichte thinks that he is able to solve the skeptical problems in question by identifying one's own body and the existence of other individuals of the same general type as necessary conditions of self-consciousness and free rational agency. In this way, Fichte also attempts to explain the general, if not entirely universal, fact of peaceful human coexistence.

In his deduction of the concept of right, which forms the first main division of the *Foundations of Natural Right* (§§1–4), Fichte attempts to explain how self-consciousness is possible. This self-consciousness consists in the act of self-positing whereby a finite rational being ascribes to itself an activity of which it alone is the source. Since the self-consciousness in question is a finite one – that is to say, one that is limited by the conditions of intuition, space, and time – this awareness of itself as a free and rational agent must involve consciousness of a spatially and temporally located object in which its own self-positing activity becomes manifest to the self which is the source of this activity. This self-positing activity can be thought to become an object of the self's own consciousness when an agent realizes its freely formed ends in a world that at the same time limits this activity, in the sense that the agent is constrained to represent this world and the objects within it in a determinate manner. These representations constrain rational agents in the sense that, in order to act effectively, the ends that these agents form and the means to realizing them that they adopt must conform to their representations of how the world and the objects within it are constituted. The activity in question cannot, however, be completely determined by these representations if it is to be free activity. Rather, the ends in question must be freely adopted at the same time as their specific content is partially determined by something external to the agent. Far from explaining self-consciousness, however, Fichte at this stage simply presupposes a moment in time in which an object exists prior to self-consciousness.

In this way, something is introduced which itself needs to be explained in order to explain self-consciousness, which therefore remains unexplained. The only solution to this problem is, Fichte claims, to identify how “the rational being can – in one and the same undivided moment – ascribe an efficacy to

itself and posit something in opposition to that efficacy" (FNR 30 [GA I/3:341]). This moment would be one in which the subject and the object were identical in that "the subject's efficacy is itself the object that is perceived and comprehended, and...the object is nothing other than the subject's efficacy (and thus...the two are the same)" (FNR 31 [GA I/3:342]). This tells us that Fichte thinks he needs to explain the possibility of an object that is not purely external to the subject since it reflects what the subject itself essentially is and what it takes itself to be – that is, "free and self-determining" – at the same time as the object limits the subject's activity. Fichte identifies the object in question with a "summons [*Aufforderung*]" by means of which the subject is determined to be self-determining (FNR 31 [GA I/3:342]).

In order for this summons to reflect what the subject essentially is and takes itself to be, it can only require that the subject chooses to act in a determinate manner or chooses not to act at all. Thus, on the one hand, the summons presupposes the capacity to act in accordance with freely formed ends on the part of the subject to whom it is addressed, while, on the other hand, it presupposes an understanding of what it means to act in such a way on the part of the one who summons another person to engage in free activity. In other words, not only the subject to whom the summons is addressed but also the one who summons another human being must be assumed to be free and rational. Since such a summons is a condition of self-consciousness, each and every self-consciousness would have to think that other rational beings exist in the world, or as Fichte puts it, "if there is such a summons, then the rational being must necessarily posit a rational being outside itself as the cause of the summons, and thus it must posit a rational being outside itself in general" (FNR 37 [GA I/3:347]). In this way, Fichte thinks that he has solved the skeptical problem concerning the existence of other persons.

Fichte proceeds to develop the implications of the idea of a summons which explains the possibility of self-consciousness by attempting to determine the precise nature of the relation between finite rational beings that it entails. This relation is one in which each finite rational being is limited by other finite rational beings at the same time as it is left free to act within the limits granted it by these other finite rational beings. In short, Fichte identifies the idea of a summons with the act of limiting one's own activity in relation to others in such a way that they are left with a sphere in which to act free from any external interference. Such interference typically involves subjecting others to one's own purposes by means of superior physical force, while the appropriate response on the part of any weaker party to the threat of such interference would be to flee from others. In this respect, the act of limiting one's activity, and thereby granting others a sphere in which they may freely act, is both the sign of a free and rational being and a condition of relations between human beings that essentially differ from a human being's relations to nature. Since the

self-consciousness of each finite rational being is conditioned by a summons that consists in limiting one's own activity in relation to other persons, the act of self-limitation must be reciprocal. In other words, each finite rational being must be both a subject that summons others and the object of a summons, for it is only by summoning others that each finite rational being demonstrates that it is a free and rational being to which a summons can in turn be directed, and it is only by being the object of such a summons that genuine consciousness of oneself as free and rational becomes possible.

Having deduced the concept of right, Fichte proceeds to identify some of its implications. Given that this concept involves the thought of individual finite rational beings exercising an influence on each other, as well as on nature, it invites the question as to how such influence is possible. By deducing the conditions for the possibility of interpersonal relations as well as relations between human beings and nature in the second main division of the *Foundations of Natural Right* (§§5–7), Fichte thinks that he has succeeded in demonstrating that the concept of right can be applied. These conditions include embodied agency, and it is consequently here that Fichte thinks he has solved the skeptical problem concerning how a person can identify a material body as his or her own body.

In light of what has been said above, it is not difficult to see why Fichte uses the term “natural right.” Essentially, he adopts a term that has previously been used to describe a type of theory that in a number of important respects mirrors his own. Take, for example, the following description of what natural law (or *jus naturale*, which is the Latin term that corresponds to the German term *Naturrecht*) commands given by one of the founders of the modern natural law tradition, Samuel Pufendorf: “In natural law a thing is affirmed as to be done because it is inferred by right reason to be essential to sociality [*socialitas*] among men.”¹ Here the source of natural law or right is associated with reason and not (at least not explicitly so) with any purely natural order. In order to determine what right commands, therefore, human beings need only consult their own reason. For Fichte, this means discovering certain *a priori* principles that constitute conditions of both self-consciousness and the peaceful coexistence of human beings. These principles are something given in the sense that they form fundamental elements of human reason, and in this respect they can be held to be essential features of human nature. Fichte makes clear that the concept of right is found in pure reason, as opposed to being derived from any observable features of human beings and their behavior in relation to each other, when he declares:

Therefore, in consequence of the deduction just carried out, it can be claimed that the concept of right is contained within the essence of reason, and that no finite rational being is possible if this concept is not present

within it – and present not through experience, instruction, arbitrary human conventions, etc., but rather in consequence of the being's rational nature. (FNR 49 [GA I/3:358])

Unlike genuine natural laws, however, individuals have a choice when it comes to acting or not acting in accordance with laws of right, hence the need for a state invested with the authority and equipped with the power to ensure compliance with positive laws that embody the principles of "right reason."

Although such principles are essential to sociality, in Fichte's case this can only mean sociality in the thin sense of the peaceful coexistence of human beings within a certain geographical location, as opposed to sociality in the thicker sense of some kind of natural drive to associate with others of the same general type as oneself and to establish social relations with them. This is evident from the way in which Fichte stresses the conditional nature of right, despite its being a condition of self-consciousness. Basically, if one wants to coexist peaceably with others, and thereby possess a sphere free from external interference, in which one may reliably exercise free choice, one must will the law of right by limiting one's own freedom in such a way that others can also be free, for logical consistency requires willing the means to the end in question. However, one does not think and act inconsistently when one renounces the means to this end at the same time as one renounces the end itself.² That is, one can refuse to live harmoniously in community with others and thus also refuse to impose the law of right upon oneself. Fichte is, moreover, keen to separate right from morality.³ He goes so far as to state:

In the domain of natural right, the good will has no role to play. Right must be enforceable, even if there is not a single human being with a good will; the very aim of the science of right is to sketch out just such an order of things. In this domain, physical force – and it alone – gives right its sanction. (FNR 50 [GA I/3:359])

This separation of right from morality has partly to do with the fact that obedience to the law of right is conditional in the sense indicated above, whereas morality involves the unconditional obligation to perform (or not to perform) certain acts or even to intend them. It also has to do with the fact that right concerns external actions alone and therefore does not consider what agents may have really intended,⁴ whereas morality is concerned with the question as to whether or not someone acted with a good will.

This distinction between right and morality is another feature linking Fichte's theory of right to earlier natural law theories, as is shown by Pufendorf's claim that "as human jurisdiction is concerned only with a man's external actions and does not penetrate to what is hidden in the heart and which gives no

external effect or sign, and consequently takes no account of it, natural law too is largely concerned with forming men's external actions."⁵ Fichte would have to disagree, however, with Pufendorf's association of natural law with "laws which teach one how to conduct oneself to become a useful member of human society," if this claim is understood to mean that right demands that individuals consciously and actively seek to make themselves useful to others.⁶ This is because Fichte's theory of right, although it does not completely abstract from possible sources of motivation, seeks to avoid any appeals to altruism, however weak, by basing itself on the methodological assumption of "universal egoism" (FNR 134 [GA I/3:433–34]). Yet this is not to say that social utility could not be an unintended outcome of acting in accordance with right. It is just that individuals are assumed not to be concerned with the freedom or welfare of others. This view of the matter may be thought to be somewhat at odds with Fichte's description of the summons as an act whereby the other person "has, in *his* choice, in the sphere of his freedom, taken my free choice into consideration, has purposively and intentionally left a sphere open for me," unless the purpose and intention in question can be explained purely in terms of self-interest (FNR 44 [GA I/3:353]).

Fichte assumes, then, that right is a matter of obeying certain rational principles with the aim of gaining for oneself a sphere of activity free from interference by others, an aim that can only be achieved through limiting one's own activity in relation to others with whom one can, therefore, peacefully coexist. In this way, right abstracts from any natural drives that are allegedly to be found in human beings and from any social relations that result from such drives. Elsewhere Fichte does acknowledge the existence of a social drive. In *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation*, he describes the social drive as one of the human being's most fundamental drives; and he claims that it is the human being's destiny to live in society, and that human beings ought to do so, since someone who lives in isolation cannot be a complete human being (EPW 156 [GA I/3:37]). In this context, the state is accorded a purely instrumental function as the means of establishing a perfect society, and it must therefore aim to abolish itself in the sense that it would become superfluous once such a society had been established with its help (EPW 156 [GA I/3:37]).

While Fichte here adopts a thicker notion of sociality than the one found in the *Foundations of Natural Right*, we shall later see that even in this work he alludes to a transition from a thin to a thicker notion of sociality when speaking of the state as a condition of morality. Thus, although right ignores the existence of a social drive in human beings, this does not mean that such a drive is entirely absent; it is simply that, if it does exist, it must form the object of a different area of philosophy – namely, morality or ethics. Right ignores any such drives or other features of human nature beyond self-interest when

explaining what motivates people to behave in certain ways, and this increases its artificial character.

Given Fichte's attempt to demonstrate how the influence that one human being exercises on another human being by means of a "summons" is a condition of self-consciousness, it may appear strange that he treats obedience to right in conditional terms. It would seem, rather, that relations of right must be established if human beings are to achieve self-consciousness in the first place and thereby come to recognize their capacity to choose whether or not to subject themselves to principles of right. However, this type of objection confuses two separate issues: the transcendental issue of the conditions of self-consciousness as such and the issue of how these conditions are met in the case of individual human beings living in particular circumstances. In the latter case, the kind of summons that Fichte describes may take the form of some kind of educative process. Yet there is no guarantee that having attained self-consciousness by means of such a process, individual human beings will continue to limit their activity in relation to others in the appropriate way. A distinction along these lines can be detected in the following passage from the *Foundations of Natural Right*:

It has indeed been shown that, if a rational being is to come to self-consciousness – and hence if it is to become a rational being – then another rational being must necessarily exercise an influence upon it as upon a being capable of reason. These are reciprocal propositions: no influence as upon a rational being, no rational being. But that, even after self-consciousness has been posited, rational beings must continue to influence the subject of self-consciousness in a rational manner, is not thereby posited, and cannot be derived without using the very consistency that is to be proven as the ground of the proof. (FNR 81 [GA I/3:385])

In the last sentence, I take the missing proof to be proof of the fact that it would be inconsistent not to will to limit one's activity in relation to others. Yet, as we have seen, Fichte denies that, from the standpoint of right, there would be any inconsistency involved in not limiting one's activity in relation to others, as long as one also renounced the ends of coexisting peaceably with others and of being guaranteed a sphere in which to exercise free choice. Since the obligation to limit one's activity in relation to others is not an unconditional one in the case of right, the failure of others to limit their activity in relation to oneself would, moreover, be sufficient to remove any obligation on one's own part to recognize their freedom, and one would, therefore, be entitled to treat them as one sees fit.

Given the ultimately contingent nature of right, it is not surprising that Fichte thinks that a condition of right, far from being something natural, must first

be constructed by means of certain acts. The construction of the type of “free” community that remains merely problematic in the first two main divisions of the *Foundations of Natural Right* forms the object of its third main division which concerns the “systematic application of the concept of right” or “the doctrine of right” (*Rechtslehre*). While the first main division concerns *what* the concept of right is, and the second main division concerns *how* this concept can be applied, the third main division concerns *what it would mean* for the concept of right to be realized in the sensible world. This attempt to apply the concept of right to the conditions of the sensible world generates certain problems that require the modification (or further determination) of the concept of right. This modification of the concept of right includes the way in which it transforms itself into the concept of property. In the next section, I focus on the concept of property because of its relevance to the question of whether and to what extent Fichte’s theory of right can be described as “natural,” beyond the fact that it has certain general features in common with the modern natural law tradition.

Property and natural right

The right of property has been treated as a natural right in the sense that human beings possess it in the state of nature – that is, in the absence of laws and political authority – even if this right can only be properly guaranteed by law and the state. Locke’s theory of property provides an example of this approach. For Locke, a right of property can be established by means of an act of appropriation which consists in having “mixed” one’s labor with an object that was previously held in common. Here something that was not previously one’s property becomes one’s property by joining it to something that is already one’s property, namely, one’s own person and labor.⁷ Since this act is by itself sufficient to establish a right of property, this right is ultimately independent of laws and state authority, and it may, therefore, exist in the pre-legal and pre-political form of society known as the state of nature. At one point, Fichte appeared to hold a similar view of property rights, but he then came to adopt a radically different one.⁸

In his *Contribution to the Rectification of the Public’s Judgment of the French Revolution* from 1793, Fichte appears to agree with Locke in conceiving one’s own person to be one’s property when he states: “Originally we are ourselves our property. No one is our master, and no one can become it” (GA I/1:266).⁹ This self-ownership is explained in terms of how the “pure I in us, reason, is master of our sensory nature, of all our mental and physical powers; it may employ them as the means to any arbitrary end” (GA I/1:266). Fichte proceeds to explain the right of property in terms of two main ideas. First of all, there is the idea that human beings have a natural right to use objects for their own ends, since these objects are not free and are not, therefore, the owners of

themselves in the sense described above. Secondly, although these objects are not originally the property of anyone, the act of forming an object that has not previously been subject to the formative activity of another human being in accordance with some end establishes an exclusive right to the same object (GA I/1:266–67). Thus a right of property can be established independently of laws and the state subject to the condition that one is the first person to form an object in accordance with an end.

The natural right in question represents a more determinate expression of the moral law, which in this work serves as the criterion of natural right in two respects. First of all, this law permits human beings to use objects that are not themselves free and thus their own property simply as means to an end (GA I/1:266). Secondly, this law forbids any rational being to disturb the free agency of another rational being, and it thereby generates the right to hinder such interference. Consequently, we have "the right to exclude every other person from the use of a thing which we have formed by means of our powers, to which we gave our form. And this right is called in relation to things *property*" (GA I/1:267). Since the right of property depends only on the moral law, it provides an example of the kind of right that would exist in a pre-legal and pre-political form of society in which the moral law "determines the world of appearances, and is called natural right" (GA I/1:278). In the *Foundations of Natural Right*, by contrast, Fichte appears to reject the idea that the right of property is a natural right, in the sense of a right that human beings would enjoy even in the state of nature. In this work he makes property rights dependent on the establishment of the kind of legal and political community that he designates by the term "commonwealth," at the same time as he rejects the idea that right is determined either by the demands or by the silence of the moral law.

The first main division of the *Foundations of Natural Right*, which concerns the deduction of the concept of right, already appears to be oriented toward an account of property rights insofar as it identifies a division of the world into separate, exclusive spheres, in which finite rational beings may exercise free choice. Indeed, although at this stage in the *Foundations of Natural Right* Fichte speaks of "right" and only later introduces the term "property," he already uses the term "property" to describe the sphere in question in his doctrine of right from 1812 (GA II/13:204). In the following statement, this division of the world into separate spheres is described as a condition of efficacy – that is, the actual exercise of the capacity to act in accordance with ends that one has freely formed – and it is associated with the idea of a world in which such efficacy must be constrained so that the freedom of one person can coexist with the freedom of others:

Now if, as is certainly the case, the effects of rational beings are to belong within the same world, and thus be capable of influencing, mutually

disturbing, and impeding one another, then freedom in this sense would be possible for persons who stand with one another in this state of mutual influence only on the condition that all their efficacy be contained within certain limits, and the world, as the sphere of their freedom, be, as it were, divided among them. (FNR 9–10 [GA I/3:320])

While the requirement that the world be divided into separate spheres of freedom entails the existence of some constraints on individuals' freedom, at this stage there is no indication that these constraints are to be identified with anything more than the limits established by the mutual recognition of each person's freedom and rationality implied by the idea of a summons.

The concept of property is formally introduced in connection with the idea of "original rights [*Urrechte*]." These original rights are contained "in the mere concept of the person as such" (FNR 87 [GA I/3:390]). While this description of original rights suggests the idea of certain inalienable human rights – that is to say, rights that we possess simply in virtue of being human and that cannot be renounced (because we cannot stop being human) – Fichte has something more specific in mind, for original rights have to do with the conditions of rational agency. In his account of such rights, Fichte accordingly introduces the right of property in connection with the need for the world to exhibit regularity and order if a rational being is effectively to realize its freely formed ends within it. He does not deny that the world and the objects within it undergo change in accordance with natural laws. A rational being can, and ought to, anticipate such changes when forming his or her ends and seeking to realize them. What Fichte has in mind are preventable changes brought about by human interference (FNR 105–6 [GA I/3:406–7]). Respecting the property rights of others will, therefore, consist in restricting the exercise of one's own freedom so that it does not interfere with their freedom insofar as it depends on having control of parts of the external world and of certain objects within the world.

In effect, Fichte's initial statement concerning property rights amounts to a reiteration of his conception of right as a relation which allows finite rational beings to coexist in such a way that each of them is guaranteed a personal sphere in which to exercise free choice. This time, however, the relation in question is taken to involve an explicit relation to material objects. It is therefore of a more complex kind than any direct interpersonal relation between finite rational beings. It is also something more than a relation between a person and a thing, since right is essentially a relation between free and rational beings. Therefore, only "if another person is related to the same thing at the same time that I am does there arise the question of *a right to the thing*, which is an abbreviated way of talking about – and this is what it should really be called – *a right in relation to the other person*, i.e. a right to exclude him from using the thing" (FNR 51 [GA I/3:360]).

Fichte points out in his deduction of the concept of an original right that a person in the sensible world is here conceived to be isolated and thus as having "the right to extend his freedom as far as he wills and can, and – if he so desires – the right to take possession of the entire sensible world" (FNR 111 [GA I/3:412]). This right is "infinite" in the sense that the condition which would require its limitation is absent – namely, the existence of other persons with whom the first person potentially stands in relations of mutual influence.¹⁰ Fichte's use of the term "right" is here somewhat inconsistent, since, as we have seen, he thinks that right essentially involves a relation between persons. A condition in which a person exists in complete isolation does not even require a theory of right, so that strictly speaking it is not the case that by rights Fichte has in mind something that we possess in virtue of our humanity alone. Rather, one could conceivably exist as a human being without possessing rights, which always involve a relation to others of the same general type as oneself, and the human being in question could, therefore, be said to have power over things but not a right to them. Fichte makes this point in the following passage:

The concept of right is the concept of a relation between rational beings. Thus, it arises only under the condition that rational beings are thought in relation to one another. It is nonsense to talk about a right to nature, to land, to animals, etc., considered only on their own or in direct relation to a human being. Reason only has power – and by no means a right over – these things, for in this relation the question of right does not arise at all. (FNR 51 [GA I/3:360])

A theory of right becomes necessary only when coexistence with others renders the "right" to extend one's freedom as far as one's power allows one to do problematic, because if "such freedom were infinite... then the freedom of all – except for that of a single individual – would be canceled" (FNR 109 [GA I/3:411]). Thus once two or more human beings exist in spatial proximity to each other, some kind of agreement between them concerning their property rights will have to be reached if they are to coexist peacefully: "All property is grounded in reciprocal *recognition*, and such recognition is conditioned by *mutual declaration*" (FNR 117 [GA I/3:418]).

This claim is not, as it stands, incompatible with the idea of a natural right of property that obtains even in the absence of laws and political authority. The recognition in question could be based on declaring what one already possesses as one's rightful property on the grounds that one was the first to form it in accordance with an end, and on others either accepting this declaration or, if there is any disagreement, all the parties involved modifying their claims until general agreement concerning their property rights is reached. Indeed, Fichte suggests that the formation of a previously ownerless object

could ground an exclusive right to the same object when he speaks of temporal priority as a potential means of establishing property rights, as long as this means of establishing such rights has already been agreed upon (FNR 120 [GA I/3:420]). The need for agreement shows, however, that property rights are not something “natural.” Rather, they must be constructed, even if the principles guiding their construction are already present in “right reason.”

The section on the concept of an original right is followed by a section on what Fichte calls “the right of coercion [*das Zwangsrecht*].” Here he addresses the issue of how and to what extent coercion may be justifiably exercised in relation to individuals who have violated “the law of right.” Fichte invokes the problem of being judge in one’s own cause in such matters. Given the problematic nature of any rightful exercise of coercion in the absence of an independent power entrusted with the task of judging impartially and possessing both the authority and the power to enforce its decisions, Fichte argues for the necessity of a third party that is not a particular individual but the commonwealth that results from the union of all individual wills. Thus the concept of an original right turns out to presuppose other elements of right, leading Fichte to call the idea of an original right “a mere *fiction*,” and to claim that there “is no condition in which original rights exist; and no original rights of human beings” (FNR 102 [GA I/3:403–4]). The possibility of rights at all in the absence of laws and state authority is, in effect, denied. This denial of the existence of any original rights, conceived as natural rights in the sense that they exist even in the state of nature, accords with Fichte’s dismissal of natural right “in the sense often given to that term” and his claim that there can be no rightful relation between human beings except within a commonwealth and under positive laws.

As if to stress the artificial nature of right, Fichte employs the idea of a “civil contract [*Staatsbürgervertrag*]” to explain how individuals may remain free while subjecting themselves to law. This contract is itself made up of various contracts, including a property contract. This particular contract “grounds the relation of right between each individual and all other individuals in the state,” and its object is said to be “a particular activity” (FNR 183–84 [GA I/4:20]). Given the way in which this right to a particular activity derives from the conditions of human agency in general, it provides a more determinate expression of what Fichte calls property “in the broadest sense of the word,” by which he means “a person’s rights to free action in the sensible world in general” (FNR 168 [GA I/4:8]). This right must be guaranteed in such a way that it depends on an individual’s own free and rational activity at the same time as its object concerns the very possibility of such activity, namely self-preservation. Fichte accordingly asserts that a principle of any rational state constitution is that “everyone ought to be able to live from his labor” (FNR 185 [GA I/4:22]). The property contract would therefore be invalid in the case

of someone who turned out, through no fault of his or her own, to be unable to live from his or her labor. The individual in question would then no longer be obliged to respect the property of others, and we may assume that he or she would be free to do all that he or she considers to be necessary when it comes to securing the means to live. In other words, an individual in this situation regains the natural freedom and the associated right to everything that he or she renounced on entering into the civil contract.

Fichte does not restrict himself to arguing that property rights concern being able to live from one's labor. He also attempts to spell out the implications of this right when he claims that each person "possesses property in objects only insofar as he needs such property to pursue his occupation" (FNR 187 [GA I/4:23]). The state must, in short, distribute resources in such a way that each person who is capable of doing so is able to live from his or her labor, and only then is the state to protect property rights. This understanding of the state's role in relation to property rights implies that individuals do not have a natural right to exclude others from the use or benefit of something, even if they were the first person to form it in accordance with some end or had acquired it by means of a contract – if "natural" is here taken to mean an entitlement that they possess in virtue of their humanity alone and thus independently of any particular legal and political arrangements. Rather, property rights are granted by an artificial creation, the state, in accordance with its task of ensuring that each and every person is able to live from his or her labor. Therefore, as well as being conditional in the sense of dependent on the establishment of state authority, the right of property is conditional in the sense that a person has a right to the property that he or she possesses as a citizen (*Bürgereigentum*) only insofar as all the other citizens are able to live by means of their property (FNR 186 [GA I/4:22–23]). Property is, moreover, merely the means to an end which for Fichte separates humanity from the rest of nature, namely freedom.

The primacy of freedom becomes more evident when we consider Fichte's views on self-preservation and its relation to the institution of property. When Fichte claims that the object of the property contract is the particular activity by means of which an individual is able to live, he is not appealing to the idea of self-preservation for its own sake. The term "natural right" may appear appropriate in the sense that political right (*Staatsrecht*) is constructed on the foundations provided by the nature of the human being as a being with needs.¹¹ However, freedom remains the fundamental value, while self-preservation is only the means of realizing this value in the case of finite rational beings. Fichte here highlights the nature of human agency in general, by claiming that the acts of forming ends and seeking to realize them in the world are essentially future-oriented ones that depend on a person's ability to preserve him- or herself as a living body. The essential connection between human agency and the human body finds immediate expression in a physical feeling, namely

the pain caused by hunger or thirst (FNR 185 [GA I/4:21]), and, in light of this essential connection between human agency and the human body, Fichte claims that to be able to live is “the absolute, inalienable property of all human beings” (FNR 185 [GA I/4:22]). Yet it is not the case that the ultimate end of right is individual self-preservation as such. This end is instead that of securing the conditions of free and rational agency.

Fichte claims, in fact, that there “is no separate right to self-preservation; for it is merely contingent that, in a particular instance, we happen to be using our body as a tool, or things as a means, for the end of securing the continued existence of our body as such” (FNR 108 [GA I/3:409]). The idea behind this claim is that a person wills the existence of his or her own body because it constitutes the immediate instrument by which he or she interacts with others and with the world with the intention of realizing his or her freely formed ends, whatever they happen to be. What is really willed, therefore, is the realization of these ends, whereas securing the continued existence of one’s own body is something that is willed only on account of this more fundamental end. Self-preservation is willed, in short, only as “the condition of all other actions and of every expression of freedom” (FNR 107 [GA I/3:408–9]).

Thus there is another sense in which it is misleading to speak of natural right, for right is ultimately not about securing purely natural ends. From the standpoint of right alone, however, it remains unclear why freedom should have this primacy. Fichte himself explains the primacy of freedom in terms of the unconditional demands of the moral law. Thus, despite his separation of right from morality, right represents certain external conditions of the free agency upon which obedience to self-imposed moral principles of action depends insofar as it involves acting in a world in which one stands in relations both to nature and to others of the same general type as oneself. Fichte alludes to this instrumental feature of right when he claims that, although humanity “separates itself from citizenship in order to elevate itself with absolute freedom to the level of morality ... it can do so only if human beings have first existed within the state” (FNR 178–79 [GA I/4:17]). Here the validity of the moral law is assumed as something given, while right is reduced to the status of means to an end. In this way, Fichte implies that the answer to the question of *why* human reason contains the concept of right is ultimately to be answered in terms of a moral teleology. Although the apparent need to explain the givenness of natural law or right may lead one to posit a legislator who also happens to be “the author of the universe,”¹² Fichte prefers to introduce an entity which he calls nature. For example, the following passage concerns the type of relation that he thinks distinguishes human relations from relations between humans and nature insofar as the latter poses a threat to them, a type of relation of which he thinks he has demonstrated the concept of right to be a condition:

Nature decided this question long ago. Surely there is no human being who, upon first seeing another human being, would immediately take flight (as one would in the presence of a rapacious animal) or prepare to kill and eat him (as one might do to a beast), rather than immediately expecting reciprocal communication. This is the case, not through habituation and learning, but through nature and reason, and we have just derived the law that makes it the case. (FNR 75 [GA I/3:380])

While this passage emphasizes the givenness of right by treating it as something quasi-natural whose source lies in human reason, it sits uncomfortably with some of the other central features of Fichte's theory of right. For if the expectation of reciprocal communication is so natural to humankind, one may wonder why the construction of a legal and political community is necessary at all, and why conflict also happens to be a pervasive feature of human relations. There appears, in short, to be some tension between the thin notion of sociality that can be detected in Fichte's theory of right and the thicker notion of sociality to which he elsewhere refers. It looks, then, as if right is simply too artificial. It abstracts from a feature of human nature which, in the passage above, Fichte treats as something that has been implanted in us by nature, rather than as something whose possibility depends on the construction of a legal and political community.

Notes

1. Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen according to Natural Law*, trans. Michael Silverthorne, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7. There are other ways in which Fichte's theory of right may be said to be related to the modern natural law tradition. For example, it is claimed that Fichte's attempt to ground the concept of right on the indubitable foundation provided by self-consciousness finds its precursor in Locke's attempt to do something similar, while Fichte's incorporation of the "collision" of individuals' external actions into his deduction of right recalls Hobbes's theory of the state of nature. See Ludwig Siep, "Naturrecht und Wissenschaftslehre," in *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 19–41.
2. This idea can also be detected in Pufendorf's theory of natural law: "the fundamental natural law is: every man ought to do as much as he can to cultivate and preserve sociality. Since he who wills the end wills also the means which are indispensable to achieving that end, it follows that all that necessarily and normally makes for sociality is understood to be prescribed by natural law. All that disturbs or violates sociality is understood as forbidden" (Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, 35–36).
3. For more detailed accounts of Fichte's separation of right from morality, see David James, *Fichte's Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 112–61; Wolfgang Kersting, "Die Unabhängigkeit des Rechts von der Moral," in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Grundlage des*

- Naturrechts*, ed. Jean-Christophe Merle (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 21–37; and Frederick Neuhauser, “Fichte and the Relationship between Right and Morality,” in *Fichte: Historical Context/Contemporary Controversies*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1994), 158–80.
4. It is because right is concerned only with external actions that Fichte denies the existence of some of today’s widely recognized fundamental human rights: “Thus it is nonsense to speak of a right to the freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and so forth. There is a faculty that performs these inner actions, and there are duties, but no rights, with respect to them” (FNR 51 [GA I/3:360]). Fichte is not denying the importance of the freedoms in question; indeed, he thinks there is a moral duty to respect them. Rather, he is simply stating that, since right concerns external actions alone and these freedoms concern inner actions, it makes no sense to speak of rights here. Yet Fichte is surely operating with an overly restrictive notion of what counts as an “external” action, for a right to the freedom of thought and a right of freedom of conscience surely mean the right to express one’s views and convictions freely, which involves having some effect in the external world.
 5. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, 9.
 6. *Ibid.*, 35.
 7. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 285–302.
 8. For a comparison of Fichte’s later theory of property with Locke’s theory of property, see James, *Fichte’s Social and Political Philosophy*, 21–55.
 9. The corresponding idea is expressed by Locke as follows: “Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his” (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 287–88).
 10. What Fichte has to say on this matter in some respects recalls Hobbes’s description of the right of nature, or that “which Writers commonly call *Jus Naturale*,” as “the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto” (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 91). The idea that, in the absence of any limiting conditions, there exists an “infinite” right to extend one’s freedom as far as one wills suggests the natural freedom to endeavor to do all that one thinks necessary when it comes to preserving one’s own life. However, as we shall see, Fichte treats freedom, rather than self-preservation, as primary, so that preserving one’s own nature for him ultimately means preserving the conditions of free and rational agency. Fichte’s understanding of the relation of right as a matter of the mutual limitation of the infinite right to extend one’s freedom as far as one wills and one has the power to do, can also be compared to what Hobbes has to say concerning the act of renouncing or transferring to another the right to everything that human beings enjoy in the state of nature. Although each individual has the right to everything in a condition of natural liberty, he or she may renounce or transfer this right, or at least parts of it, by agreeing not to hinder another individual in his or her exercise of this same right. One individual does not thereby grant another individual a right that he or she previously lacked. On the contrary, the second individual, like everyone else in the natural condition, originally had

a right to all things. Rather, one "onely standeth out of his way, that he may enjoy his own originall Right, without hindrance from him" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 92). In other words, in this particular case one individual no longer impedes another individual's enjoyment of the right to everything. The idea that this act of partially renouncing the right to everything must be reciprocal in nature is implied by Hobbes's view that all voluntary acts must be explained in terms of some good that one hopes to enjoy (see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 93). Thus the right to all things that each individual enjoys in the natural condition is subject to a process of mutual limitation, whereby each individual gives up the right to everything without, however, renouncing the right to certain other things. In short, I agree to limit my natural freedom and right to everything if you agree to limit your natural freedom and right to everything.

11. Cf. Ives Radrizzani, "Recht und Natur. Das Naturrecht bei Fichte," *Fichte-Studien* 27 (2006): 135–55. Given the primacy of freedom, the claim made in the same article that right is "through and through the instrument and plaything of nature" (154) seems to me to be an overstatement.
12. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, 28.

18

Transcendental Idealism and Theistic Commitment in Fichte

Steven Hoeltzel

What does Fichte's philosophy, especially in writings relating to the "atheism dispute [*Atheismusstreit*]" (1798–1800), actually say about the intellectual basis and philosophical tenability of theistic belief? Fichte found himself at odds with his own audience on exactly this issue,¹ and puzzlement on this point persists to this day. In 1798, he published the chapter "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World." This text's derivation of pre-philosophical religious conviction from ineluctable acts of ideation, coupled with its identification of God with the moral world order, can give the impression (and prompted the objection) that Fichte philosophically accounts for belief in God in a way that proves to be completely corrosive of any genuinely theistic commitment. And his attempts to rebut that objection, especially in Book III of 1800's *The Vocation of Man* (hereafter, "VM III"), depict and defend properly philosophical belief in a supreme being in a way that has perplexed and divided scholars right down to the present, and so seriously as to raise doubts about how well we have understood the essential content of his Jena-era transcendental idealism – from which, according to Fichte himself, *The Vocation of Man* does not radically depart.²

Despite Fichte's declaration that this text contains nothing "which has not already been presented in other writings by the same author" (VM 1 [GA I/6:189]), precisely those other writings make it unclear how a methodologically responsible transcendental idealism could legitimately incorporate metaphysical commitments of the sort that VM III seems to proclaim. This text propounds an outlook organized around "God, the infinite, who is beyond all measure" (VM 112 [GA I/6:297]), in the light of which "only reason is; infinite reason in itself, and finite reason in it and through it" (VM 111 [GA I/6:296]). Compounding the difficulty, Fichte explicitly flags these affirmations, plus some important auxiliaries, as matters of "faith" or "belief" (*Glaube*), by contrast with "knowledge" (*Wissen*) – and with knowledge seemingly consigned to a subordinate position. But what does it mean to flag a given commitment as specifically a matter of "belief," and to grant belief philosophically superlative

standing? These matters, moreover, are all bound up with difficult metaphysical and methodological questions concerning what Fichte's transcendental idealism consists in and can accomplish.

This chapter will argue that for Fichte some very basic and general metaphysical commitments, including certain broadly theistic ones, prove to be backed by transcendental idealism's basic principles and procedures – but in a distinctive way, which gives them a special (and thoroughly rational) status, denoted by their designation as matters of belief (*Glaube*).³ In particular, transcendental idealism secures for said commitments rationally compelling credentials of a type not tied to knowledge *per se* – that is, not narrowly *epistemic* – but still through and through *rational*, and indeed even rationally *unimpeachable*: given Fichte's transcendental idealism, these commitments are (i) concerned with questions that are epistemically intractable, *but also* (ii) bound up with a basic, broadly ethical commitment that is rationally ineluctable. The crux of this account is thus a broadly Kantian notion of *non-epistemic justification*,⁴ according to which certain specific descriptive propositions, comprising various metaphysical commitments, are requisite objects of rational assent, even though (and indeed partly because) they pertain to matters that are epistemically intractable. (Here I am of course adverting to Kant's postulates of pure practical reason, but so as not to overburden this chapter I will not pursue any detailed comparison of Kant's and Fichte's exact modes of argument.)⁵

In what follows I will offer an account of the derivation and justification of theistic commitments in Fichte's philosophy.⁶ This will be nested within a more general rendering of the nature and basis of metaphysical commitment in Fichte, but I will devote special attention to the theological dimension. I will propose that there is a supremely rarefied species of theism that is (i) conceptually provided for by Fichte's first principles; (ii) philosophically allowed for, and critically controlled for, by his metaphilosophy and methodology; and (iii) supplied with superlative rational backing, given the account of rationality that derives from his transcendental explanation of the possibility of experience. Of course, no one chapter is going to settle all of this. Still, by all appearances VM III stakes out a metaphysical position, and I believe that the reading proposed below affords us the best way of rendering it consistent with the transcendental idealism articulated in his earlier texts. That alone should recommend this reading to our attention. But for present purposes I will be satisfied merely to make the case that such a reading merits closer consideration.

Idealism, metaphilosophy, and method

Such a reading diverges from prevailing interpretations in ways that may occasion strenuous objections. For one, it might be urged that I am mistaking Fichte's ontologically noncommittal, broadly transcendental *derivation* of

metaphysical commitments latent in our pre-philosophical outlook, with his own actual, philosophical *adoption* of some such commitments. I will argue that one can plausibly interpret Fichte as making both of these moves, not just the first one. – But then, because I am indeed suggesting that he affirms the existence and efficacy of something other than and ontologically prior to the self-positing subject, some may object that I have foisted onto Fichte some sort of realism alien to his idealism, or abandoned the basic standpoint of his philosophy. I will address such objections in the concluding section, but the better to orient the coming discussion, I will now briefly recount the key claims upon which they are based.

Fichte's philosophy occupies a position marked out by a radical metaphilosophical distinction between the standpoints of philosophy and of ordinary life. We occupy the latter standpoint insofar as we unreflectively affirm that sensible things are objectively real and causally efficacious in relation to our own minds. This is our cognitive default, and we adopt the alternative standpoint of philosophy only if and when we freely step back from our ordinary standpoint, intellectually suspend its ontological commitments, and inquire into the ultimate grounds and overall significance of that whole way of representing reality.⁷ Instead of uncritically judging that the entities on display in experience actually exist and affect us, the philosopher isolates the elements and enabling conditions of such a judgment, models their cooperative coordination, and thereby assembles an account of self-initiated mental accomplishments, transcendently productive of (and thus invisible to) our ordinary standpoint, that together effect an articulated *representation* of the mind's being presented with and affected by something other than itself. On this account, all putatively extra-subjective reality thus "*originates for us* only insofar as *one does not engage in philosophizing*," and "the converse is also true: as soon as one lifts oneself to the level of speculation then *this reality necessarily disappears*, because one has then escaped from the mechanism of thinking" that is transcendently generative of the standpoint of life (EPW 434 [GA III/3, no. 440]).

Fichte's philosophy thus proceeds *idealistically*: it accounts for our experience on a model reflecting the programmatic postulate that "everything which occurs in our mind can be completely explained and comprehended on the basis of the mind itself," and thus without figuring any act or aspect of the mind as a mechanically induced effect of any other entity (EPW 69 [GA I/2:55]). Accordingly, the resulting picture comprises nothing but purposive intelligence – and consequently nothing but *autonomously* purposive intelligence. Idealism thus radically opposes the position that Fichte calls *dogmatism*, which metaphysically credits all mentality to "an efficacious action of the thing in itself" (IWL 20 [GA I/4:196]). The thing in itself, in the sense involved here, is something that ontologically grounds our mentality, but that is not itself an instance or product of purposive mental activity. For the dogmatist, then, the

mind exists “merely as a product of things, i.e., as an accidental feature of the world” (IWL 16 [GA I/4:192]): ultimately, thinking and willing are products or modifications of unconscious entities that exist and operate without purpose. Idealism opposes this account from the ground up: “The intellect cannot be anything passive,” Fichte says, “because, according to the postulate of idealism, it is what is primary and highest and is thus preceded by nothing that could account for its passivity” (IWL 25–26 [GA I/4:199–200]).

In the “Divine Governance” chapter, religious convictions integral to the standpoint of life are viewed from the standpoint of philosophy and accounted for on idealism’s explanatory model. Yet VM III seems to state plainly that Fichte’s philosophy itself comprises commitments of a specifically theistic sort. In the following sections, I will flesh out what such commitments could consist in. At this stage, though, it may be difficult to see how they could be consistent with the above principles and strictures. How could Fichte affirm the existence and efficacy of anything ontologically prior to the self-positing subject, without abrogating his idealism, perhaps even lapsing into dogmatism? Indeed, how could his system make any claims about anything extrinsic to subjectivity, without stumbling back into the standpoint of life? We will return to these questions below.

Evidentialism, practical reason, and belief (1794–1800)

Fichte’s account of reason entails the falsehood of what I will call *evidentialism*. Commonly assumed without argument, and seldom even made explicit, evidentialism asserts that it is rational to accept all and only those propositions for which one possesses *sufficient epistemic grounds*. These would be grounds for assent such that (i) they are reliably indicative of the state of affairs said to obtain by the proposition in question, (ii) they would be recognized to be thus indicative by any similarly situated rational inquirer, and (iii) they provide sufficiently strong indications of the proposition’s truth to license confident assent.⁸ Recognizing Fichte’s rejection of evidentialism may eliminate one obstacle to ascribing metaphysical commitments to his philosophy: the common conviction that such commitments are automatically illicit for any properly critical, transcendental idealism may itself reflect an implicit and uncritical evidentialism, in which case it simply begs the question on one basic issue in play.

In any case, in order to understand aright what is being argued in *The Vocation of Man*, we need to give careful consideration to the notion of *non-epistemically* justified belief around which that work is organized and upon which VM III especially is based. This notion is not a late innovation, let alone an *ad hoc* expedient, in the context of Fichte’s philosophy. In fact, it is on display in the first published presentation of this philosophy’s core principles, the 1794 “Review

of *Aenesidemus*." Here – and again in "Divine Governance" and VM III – Fichte foregrounds the close connections between (i) the systematically central claims of his transcendental idealism, (ii) the practicality of pure reason, (iii) a certain very rarefied concept of divinity, and (iv) a mode of belief – and in particular of "belief in God" – that, while epistemically unfounded, nonetheless possesses "certainty which infinitely transcends that objective certainty" that epistemic warrants could confer (EPW 76 [GA I/2:65]).

Fichte's first principles, which this early text only adumbrates, are designed to delineate the transcendently most elementary acts of the mind, which, on Fichte's account, interrelate in such a way as to support a radical rethinking of the nature of reason.⁹ This, too, is only sketched in 1794, but over time it emerges that, for Fichte, reason is the capacity to originate content and effect ideal ordering, and that in the *finite* rational being, this capacity is continually confronted and qualified by unchosen, arational givens: sensible phenomena and affective incitements to agency, not authored through reason's own activity, that cloud its transparency and contest its authority.¹⁰ Thus, finite rational activity always takes a specific form: autonomous origination and instatement of non-sensory notions and norms, by which experience is organized and agency oriented. Furthermore, the finite rational being always (and in the transcendental background, not as an element of its empirical psychology) posits rational activity, *qua* simply rational – that is, in the freedom and purity proper to it prior to entanglement with the empirical – as absolutely essential to its own being, *qua* rational, and thus as *unconditionally normative for its own being, qua finitely rational*. In other words, rational activity, finding itself encumbered with empirical givens, figures its own felt finitude as a contingent condition that its own essential nature appoints it to overcome. Accordingly, "a striving is engendered" (EPW 75 [GA I/2:65]): finite rational activity is ineluctably oriented toward, and occurs only as approximation to, a rationally legislated ideal of *unconditioned* rational activity. This, Fichte says, "is what it means to say that *reason is practical*" (EPW 75 [GA I/2:65]). Finite rationality has its own non-arbitrary, ultimate end – unconditioned rational activity – and this is a broadly ethical end, insofar as it involves self-actualization in a broad sense, comprising efficacious autonomous volition, and not only (or primarily) more narrowly epistemic endeavor (belief-formation, theory-construction, etc.).

Fichte maintains, moreover, that "these are the first principles which must underlie Kant's own expositions (granted that he never establishes them specifically)" (EPW 75 [GA I/2:65]). This echoes an earlier allegation that Kant fails to prove "that reason is practical" (GR 305 [GA I/2:28]). As Fichte understands it, Kant's doctrine of the "fact of pure reason" reports on the manifest content of experiences of putative obligation, but no such empirical fact entails, nor does Kant otherwise transcendently secure, the conclusion that rationality

as such has a broadly ethical final goal. Fichte's subsequent work seeks to remedy this defect, principally via an argument, first detailed in the 1794–95 *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, that the practicality of pure reason is a necessary condition of the possibility of experience, insofar as experience involves the ascription of sensed qualities to putatively mind-independent objects: "without a striving, no object at all is possible" (WL 233 [GA I/2:399]). Suppose that the finite rational being, presented with sensory givens, were content, so to say, simply to *register* the presence to it of data not autonomously authored by it. In other words, suppose that it were *not* enjoined by its own rationality to incrementally approximate to the optimum of unlimited understanding and uncontested authority, in this instance by assigning this intellectually unbidden qualitative manifestation to its proper place in an abstract order, the pure principles of which reason itself originates *a priori*. In that case, this being would not credit these qualia to anything outside of and acting upon its own consciousness.¹¹ It is therefore, Fichte argues, a necessary condition for the possibility of experience that the I exist precisely as "a striving" – that is, that all finite rationality is superintended by, and in its activity approximates to, the self-legislated ideal of untrammelled rational activity.

For Fichte, both rational comprehension and right orientation involve the origination of non-sensory notions and their order-inducing integration with given arational data. Thus, each achieves an increment of the indicated approximation, by (re)instating, at least to some degree, reason's insight into and authority over existence, which empirical givens continually cloud and contest. Still, *qua* finite, the rational being can never complete this approximation or coincide with its orienting optimum: "man must approximate, *ad infinitum*, to a freedom he can never, in principle, attain" (WL 115 [GA I/2:277]). To complete this project would require that the mind transcend its own finitude: that it cease to find its power of origination and orientation confronted and qualified by arational data. This, however, would entail its ceasing to experience itself as a particular individual, in whom reason's pure activity is pinned to an empirically individuated perspective. Indeed, this would mean its ceasing to undergo anything recognizable as experience at all. Such a being "has ceased to be an individual, which it was only because of the limitations of sensibility," and thus "has actually become rational through and through, and is nothing but rational" (IWL 100 [GA I/4:266]). All that remains, at this no-longer-finite, supra-individual, ideal limit, is pure rational activity which, as such and autonomously, constitutes whatever there is and ordains what there ought to be. Thus, "the complete annihilation of the individual and the fusion of the latter into the absolutely pure form of reason or into God is indeed the ultimate goal of finite reason" (SE 143 [GA I/5:142]).¹²

Fichte repeatedly depicts this ideal in theological terms. In the *Aenesidemus* review, for example, he describes it as the idea of “an I which, in determining itself, determines all that is not-I (the idea of divinity)” (EPW 76 [GA I/2:65]). Such depictions seem apt, insofar as philosophical theology commonly casts the supreme being as an autonomously purposive, absolutely efficacious intelligence that originates all phenomena and appoints them to their ends. But this is not to say that the transcendental argument outlined above is supposed to supply evidence for the objective reality of anything answering to that description. Instead, the upshot of that argument is that divinity, in the sense just specified, is a regulative ideal: “it is only something to which we ought to draw infinitely nearer” (IWL 101 [GA I/4:266]). As the ideal limit of the progression that is the finite rational being’s ultimate task, it is “the final goal of this striving” (EPW 76 [GA I/2:65]) – the absolute optimum to which all finite rational activity incrementally approximates.

The first principles of Fichte’s transcendental idealism thus unfold into and incorporate the idea of a mode of being aptly designated as divinity: autonomously purposive, efficacious intelligence in its absolutely unconditioned form; not pinned to any particular, empirically individuated perspective on things, but autonomously originative of whatever is and determinative of what ought to be. (Thus, transcendental theology, which traces the pure idea of a supreme being back to certain elementary operations of reason, is articulated at a transcendently much more basic level in Fichte than in Kant.)¹³ Unknown and unattainable by any finite rational being, divinity nonetheless must be normative for any such being: per the transcendental argument outlined above, experience eventuates only on the condition that this ideal is authored and approximated to (commitment to it autonomously adopted and enacted) in the transcendental background.

This, however, does not exhaust Fichte’s treatment of God and godhood in the *Aenesidemus* review. For even as he underscores this concept’s epistemic vacuity and merely regulative role, he links practical reason’s ineluctable striving with a species of belief in God that has “a certainty which infinitely transcends that objective certainty” obtainable on epistemic grounds (EPW 76 [GA I/2:65]). To deem this belief rationally insupportable just because it is *epistemically* unsupported, he continues, would be to posit a philosophical need for “an objective proof of the existence of God” – and this would betoken a “complete misunderstanding of the basis of moral belief,” and even a “deficient grasp of the true difference between theoretical and practical philosophy” (EPW 74–76 [GA I/2:63–66]).

His initial presentation of all this is rather obscure, but by way of beginning to decipher it, we should consider the context. Fichte’s conception of practical reason (as outlined above) and the affiliated ideas of belief and certainty (to be fleshed out below) are first proclaimed in the course of, and indeed in support

of, a defense of Kant's moral theology. The dispute concerns the defensibility of some of Kant's main metaphysical commitments, and it hinges on whether "the recognition of a command can provide the basis for the conviction that the conditions for its fulfillment actually do exist" – as Kant's moral theology indeed requires (EPW 75 [GA I/2:64]). To spotlight the central question here, let us imagine that one finds oneself to be non-arbitrarily, authoritatively appointed to bring about *e*, and that one also judges, justifiably, that this cannot actually be accomplished unless *x* exists. The question now is this: is one rationally justified, on just those grounds – and thus absent any *evidence* bearing on the question whether *x* exists – in assenting to the proposition "*x* exists"? Note that this is implicitly a question about the nature of rational justification as such: the answer we offer will reflect the concept or criterion of rationality with which we are operating. The evidentialist will immediately answer in the negative. But if we reject evidentialism, as Kant and Fichte both do, then a negative answer is not necessarily indicated. The dispute over Kant's moral theology thus masks a more fundamental controversy concerning what rationality itself consists in and requires of us – why and how reason, simply *qua* reason, privileges or prioritizes some commitments but not others.

I say "commitments" advisedly, because our term "belief" can have connotations that ill accord with the operative concept of *Glaube*. It is Kant's contention, which Fichte develops and defends, that rationality as such has its own non-arbitrary ends, some of which are both (i) ethical as opposed to epistemic, and (ii) *no less normative or authoritative* than are any narrowly epistemic ends. Accordingly (and subject to certain conditions), there can be properly rational cognitive commitments that are entrained by the adoption of some such broadly ethical ends, and that thus do not depend for their rationality solely upon considerations of the kind that constitute evidence-based justification or proof. Commitments of this special sort are designated by Fichte as matters of belief, but it may be more apt for us to think in terms of *assent* or *commitment*. Such commitments are constituted via principled assent, on distinctly non-epistemic grounds, to descriptive propositions pertaining to epistemically intractable metaphysical questions; consequently, they will have a phenomenology very different from that of garden-variety beliefs about pre-philosophical matters of fact.¹⁴

Here is another important qualification:

This belief should not be represented as, so to speak, an arbitrary assumption one may adopt or not adopt as one pleases, that is, as a free decision to consider true whatever the heart wishes and to do so because this is what it wishes. Nor should this belief be represented as a hope that supplements or takes the place of sufficient (or insufficient?) grounds of conviction. What is grounded in reason is purely and simply necessary. (IWL 144 [GA I/5:348])

The special standing claimed for belief – a species of superlative certainty, somehow independent of evidence – is accorded only to beliefs that are “grounded in reason” in that they are ineluctably entrained by commitments that are unconditionally authoritative for any finite rational being. Thus it is the basic nature and operations of *reason*, not any moralistic pathos or arational voluntarism, that ground whatever specific commitments do the justificatory work here, and said commitments do such work *just insofar as* the rational being, *qua* rational, cannot refrain from adopting or enacting them. Moreover, the only assents that can be *ineluctably* entrained by the adoption of such commitments will be assents to propositions that are epistemically indefeasible. No assent that countervailing evidence could eventually overturn can claim this special sort of certainty. (I take it that this is why Fichte accords belief in God “a certainty which infinitely transcends that objective certainty” that apposite evidence can underwrite [EPW 76 (GA I/2:65)].) Accordingly, any belief possessing such certainty must pertain to an issue that is epistemically intractable. Fichte therefore describes such beliefs as “*not at all* capable of proof, not at all capable of being mediated by other truths or proved on the basis of other truths” (JD 180 [GA I/6:53]) – given that proofs and truths rest upon epistemic grounds. And the commitments advanced under the banner of “belief” in VM III all concern metaphysical questions which, given Fichte’s transcendental idealism, we cannot but regard as epistemically intractable.

Let us now condense some of these considerations into rough argument form. It is not my concern here to evaluate this type of argument, or the instances sketched in subsequent sections; I simply want to limn the logic of Fichte’s position. So, premise one: Given transcendental idealism, any finite rational being, *qua* rational, is unconditionally committed to end *e*. Two: commitment to end *e* can be coherently sustained only if descriptive proposition *p* is assented to. Three: given transcendental idealism, *p* pertains to an issue that is epistemically intractable. Conclusion: given transcendental idealism, any finite rational being possesses unshakeable rational grounds for belief that *p* – that is, for principled assent, on a broadly ethical basis, to a particular position on some epistemically intractable question. This assent sustains a commitment that is integral to rationality as such, and it does so by assenting to a proposition that no evidence could ever discredit. Thus its rational grounds, although non-epistemic, are unimpeachable and irrevocable. In just that sense and to just that extent, the belief that *p* is “certain”: it is indissolubly integral to the properly rational, philosophically ratified outlook on existence.¹⁵

Concerning the rationally mandated commitments that confer this sort of certainty upon some beliefs, Fichte further argues – and circa the atheism dispute, he argues this repeatedly – that, precisely in and through the conferral of such certainty, said commitments secure the sole “firm standpoint” from

which to understand existence. Referring to the normativity of reason's self-legislated ultimate end (and mostly speaking with the vulgar), he says,

I claim that this is something I cannot doubt; indeed, I maintain that I cannot even entertain the possibility that it is not so....At this point, therefore, my reason is quite unable to take me any further; I have reached the limit of all interpretation and explanation....because I cannot *will* to go any further. Here lies that which sets a limit to the otherwise unbridled flight of argumentation, that which binds the mind because it binds the heart. (IWL 147 [GA I/5:351])

Owing to its popular phrasing, this and many kindred passages can sound like mere odes to moralistic obstinacy. But the real point of such passages, I propose, concerns the proper relations, in the light of Fichte's transcendental idealism, between the broadly ethical ideal of untrammelled rational activity that is the final goal of finite reason, and the narrowly epistemic norms of evidence-based justification. The precise point in this case is that anyone who *entertains or insinuates doubts about the former, in service to the latter*, "totally misunderstands the original progression of reason" (IWL 149 [GA I/5:352]). On Fichte's account of reason, the *normativity* of narrowly epistemic norms derives from the normativity of untrammelled rational activity: adherence to norms of the former sort is rationally mandated *because* this is one way in which to approximate to the latter ideal – a task to which the finite rational being is unconditionally appointed by its own basic nature. (Another avenue of approximation: agency adhering to narrowly ethical norms, such as the imperative of unconditional respect for autonomy.)

Consequently, doubts that might be raised about the assents entrained by finite reason's final goal prove to be epistemically respectable but rationally wrongheaded. Such doubts can be pressed in two basic ways. First, one might proffer epistemically driven doubts as to the tenability of these beliefs themselves. To take Fichte's own original example of "belief," suppose that we have no clear evidence for or against God's existence. In that case, the doubter urges, the rational thing to do is to suspend judgment on the question. But that conclusion follows only if evidentialism is assumed, and as we have seen, on Fichte's account of reason evidentialism is false: narrowly epistemic norms do not outrank the more comprehensively and robustly rational ideal that supplies finite reason's final goal, and commitment to the latter entrains a specific, non-epistemically justified belief pertaining to this (supposedly) epistemically intractable issue.

Similar considerations will obviate a second sort of doubt which, based on the *epistemic* infirmity of some such belief, proceeds to question the normativity of the ideal postulated by Fichte as finite reason's final goal. Suppose, for

example, that we could never be in a position to know whether God actually exists. In that case, if we further suppose that “ought” implies “can,” and that coherent commitment to the ideal of untrammelled rational activity depends (as Fichte claims) upon belief in God, then we have grounds for doubting that we are actually called upon always to approximate to that alleged ideal (by always adhering to epistemic and moral norms, etc.). Once again, though, these doubts implicitly assume evidentialism: only if all *rational* commitment must be *epistemically warranted* commitment does the rationality of commitment to the normativity of untrammelled rational activity presuppose the possession of evidence that the conditions requisite for the actualization of that ideal obtain. And for the reasons recounted above, Fichte explicitly rejects that assumption.

A rationally ineluctable ultimate commitment thus secures a rationally unassailable overall outlook:

There is no firm standpoint except the one just indicated, and it is based not upon logic, but upon one’s moral disposition or sentiment; and so long as our argument either fails to progress to this point or else proceeds beyond it, we remain upon a boundless ocean where every wave is propelled forward by yet another. (IWL 148 [GA I/5:352])

This standpoint is uniquely “firm” in that the beliefs that constitute it concern epistemically intractable issues *and* have unshakeable foundations in non-epistemic operations of reason, such that to gainsay these beliefs, doubt them, or even suspend judgment on them, is *irrationally* to ascribe unqualified authority to narrowly epistemic norms. Given Fichte’s account of reason, there is a very special area of inquiry (concerning epistemically intractable questions bound up with assent to rationally necessary ends) in which one is rationally required to desist from raising epistemically driven doubts. Were this not the case, were skepticism and evidentialism entitled to press their claims *ad infinitum*, unchecked by rational considerations of any other kind, then the demand for epistemic warrants could be legitimately renewed without limit – in wave after wave, so to say, of commitment-corroding questioning. But on Fichte’s account that is decidedly not the case: assent to certain epistemically questionable beliefs proves to be rationally requisite, dissent from them rationally illicit. The most basic such beliefs constitute a distinctly philosophical outlook on existence: they address metaphysical questions that do not arise within the standpoint of life, and their content is controlled for by the findings of Fichte’s philosophy.

I will expand on this below, but first we should address one other issue. Fichte’s “firm standpoint” derives from the account of reason that issues from his transcendental idealism. But Fichte describes his own initial choice of

idealism over dogmatism as itself an act of faith or belief (SE 31 [GA I/5:43]). Does this render his position circular? That is, does the argument I have interpreted as undertaking to establish that we can be non-epistemically justified in assenting to certain descriptive propositions, ultimately depend upon a prior assumption, at the very basis of Fichte's system, to exactly that effect? Answer: no. Granted, Fichte figures the conflict between idealism and dogmatism as epistemically undecidable at the outset (that is, in advance of the completed construction of theories of both kinds), and this is why he initially opts for the position most accordant with his own ethically charged self-conception. Nevertheless, he does not regard this dispute as epistemically undecidable in the long run, let alone epistemically intractable in principle. Once a thoroughgoing idealism has actually been articulated, he argues, it will prove superior to any possible dogmatism on grounds of simplicity and explanatory power – that is to say, based on epistemic warrants of commonplace kinds. Thus, while the construction of his system begins with a provisional belief, adopted on non-epistemic grounds, the logic of Fichte's fully articulated position does not bottom out in anything of the sort.¹⁶ His completed case against evidentialism therefore does not procedurally beg the question against it.

The derivation of religious conviction (1798)

The "Divine Governance" chapter proffers a derivation, "from the very nature of reason," of a broadly theistic kind of conviction latent in the standpoint of life: "*religion*, as it has dwelt within the hearts of all well-meaning people from the beginning of the world and will continue to dwell there until the end of time" (IWL 166 [GA I/6:377]). One might think that the aim of such a derivation would be to secure solid philosophical justification for this pre-philosophical conviction, but whether this is Fichte's actual goal here is unclear. Indeed, all things considered, this chapter actually seems to philosophically undercut such convictions – but here, too, it is questionable whether this is Fichte's actual intention. The problem (supposing that it is a problem) is that the metaphilosophical and methodological framework into which Fichte here fits the question concerning the grounds of religious conviction seems to lay his philosophy open to the charge of "nihilism," not so much for its supposed failure to found a theistic metaphysics, as for its apparent incapacity (or unwillingness) to acknowledge the existence of *anything at all* other than the freely self-positing subjectivity of the person doing the philosophizing. VM III rebuts this charge, by broadening the philosophical focus of the discussion, so as to encompass not only what we are non-epistemically justified in believing *from the standpoint of life* (the putative topic of "Divine Governance"), but also, and especially, what we are

non-epistemically justified in believing *from the standpoint of Fichte's philosophy*. "Divine Governance" thus falls far short of completely conveying this philosophy's implications concerning matters of metaphysical commitment. Still, some attention to issues raised by this chapter should help clarify the content and rationale of Fichte's fuller position.

The derivation of pre-philosophical religious conviction proceeds roughly thus. (Here, too, I am not concerned to evaluate the argument, but just to articulate its essentials.) The practicality of pure reason at the transcendental level is manifest, within the standpoint of life, as the discovery, via moral experience and agency, that I am "a power elevated above everything sensible," a power that "possesses a goal of its own" (IWL 147 [GA I/5:351]). My own rationality gives me an overarching purpose (unsullied volition, pure intellection) that does not derive from any passively registered, merely sensory or affective incitements, but that is actively self-wrought and permanently set up as preeminently choiceworthy. And inasmuch as I dedicate my life to that goal, "I at the same time posit that it is possible to accomplish this goal through real acting" (IWL 148 [GA I/5:352]): I assume that what is most important really can be actualized via my own agency. Experience teaches, however, that my agency depends for all its actual effects on a natural mechanism, the ordering principles of which are heedless of human purposes. Thus, given that, *qua* rational, I cannot renounce my vocation, I likewise cannot but believe that there exists a "higher law," thanks to which "an ethical act infallibly succeeds" (IWL 149 [GA I/5:353]). That is to say, I am entitled to regard my existence as irreducible to my merely sensible situation in the physical world. I must also inhabit some sort of hyperphysical (supersensible) order, superintended by something that assures that my own appropriately oriented volition counts toward or contributes to something of ultimate value – accomplishes its essential goal, even if in the sensible world my best intentions appear to come to naught. Thus, "it is absolutely necessary and is the essential element in religion that the man who affirms the dignity of his reason relies on the belief in this moral world order (this supersensible, divine realm that is infinitely superior to all that is transitory)" (AP 103 [GA I/5:428]).

So far this seems fairly innocuous, although we might wonder what it really has to do with unreconstructed religious belief.¹⁷ And the more so as, notoriously, Fichte proceeds to *identify* God with this moral world order (IWL 151 [GA I/5:354]), and then to deny that the entity in question possesses personality or consciousness. By now, however, it should be clear to us why Fichte would unabashedly issue the latter denial – and once we recollect the reasons for this, we should also see that the former equation, considered on its own, is a far cry from outright atheism. As we have seen, Fichte figures divinity on the model of infinite or absolute reason. Reason is the capacity to originate content and effect ideal ordering, and this activity is pinned to a particular perspective or tied to

some concrete personality *only if it is finite*, that is, confronted and qualified by unchosen arational givens: “you simply do not and cannot think of personality and consciousness apart from limitation and finitude” (IWL 152 [GA I/5:355]). Rational activity not constrained by those conditions constitutes what is and ordains what ought to be. But note that with this idea we are quite close to “the concept of an *intelligible moral order*, in its philosophical purity, simplicity, and precision” (IWL 175 [GA I/6:388]). The concepts’ kinship may be clearer once we note that by “order” Fichte expressly means “nothing but an *active ordering (ordo ordinans)*” – not any passively preexistent arrangement (IWL 161 [GA I/6:373]). This ordering, moreover, is not posited as something effected via the moral volition of finite rational beings alone. Rather, it is something that all such volition tacitly counts on, as that which assures that such volition counts for and contributes to something of real value, regardless of its uncertain, mechanically determined impact on the empirically evident world (IWL 171–72 [GA I/6:382–83]). Thus this ordering, although itself without personality, is posited as providential in relation to the projective personhood of each finite rational being.

Still, even if we are willing to count this perspective as a very rarefied kind of theism, there remains a problem as to its philosophical standing. Does Fichte’s *explanation* of it provide any genuine *justification* for it? Indeed, could it, or should it? Fichte says that his “sole concern is to answer the causal question, ‘How does a human being arrive at this belief?’” (IWL 144 [GA I/5:348]). His answer, however, invokes “the necessary manner in which every rational being must operate” (IWL 143 [GA I/5:348]), and casts the resulting commitment as “the ground of all other certainty and the sole absolutely valid objective [truth]” (IWL 152 [GA I/5:356]). Those look like claims to solid justification. How then are we to fit all this together?

To begin with, recall that the *explanandum* here is a commitment integral to the standpoint of life. Fichte figures it incredibly abstractly, but it is nevertheless supposed to inhere in our pre-philosophical outlook “without any help whatsoever from the philosopher” (IWL 143 [GA I/5:348]). And as I hope my rough rendering makes plain, Fichte’s derivation of this commitment fits the basic pattern of an argument to non-epistemic justification: it cites a rationally inescapable end, and argues that coherent commitment to that end requires assent to some descriptive proposition concerning an issue that is epistemically intractable (as questions about the supersensible would seem to be, if entertained from the standpoint of life). So, *from the philosophically unreflective standpoint*, a certain sort of very broadly theistic commitment proves to be unimpeachably rational – at least supposing that from that standpoint certain evaluative commitments manifest themselves as categorically mandated by reason. Fichte’s answer to the “causal question” concerning pre-philosophical religious conviction thus supplies the latter with at least some degree of

rational vindication – of a quite unusual kind, to be sure, but vindication all the same.

Still, if the question of its justification is raised from *the standpoint of Fichte's philosophy*, then the matter assumes a very different aspect. For from that *philosophical* standpoint, the standpoint of life *as such* is bracketed in its entirety, the ontological commitments that constitute it are suspended, and the whole of its contents are accounted for in terms of nothing but states and activities of a self-contained subjectivity: “from the transcendental standpoint. ... there is no world that subsists on its own. Wherever we look, we see nothing but the reflection of our own inner activity” (IWL 145 [GA I/5:349]). In that case, it seems, Fichte philosophically reduces God to a purely notional posit integral to this subjectivity's self-wrought image of its own sublime vocation – and, not content to stop there, finally reduces *all* putatively real beings to posits of a freely self-positing subjectivity. It is thus no wonder that he was charged with “nihilism.” The crux of this charge, pressed by F. H. Jacobi, is that Fichte's philosophy downgrades all objects of experience into “appearances of nothing,”¹⁸ such that all of one's thinking and willing must ultimately be understood to proceed “*from nothing, to nothing, for nothing, into nothing.*”¹⁹ The *Wissenschaftslehre* so immoderately exalts self-enacting, autonomously unfolding cognition and volition, that *nothing* remains visible, from this system's standpoint, which cognition or volition could meaningfully reflect or affect.

The defense of theistic commitment (1800)

But is the charge of nihilism even legitimate? And if so, is Fichte actually guilty? The charge is illegitimate if it uncritically assumes something that Fichte's philosophy rejects on good grounds. By that standard, it is tempting to deem it obviously illegitimate, in that it faults Fichte for failing to maintain metaphysical commitments (to a real world and a transcendent God, especially) which his philosophy exists precisely to methodologically suspend and transcendently explain.²⁰ Fichte himself initially mounted essentially this defense, stressing his longstanding radical separation of the standpoints of philosophy and of life. Jacobi has a profound grasp of the nature of philosophical speculation, Fichte says, but deplors it because he cannot shake off a “fanaticism of *real life*” that clings to the by-default outlook which speculation brackets and explains (EPW 429 [GA III/3, no. 440]). If that is all there is to it, then Jacobi is simply begging the question. Case dismissed.²¹

Yet Fichte takes a different tack in VM III, working toward a “*further determination and development*” of his system's basic principles, which should eventually manifest their essential affinity with “popular religion” (IWL 176 [GA I/6:388]). The resulting position is anything but pre-philosophical – and is at

least *prima facie* metaphysically committed. To set up the coming discussion, permit me a few pertinent citations:

The most truly human view, which alone is appropriate to him and presents his whole power of thought is the view ... through which the whole sensible world is transformed for him purely into nothingness, into a mere reflection in mortal eyes of the nonsensible, which alone exists. (VM 114–15 [GA I/6:300])

The dead inert mass, which was only the stuffing of space, has disappeared.... (VM 120 [GA I/6:306])

The invisible world ... is a world or a system of a number of individual wills: that union and direct interaction of a number of autonomous and independent wills with each other. (VM 108 [GA I/6:293])

Only reason is; infinite reason in itself, and finite reason in it and through it. Only in our minds does it create a world.... (VM 111 [GA I/6:296])

Now, to statements such as these, one can always affix the qualifier, “*from the ontologically non-committal standpoint of idealistic speculation,*” thereby evacuating them of any apparent metaphysical import. However, we need not finesse the text in that way in order to discern within it a transcendently well-founded position – one involving a very broad and basic metaphysical outlook, intellectually opened up by idealism’s dematerialization of the sensible world, and philosophically filled out by some rationally mandated, non-epistemically justified beliefs. Nor need we understand this metaphysical move to abrogate the project configured by Fichte’s earlier metaphilosophical innovations and methodological stipulations.²² I will address the latter issue below. First, let us consider what the case for these commitments looks like if we focus on their designation as matters of non-epistemically justified belief. *Qua philosophical* beliefs, these would be commitments whose justification derives from, and whose content is controlled for by, (i) the nature of finite reason’s ultimate goal, as Fichte understands it, *and* (ii) the main results of the transcendental explanation of experience, as Fichte constructs it. Accordingly, the most basic of these beliefs are: that there is a real world, transcendent to the states and activities of the I; that this world is essentially mentalistic in makeup (immaterial and intellectual in constitution, teleological in organization); and that it is superintended and sustained by a being aptly described as divine.

The Fichtean philosopher has comprehensively suspended and transcendently explained away the ontological commitments constitutive of the standpoint of life. In the process, she has determined that she can in principle possess no philosophically tenable evidence for (or against) the existence of anything

other than her own subjective states and activities: “with our explanation of consciousness we can never arrive at things that exist independently of us” (AP 99 [GA I/5:423]). But along the way to this discovery she has also determined that, as a finite rational being, her existence is oriented toward a rationally self-legislated final goal: unconditioned rational activity, or absolutely untrammelled effectuality in autonomous thinking and willing. This end, she sees, is the ultimate goal of rational existence as such; thus it is no less normative for her *qua* philosopher than it must be for the purely rational proto-personality that is the principal object of her transcendental reflections.

She consequently possesses unimpeachable rational grounds for belief in the existence of something other than her own mind. (This is not to say that she has good grounds for belief in the reality of the sensible world. To the contrary! But more on this point anon.) So long as she strictly maintains her philosophical standpoint, she has (and can have) no tenable evidence on this metaphysical question. But on Fichte’s account she does have (and always will have) non-epistemic grounds, bound up with the nature of reason as such, that unequivocally support this belief. For only if she assents to this proposition can she understand herself, *qua occupant of the philosophical standpoint*, as able to think and will *with genuine efficacy*, such that her cognition somehow reflects a reality that her volition can somehow affect. And reason, *qua* practical, mandates that she understand herself in this manner, insofar as it unconditionally orients her existence toward such an ultimate goal. Indeed, it would be irrational for her even to suspend judgment on this question. That would either reflect a failure to acknowledge that her own rationality places her under an unconditional requirement that is essentially non-epistemic in nature, or else it would result from a rationally illegitimate subordination of finite reason’s broadly ethical final goal to some derivative, narrowly epistemic norm.

How then shall she further understand this mind-independent order of existence? Could it be a mechanistic material world, meaninglessly superintended by mindless laws, indifferent to rational beings’ existence and ends? Or perhaps an “entire invisible realm of spirits” (VM 94 [GA I/6:280]), immaterial and intellectual in constitution, teleological in configuration? No apposite evidence is available from the standpoint of philosophy: the transcendental idealist’s explanation of experience treats the empirical contents of consciousness as contingent modifications of the mind, modifications the determinate character of which is further inexplicable (IWL 75 [GA I/4:242–43]). Nonetheless, the philosopher has unimpeachable rational grounds for assent to the existence of a strictly immaterial, teleologically ordered world of purposive intelligences (supposing, as Fichte does, that dogmatism supplies the only alternative account). To assent to the dogmatist’s metaphysical model would be to accept that what exists apart from one’s own mind is, in the final analysis, something mindless, meaningless, and mechanically generative of all

of one's subjective states and operations. Thus, only assent to a metaphysics modeled after her own transcendental-idealist account of subjectivity allows the philosopher to understand her own thinking and willing as *self-initiated and genuinely autonomous*. Reason, *qua* practical, mandates that she understand herself in this manner, insofar as it unconditionally orients her existence toward such an ideal. It thus would be irrational for her to come to any other conclusion – or even to suspend judgment on the question.

Nor can this “realm of spirits” be thought of as just any kind of mentalistic world, if commitment to the normativity of finite reason's final goal is to be sustained – and it is here that theistic commitment comes in, albeit in a supremely rarefied form. For if the philosopher is to be assured that her rationally oriented, autonomous activity actually counts toward and contributes to this (supersensible) world's improvement, despite the utter inscrutability of her agency's actual (non-sensible) effects, then she must believe that there exists a rationally purposive superintending of the entire “realm of freedom and rational self-activity” (VM 95 [GA I/6:280]) by which such results are secured. This rationally purposive superintending would be an *ordo ordinans*, constituting the realm of spirits as a “world of reason” (VM 94 [GA I/6:280]) by *purposively* originating finite rational being, *teleologically* eliciting its further free self-articulation, and *actively* sustaining the normative order in and through which rational activity bears positive value apart from whatever causal impact it has. In this way, the *ordo ordinans* ensures that our activity has the deeper sort of efficacy at which practical reason principally aims.

On this picture – for which the philosopher once again has rationally unimpeachable grounds for assent, and concerning which skepticism or suspension of judgment would once again prove irrational – “only reason is; infinite reason in itself, and finite reason in it and through it. Only in our minds does it create a world, or at least that *from* which and *through* which we produce it: the call to duty; and concordant feelings, intuitions, and laws of thought” (VM 111 [GA I/6:296]). That is to say, the empirical contents of consciousness, which *transcendentally* are inexplicable, are now supplied, via non-epistemically justified belief, with a *teleological* explanation that draws upon the assented-to metaphysical perspective. Viewed in this light, they exist in order to elicit our own, self-initiated rational activity – and thus not, *contra* dogmatism, because they are mechanically induced by something in relation to which the mind is purely passive. Accordingly, they symbolize our situation within an order of active, incorporeal being transcendent to our own subjectivity. Although they do not at all correspond to the way the world actually is, they nonetheless are not at all fraudulent as concerns what really counts: our being appointed to freely realize ourselves through impactful and important engagement with a world transcendent to our thinking and willing. To this end, within the properly philosophical scheme of things, all such narrowly epistemic norms as veridicality must defer.

It seems that we have come a very long way from the unreflective standpoint of life. Still, have we not also abandoned the standpoint of Fichte's philosophy, straying onto the terrain of metaphysics? And insofar as this metaphysics depicts the being of the finite rational being as deriving from something other than its own self-positing, does it not abrogate Fichte's idealism? These are important questions, and in the short space remaining I can address them only inadequately and programmatically.

To begin with, we should ask what a duly *idealistic* assertion of the independence of the I really ought to affirm. Must the idealist affirm a *self-sufficiency* thesis, according to which the I is in no sense subject to determination by anything other than itself? Or does it suffice merely to propound an *anti-dogmatic* thesis, according to which nothing in or about the I is the product of a mechanical (ateleological) determination having a mindless basis? Fichte seems to affirm both – and neither is obviously incompatible with the metaphysical beliefs outlined above. The self-sufficiency thesis, considered in context, serves principally to program for the form to be taken by the explanation of experience elaborated from the standpoint of philosophy. It subsequently emerges that said explanation need not countenance anything other than states and activities of the I, and *in that sense and to that extent*, the I is not subject to determination by anything other than itself, so far as the epistemically warranted, transcendental foundations of Fichte's philosophy are concerned. But these foundations do not exhaust that philosophy, which also (I am arguing) involves their metaphysical contextualization by certain non-epistemically justified beliefs. Said supplementation does figure the I as dependent upon something other than itself for its existence and the given contents of its experience – but not in such a way as to contravene the anti-dogmatic thesis.

After all, what is dogmatism? As Fichte depicts it, it is not just any view whose metaphysical commitments outstrip those proper to a solipsistic, subjective idealism or ontologically non-committal proto-phenomenology. Rather, dogmatism is a theory that credits the I's existence and experience to mechanical determinations that have a mindless basis. The metaphysical beliefs discussed above constitute no such theory. Per VM III, the I is brought to exist by means of and for purposes of an absolute or infinite reason that is the ground of all else. And in that case dogmatism is false: reality consists in purposive mental activity all the way down. Moreover, on this account, the given contents of the I's experience, in coping with which it freely posits the sensible and supersensible worlds, are products of a purposive solicitation to free self-actualization, not of causal compulsion by some mindless mechanism. Thus dogmatism is denied, the anti-dogmatic thesis is upheld, and the self-sufficiency thesis, properly understood, is not contravened.

Nor does the formation of beliefs like these clearly violate Fichte's strict separation between the standpoints of philosophy and of life. Manifestly, these

beliefs do not add to or obtrude upon what we unreflectively take to be true from the standpoint of life: the questions these beliefs address do not even arise except for one who has stepped back from that standpoint. That said, these beliefs do provide that standpoint, as such and as a whole, with a kind of comprehensive clarification, as to its ultimate grounds and final significance. But Fichte explicitly allows that philosophy may play that cognitive role: “One can gain knowledge about oneself only insofar as these two different standpoints coexist – that is, only insofar as the standpoint which transcends life exists alongside the standpoint of life itself. ... [O]ne cannot have any knowledge of life without engaging in speculation” (EPW 435 [GA III/3, no. 440]).

Then again, could it be that in forming such beliefs, one objectionably oversteps the boundary between standpoints in a different way, by smuggling ontological commitments into the sphere of pure speculation? According to Fichte, as we have seen, reality obtains “insofar as one does not engage in philosophizing,” and from the standpoint of speculation, “this reality necessarily disappears, because one has then escaped from the mechanism of thinking” (EPW 434 [GA III/3, no. 440]). All things considered, however, I think that such statements are best understood as maintaining merely that a quite specific notion of *being* has no legitimate philosophical application apart from its use in describing how we uncritically take things to “be” from the standpoint of life (that is, when unreflectively in thrall to the aforesaid “mechanism”). “Being” is a technical term for Fichte: it singles out a special ontological category, which he distinguishes from and subordinates to that of *acting*. “Being” connotes inert self-subsistence and impassive persistence requiring no contribution from consciousness; “acting” connotes spontaneous origination and purposive self-actualization. Thus, for example, “a spirit...*is* not; it is not a *thing*, for only a thing *is*” (JD 177 [GA I/6:49]). In order to raise ourselves to the speculative standpoint, we have to suspend our default belief in the *being* of things – but this bracketing is not undone by the metaphysical beliefs in question here, as they do not predicate being (in Fichte’s sense) of the entities they postulate. All that is assented to is acting:

Purely philosophically, one would have to speak of God as follows: He is (the logical copula) not a being but rather a *pure action* (the life and principle of a supersensible world-order), just as I, a finite intelligence, am not a being but rather a pure action, i.e., action in conformity with duty, a *member* of that supersensible world-order. (JD 174 [GA I/6:46])

This outlook’s cognitive baseline and constitutive commitments are thus nowhere near pre-philosophical: no “mechanism of thinking” engenders this perspective, and no uncritical idea of arational “being” is affirmed by it. Moreover, grounds for this philosophical outlook’s adoption are supplied by

precisely the transcendental theory that is basic to the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. For this is a theory by which our pre-philosophical standpoint and its ingredient ontology are not just provisionally bracketed but, ultimately, transcendently discredited – and in a way which renders the associated metaphysical questions epistemically intractable *and* rigorously secures rationally unimpeachable, non-epistemic grounds for related, philosophically indicated assents.

Notes

1. I will elide the historical details of the atheism dispute here. For a detailed treatment, see Yolanda Estes, “Commentator’s Introduction: J. G. Fichte, *Atheismusstreit*, *Wissenschaftslehre*, and *Religionslehre*,” in *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, trans. Curtis Bowman, ed. Yolanda Estes (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010), 1–16.
2. For an overview of this text’s conflicted recent reception, see Daniel Breazeale, introduction to *Fichte’s Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 1–17.
3. The German term *Glaube* can be rendered as “belief” or as “faith.” I will exclusively use “belief,” so as to foreground the principally epistemological content of the concept as Fichte employs it. While *Glaube*, in Fichte, sometimes has content of the sort we associate with religious faith, it always has a special epistemological standing.
4. In this connection I am particularly indebted to Andrew Chignell, “Belief in Kant,” *Philosophical Review* 116, no. 3 (2007): 323–60.
5. For more on this connection, see Steven Hoeltzel, “Non-Epistemic Justification and Practical Postulation in Fichte,” in *Fichte and Transcendental Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).
6. I will be speaking specifically of the philosophy of the Jena era (1794–1801). Fichte’s later work is more markedly metaphysical in tone and replete with religious references. For an overview focused on his theory of religion, see Yolanda Estes, “After Jena: Fichte’s *Religionslehre*,” in *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte’s Later Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 99–114.
7. For further discussion, see Daniel Breazeale, “The ‘Standpoint of Life’ and the ‘Standpoint of Philosophy’ in the Context of the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *Transzendentalphilosophie als System: Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen 1794 und 1806*, ed. Albert Mues (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989), 81–104.
8. This formulation is indebted to Chignell, “Belief in Kant,” 326–27.
9. For more on Fichte’s first principles and the associated account of reason, see Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Günter Zöller, *Fichte’s Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
10. See Matthew C. Altman and Cynthia D. Coe, *The Fractured Self in Freud and German Philosophy* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27–52.
11. For further discussion, see Wayne M. Martin, “‘Without a Striving, No Object is Possible’: Fichte’s Striving Doctrine and the Primacy of Practice,” in *New Perspectives*

- on Fichte, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Prometheus Books, 1996), 19–33.
12. For more on these issues, see Steven Hoeltzel, "Finite and Absolute Reason in (and beyond) Fichte's *System of Ethics*," *Philosophy Today* 52, nos. 3–4 (fall–winter 2008): 259–69.
 13. For more on transcendental theology in Fichte, see Benjamin D. Crowe, "Fichte's Transcendental Theology," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92, no. 1 (Jan. 2010): 68–88.
 14. For more on the differences between what we standardly think of as "belief" and what I am here calling "assent," see Chignell, "Belief in Kant."
 15. For more on Fichte's notion of certainty, see Günter Zöller, "'Das Element aller Gewissheit.' Jacobi, Kant, und Fichte über den Glauben," *Fichte-Studien* 14 (1998): 21–41.
 16. For further discussion, see Daniel Breazeale, "How to Make an Idealist: Fichte's 'Refutation of Dogmatism' and the Problem of the Starting Point of the *Wissenschaftslehre*," *Philosophical Forum* 19, nos. 2–3 (winter–spring 1987–88): 97–123.
 17. On this vexed question, see Benjamin D. Crowe, "Revisionism and Religion in Fichte's *Jena Wissenschaftslehre*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (May 2008): 371–92.
 18. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"*, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 514. German edition: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Werke*, 6 vols., ed. Friedrich Roth and Friedrich Köppen (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1812–25. Reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), 3:33.
 19. Jacobi, *Philosophical Writings*, 50 (*Werke*, 3:22).
 20. For a reading along these lines, according to which Fichte's position thus "can be neither theistic nor atheistic," see Wayne M. Martin, "Transcendental Philosophy and Atheism," *European Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (April 2007): 122.
 21. Such a rebuttal is clearly ill-suited to the court of public opinion – in which case, perhaps *The Vocation of Man* serves to rhetorically drape an ontologically unencumbered idealism in metaphysically respectable guise. For a detailed reading to this effect, see Ives Radrizzani, "The Place of *The Vocation of Man* in Fichte's work," in *New Essays on Fichte's Later Jena Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 317–44.
 22. VM III is often read as a radical reversal of Fichte's prior position. For a detailed example of that sort of interpretation, see Martial Guérout, "La destination de l'homme," in *Études sur Fichte* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974), 72–96.

Part IV

German Romanticism

The conception of the idea of poetry as that of prose determines the whole Romantic philosophy of art. And it is this determination that has made the Romantic philosophy of art so historically rich in consequences. Not only did it spread with the spirit of modern criticism, without being “agnosticized” in its presuppositions or essence, but it also entered, in more or less clearly marked form, into the philosophical foundations of later schools of art, such as French Romanticism (which succeeded it) and German Neo-Romanticism. Above all, however, this fundamental philosophical conception founds a peculiar relation within a wider Romantic circle, whose common element, like that of the narrower [Romantic] school, remains undiscoverable so long as it is sought only in poetry and not in philosophy as well.

— Walter Benjamin, “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism” (1920)¹

Hölderlin is too genuine a poet, he always echoes the momentary and concrete occasion of his experience, he has no need therefore to rehearse constantly in abstract terms the ultimate bases of the individual experience he expresses.

— Georg Lukács, “Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*” (1934)²

¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism,” trans. David Lachterman, Howard Eiland, and Ian Balfour, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2004), 175.

² Georg Lukács, “Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*,” in *Goethe and His Age*, trans. Robert Anchor (London: Merlin, 1969), 146.

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The Aesthetic Philosophy of Early German Romanticism and Its Early German Idealist Roots

Elizabeth Millán

German Idealism is notoriously difficult to define: Is it a cultural movement, or a dedication to a certain set of philosophical positions? Should it be considered in terms of chronology and geography? Should it be defined by the unfavorable gaze of its detractors, and thereby, at least if we follow G. E. Moore, overcome? Is it a movement that begins, say, with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), includes Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* (1794) and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), and then ushers in the work of figures such as Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860)?¹ The other articles in this collection shed light on the looming issue of what German Idealism is, so I can leave this particular quixotic chase to others. I will assume for the sake of my story that German Idealism was, at the very least, shaped by a set of critical responses to Kant's work, responses that preserved Kant's view of system and the unity of reason, yet sought to overcome some of the troubling dualisms left in the wake of his critical work (in particular the one between intellect and sense).² While not all post-Kantian paths led to Hegel, Hegel, dubbed by Rüdiger Bubner as "the absolute professor of Berlin,"³ was certainly a central figure of German Idealism. In what follows, a contrast between Hegel's philosophical convictions and those of Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) will be marked in order to clarify some of the differences between German Idealism and another recalcitrant (at least in terms of its definition) movement, early German Romanticism.⁴

In what follows I will be interested in the philosophical dimensions of early German Romanticism, a movement that flourished in two cities, Berlin and Jena, between the years of 1794 and 1808. The leading figures of the early German Romantic Movement were the Schlegel brothers (Friedrich and August Wilhelm), Caroline (née Böhmer) Schlegel Schelling, Dorothea

(née Mendelssohn) Veit Schlegel, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Ludwig and Sophie Tieck, and Wilhelm Wackenroder. Early German Romanticism began to break apart soon after the events that drove its formation, events which included the French Revolution (1789) and the publication of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) and of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795–96). Early German Romanticism was a short-lived period of innovative thought (in part, unfortunately, due to the short lives of some of its members: Wackenroder died in 1798, Novalis in 1801). After having been active in Jena and Berlin, in 1802, Friedrich and Dorothea Schlegel left for Paris.⁵ Theodor Ziolkowski has located the heart of an already brief intellectual movement in one year, 1794–95, which he calls the *Wunderjahr* of early German Romanticism.⁶

A rather important event for *Frühromantik* did occur a few years after the *Wunderjahr*: in 1798, Friedrich Schlegel and his brother founded *Das Athenäum*, a journal dedicated to pushing the borders between philosophy and poetry and of pushing its readers' hermeneutical limits. The journal, like so many aspects of early German Romanticism, was also short-lived, published only between 1798 and 1800. The journal was a reaction against the conservative mood of some of the other journals of the period. As Schlegel put it, the journal would welcome contributions that were "sublimely impudent" (displaying *erhabene Frechheit*), that is, all contributions that were "too good" for other journals (KFSÄ 2:xlii).⁷ As we shall see, the "sublime impudence" not only of the journal's entries, but also of some of Schlegel's writings, made it difficult for his work to be properly understood and appreciated.

While in order to set the stage for my story of early German Romanticism's defining characteristics, I am guilty of departing from an assumption regarding what German Idealism is, the argument of my chapter will not be based on mere assumption: I hope to show that the non-system-building ambitions of the early German Romantics freed them to explore art and its relation to philosophy in a way unavailable to the German Idealists of the period, whose hierarchies and systems impeded an appreciation of all that art could offer to philosophy's goals. I shall argue that the early German Romantics put forward a decidedly philosophical project, one that called into question some of the presuppositions of the German Idealists of the period and led to a new conception of philosophy itself: with the early German Romantics, a kind of aesthetic philosophy was born.

I will begin with an account of a rather enigmatic text that, while claimed by the German Idealists, set the stage for many of the theoretical lines that shaped early German Romanticism, lines which set the early German Romantics on a different course than some of their idealist contemporaries. The distinct philosophical path traveled by the early German Romantics (in particular, by Schlegel and Novalis), also gave them a different lens through which to assess

some of the work of their contemporaries. In order to provide more detail of the differences between the early German Romantics and the German Idealists, I will present a brief romantic portrait of Goethe and Schiller and contrast that portrait with the one that emerges from the lens of Hegel. Finally, I will explore the result of the romantic view of philosophy, looking at the particular details of the romantic fusion of poetry and philosophy, and giving an account of the theoretical underpinnings of that fusion.

Hegel's romantic letters versus Schlegel's romantic spirit

The post-Kantian period ushered in many discussions of the spirit versus the letter of a given thinker's philosophy. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* attracted the leading thinkers of the period, and their readings of his work led to pronouncements of a final word on the spirit of its meaning. Kant himself set the stage for the view that philosophy should offer final words. Consider the following passage from the end of the first *Critique*:

Now as far as the observers of a *scientific* method are concerned, they have here the choice of proceeding either *dogmatically* or *skeptically*, but in either case they have the obligation of proceeding *systematically*. ... The *critical* path alone is still open. If the reader has had pleasure and patience in traveling along in my company, then he can now judge, if it pleases him to contribute his part to making this footpath into a highway, whether or not that which many centuries could not accomplish might not be attained even before the end of the present one: namely, to bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge. (A856/B884)

A close kinship between philosophy and science is welcomed by Kant; indeed, it is offered as the way to fully satisfy our hunger for knowledge. Armed with his systematic philosophy, Kant is confident that he has been able to lay down the limits of human knowledge and give a full account of the structure of human reason.

Idealists of the period such as Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling were just the sort of patient readers Kant envisioned for his *Critique*. Yet, they misunderstood Kant's project as a search not for the limits between what can be known and what can be thought, but rather as a search for the absolute first principle of all philosophy.⁸ Kant's *Critique* continues to fascinate readers, and the *Critique of Pure Reason* continues to shape the field of philosophy.⁹ I shall focus on a much less grand text, and one which has not created the same legacy within philosophy. This text was found in Hegel's handwriting, yet attributed to either Hegel, Schelling, or Hölderlin.¹⁰ It presents a case of a letter/spirit tension that I

find valuable for the purposes of exploring a way to mark a distinction between German Idealism and early German Romanticism. If the letters were written by Hegel, the spirit of the piece belongs more properly to a thinker such as Friedrich Schlegel or Novalis.¹¹

The famous and meticulously analyzed text, with the misleading title *The Earliest Program for a System of German Idealism* (1796),¹² does not set out a program for any sort of system of German Idealism at all, but rather in piecemeal fashion calls for a move away from mechanistic models to understand natural and social reality – invoking a new mythology that will join science and art, lawfulness and freedom.¹³ According to the text, “the highest act of reason is an aesthetic act,” and so “the philosopher must possess as much aesthetic power as the poet.”¹⁴ Those individuals lacking in aesthetic sense will remain limited beings, “in the dark when it comes to anything beyond graphs and charts.” In other words, those people who do not know how to handle ideas will be limited to the realm of the measurable, the quantifiable. Those individuals lacking an aesthetic sense are summarily dismissed as philosophers of the letter, unable to handle anything like the spirit of a text or an idea. As we are told, “the philosopher of the spirit is an aesthetic philosopher” and “the people with no aesthetic sense are our philosophers of the letter.”¹⁵

Both the early German Idealists and the early German Romantics stressed the intimate relation between poetry and philosophy and were interested in providing culture with an aesthetic point of orientation. Nonetheless, although *The Earliest Program for a System of German Idealism* emerges from the hand of an early German Idealist, German Idealism could not have developed as it did under the influence of this text. The aesthetic project sketched in the text belongs more properly to the spirit of early German Romanticism, a movement structured by aesthetic sense and concerns. The text is calling for a radical new map of the borders between philosophy, poetry, and science, one that would bring the disciplines into dialogue with each other and eliminate any sense that philosophy is above either science or poetry. Indeed, if any hierarchy is to be in place, it is reserved for the “aesthetic act of reason” to which the author/s make reference as the “highest act of reason.”

Such claims were revolutionary during a period in which Kant presented philosophy as “the *queen* of all sciences” and claimed that the scientific method would lead us to the complete satisfaction of our hunger for knowledge (Aviii). The young German Idealist, Hegel, even if he did write the text, certainly did not, as his thought matured, follow the calls announced in this text. While aesthetics was an area of philosophical interest for Hegel, and while he did make many valuable contributions to aesthetics, his philosophy was certainly *not* itself an aesthetic philosophy. Hegel, in his later work, was no fan of the sort of fusion suggested by the text found in his handwriting, so while the letters may

have been his, the spirit of the piece, as shall become clear, belonged to the early German Romantics, a group for which Hegel had little sympathy.

Schlegel and Hegel on Goethe and Schiller

What better way to begin a reflection upon Hegel's antipathy toward early German Romanticism than with Nietzsche, who never shied away from the most explicit disdain for those of whom he disapproved? Bubner begins his chapter, "Hegel and Goethe" (in *The Innovations of Idealism*), with a reminder from Nietzsche that the German penchant for "ands," whether unifying the classic Weimar couple "Goethe and Schiller" or the odd couple "Schopenhauer and Hartmann," is to be viewed with some reservations.¹⁶ Bubner then playfully ignores Nietzsche's advice and gives us an account of Goethe, the "prince of poets in Weimar," and Hegel, "the absolute professor of philosophy in Berlin." However, Bubner does follow the spirit of Nietzsche's suspicion of "ands" – using "Goethe and Hegel" not to present an account of their unity, but rather to uncover their two fundamentally different conceptions of art. Bubner highlights the "external association of Hegel and Goethe," including Goethe's oversight of the University of Jena while Hegel was a professor there and the shift in the power structure of their relation as Hegel became an esteemed professor in Heidelberg and then in Berlin, so that he no longer depended upon Goethe's approval. In fact, as Hegel grew in philosophical stature, it was his approval that mattered to Goethe. Bubner lingers on Hegel's endorsement of Goethe's *Theory of Colors*, published in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817). As Bubner tells us, Goethe's *Farbenlehre* was "a controversial theory that employed poetic means to champion the immediate qualitative perception of scientific phenomena over against the explanatory procedures of nature's science typically adopted by Newton."¹⁷ Bubner links Hegel's endorsement of Goethe's scientific work to the text found in the young Hegel's handwriting, claiming, "Goethe's general approach [to the *Theory of Colors*] certainly answered to one of the first ambitions of idealist philosophy, already formulated in its early days, namely 'to bestow wings once more upon the physics that advance so slowly and laboriously by means of experiment.'"¹⁸

If the aesthetic liberation of science from the philosophers of the letter was an ambition of early German Idealism and of the young Hegel, it is one whose realization could not be brought about by the more mature Hegel, who gave up the revolutionary spirit of the call to unite philosophy, poetry, and science. Schlegel remained committed to this liberation of science from the "charts and graphs" of the philosophers of the letter, claiming in *Athenäum Fragment* no. 116 that "Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim is not merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and

prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature" (PF 31 [KFSa 2:182]).¹⁹ In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1823, 1826, and 1828–29), Hegel positions art and religion below philosophy. Art and religion are overcome or sublated through philosophy, because philosophy is the only vehicle through which to comprehend the Absolute or the ultimate ground of all Being. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the later work on aesthetics, a hierarchical relation between art and philosophy is established by Hegel. As Bubner indicates, "Art and philosophy belong so intimately together because philosophy clearly expresses what art can only intimate through the sensuous image."²⁰ For Hegel, poetry needs philosophy to make the Absolute comprehensible. In contrast, for the early German Romantics, it is philosophy that needs art in order to articulate the grounds and bounds of reason. Novalis and Schlegel rejected both the self-sufficiency of reason in connection with the problem of uncovering the ultimate origin of Being and the accompanying view that finite human beings could grasp the Absolute. As Schlegel writes, "the unknowability of the Absolute is an identical triviality" (KFSa 18:511, no. 64). The unconditioned is by definition unknowable. There is an opacity to the unity of thought and Being, an opacity that is illuminated once we allow the light of art to shine upon our investigation of the Absolute. The borders that the early German Romantics open between philosophy and poetry are moves to illuminate philosophy as an infinite and sometimes incomprehensible task.

A look at some of the portraits Hegel offers in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* reveals that, while open to the value of poetry and its beauty, he did not place art, religion, or even the natural sciences on equal footing with philosophy: each area of inquiry had its "proper sphere" and those working within each area did best when they stayed within the bounds of their proper spheres (ILA 67 [HW 13:90]). In fact, some of his disdain for the early German Romantics can be traced to their playful disobedience of "proper spheres." Hegel did not much appreciate the *Frechheit* (sublime or not) of Schlegel and his cohort. The traditional duo of Weimar, Schiller and Goethe, were much easier for Hegel to admire than the border-pushing early German Romantics. As we shall see, Hegel even found fault with the "prince of Weimar," when he moved beyond his "proper sphere."

In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel's portrait of Goethe and Schiller is telling of his view not only of art and the beautiful, but also of his view of the relation between art and science. It becomes clear that Hegel has great respect for Schiller; he even claims that Schiller went beyond Kant in understanding the beautiful. As Hegel writes:

Schiller must be credited with the great merit of having broken through the Kantian subjectivity and abstractness of thought, and having dared the

attempt to transcend these limits by intellectually grasping the principles of unity and reconciliation as the truth, and realizing them in art. Schiller, in his aesthetic discussions, did not simply adhere to art and its interest without concerning himself about its relation to philosophy proper, but compared his interest in artistic beauty with the principles of philosophy; and it was only by starting from the latter, and by their help that he penetrated the profounder nature and notion of the beautiful. ... The intentional character of abstract reflection and even the interest of the philosophical idea are noticeable in many of his poems. This has been made a ground of censure against him, especially by way of blaming and depreciating him in comparison with Goethe's agreeable straightforwardness and objectivity. (ILA 67 [HW 13:89])

Important to note in these words of praise for Schiller is Hegel's insistence that it is philosophy that helps Schiller "penetrate" the "profounder nature and notion of the beautiful." For Hegel, art needs philosophy, but philosophy does not need art. Hegel also articulates his discomfort with excessive subjectivity, a theme that will arise again in his critique of irony. As for those guilty of "blaming and depreciating" Schiller, Schlegel would most certainly have been on Hegel's mind.

While Hegel lauded Schiller's contributions to philosophy and literature, Schlegel's reviews of Schiller's work were filled with irony and stinging criticisms.²¹ Indeed, Schlegel's polemic with Schiller made it difficult for him to remain an active and financially supported member of the Jena intellectual community, for Schiller controlled the most important journals in Jena. During his time in Jena, Schlegel had contributed to the Berlin-based journals *Lyceum der schönen Künste* and *Deutschland*, both edited by the Berlin *Aufklärer* C. F. Reichardt. As I mentioned above, early German Romanticism was centered in Jena and Berlin. In 1797, Schlegel left Jena for Berlin. It was in Berlin where Schlegel and his brother founded *Das Athenäum*. Dorothea Veit, Caroline Schlegel, Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and others were contributors to this journal.²² The Schlegels wanted their journal to be open to innovative articles at both the level of form *and* content, a desire for innovation linked to Schlegel's desire to provoke with "sublimely impudent" contributions to the journal.²³

Schlegel was no fan of Schiller's work, although his critique of Schiller did not necessarily go after "the intentional character of abstract reflection" or the "philosophical ideas" of his poetry. Schlegel was offended by Schiller's view of women and his tendency to moralize in his work. For Schlegel, Goethe was the more accomplished of the two poets of Weimar.²⁴ Schlegel was in a more suitable theoretical position than Hegel to appreciate Goethe's contributions to poetry, science, and philosophy. Hegel's view of Goethe was limited by his

view of Goethe's "proper sphere." Hegel's praise of Goethe is tinged with a complaint about his straying from the path of poetry:

At the same epoch the same scientific stimulus withdrew Goethe...from poetry, his proper sphere. Yet just as Schiller immersed himself in the study of the inner depths of the *mind*, so Goethe's idiosyncrasy led him to the *physical* side of art, to external nature, to animal and vegetable organisms, to crystals, to cloud formation, and to colour. (ILA 67 [HW 13:90])

Even if Goethe left his "proper sphere" to investigate the natural sciences, those with more open views of the spheres of knowledge have been able to appreciate Goethe's contributions to science. A recent note of praise was sounded by E. O. Wilson, who in *Consilience* claims that a unified system of knowledge is "the surest means of identifying the still unexplored domains of reality."²⁵ Wilson lauds Goethe for his "noble purpose," namely, "[to couple] the soul of the humanities to the engine of science."²⁶ Years before Wilson, the botanist Agnes Arber was aware of the benefits of overstepping boundaries, describing Goethe as "a great biologist who, in the long run, overstepped the bounds of science."²⁷ In overstepping these bounds, Goethe helped form a richer field from which to contemplate nature.

It should not be a surprise that Goethe's work would draw the attention of one of early German Romanticism's greatest heirs, Walter Benjamin. In his chapter on Goethe's novel, *Elective Affinities*, we find this description of Goethe's contributions to the post-Kantian period: "[A]t the exact moment when Kant's work was completed and a map through the bare woods of reality was sketched, the Goethean quest for the seeds of eternal growth began."²⁸ Benjamin's claim brings an important element of Goethe's work into sharp focus, an element that unified Goethe's poetic and scientific work. Debates linger over the value of the scientific side of Goethe's quest for the "seeds of eternal growth," with some thinkers, following Hegel's lead of questioning Goethe's wanderings beyond his proper sphere of poetry, casting doubt on his work as a scientist, wondering if we would even bother with Goethe's science if it were not for his poetry (Charles Sherrington), joining claims that Goethe's scientific interests were a "real crime against the majesty of his poetic genius" (J. G. Robertson). Others look more favorably upon Goethe's contributions to the natural sciences. Wilhelm Troll, for example, writes, with no risk of understatement, that "in a fully reasoned study of Goethe's morphology" we find the "focal point of his whole mental life."²⁹ One thing is clear: Goethe himself did not consider his work in the natural sciences to be a mere hobby or as whimsical wandering in an area beyond his "proper sphere." For Goethe and for the early German Romantics, a quest for the seeds of eternal growth trumped any concern for strict boundaries between science, poetry, and philosophy. Hegel's

concern with philosophical propriety became an obstacle in his understanding of romantic irony.

Irony and the equality between poetry and philosophy

Hegel was not the only one who failed to understand the work of the early German Romantics. The “sublimely impudent” contributions of *Das Athenäum* proved to be incomprehensible to many readers. The phrase, *Was man nicht versteht hat ein Schlegel geschrieben* (what one does not understand must have been written by a Schlegel), was born of the frustration that readers of the journal had in trying to come to an understanding of the fragments and essays printed in its pages. A particular literary device that caused many hermeneutical hurdles was the use of irony.

Schlegel claims that Socratic irony “contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” (KFSa 2:160). Frederick Beiser has recently made a case for reading the early German Romantics as idealists of a Platonic bent, but I remain unconvinced by those arguments, preferring to emphasize (with Manfred Frank) the realism of the early German Romantics.³⁰ There is undoubtedly a Platonic legacy to be found in the work of the early German Romantics, but I believe that the best case for this Platonic legacy can be located in what Beiser so well describes as “the ironic smile of Socrates” found “beneath the surface of Schlegel’s...scepticism about first principles and complete systems,” rather than in Plato’s theory of ideal forms.³¹ If we follow that smile, we are led to Don Quixote (but not to the sort of quixotic chases with which the character is associated).

In the work of the early German Romantics, the path from the ancients to the moderns is bridged via the literary work of Cervantes and Shakespeare. Schlegel locates the Romantic in the work of Shakespeare and Cervantes: “This is where I look for and find the Romantic – in the older moderns, in Shakespeare, Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of knights, love, and fairy-tales where the thing and the word originated” (KFSa 2:335). A central reason why Schlegel is drawn to Cervantes (in particular, *Don Quixote*) and Shakespeare (in particular, *Hamlet*) is because their works lead us directly to irony, where he locates the root of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. One function of irony is that of providing a kind of distancing device that enables the characters to reflect on the power of the mirroring that is one central aspect of art, namely representation. Irony is a mimetic device that enables Shakespeare’s characters to make the issue of the power of representation explicit. The use of irony requires that the author know how to move from a representation of the subject matter at hand to a reflection upon the representation of that subject matter, creating a kind of frame in which the

subject matter is seen at a different level. This makes the subject matter move between two or even more levels of meaning, if we take seriously Schlegel's reference to "an infinitely teeming chaos" (KFSa 2:263, no. 69). Irony puts us on the trail of the Absolute, helping us to approximate it. Moreover, it played a central role in the critique of philosophy that Schlegel pursued: he saw the hovering function of irony as instrumental in helping us to look critically at philosophy itself.

Hegel was one of many readers who did not find anything of philosophical value in either the form or content of Schlegel's thought. Consider the following description that Hegel offers of the work of the Schlegel brothers, work that he claims is anything but philosophical:

A. W. and Friedrich Schlegel, in proximity to the renaissance of philosophy, being covetous of novelty and with a thirst for what was striking and extraordinary, appropriated as much of the philosophical idea as their natures, which were anything but philosophical, and essentially of the critical stamp, were capable of absorbing. (ILA 69 [HW 13:92])

In the Age of Critique, Hegel's claim that the Schlegel brothers are "critical" yet "anything but philosophical" is odd and leaves the reader wondering what counts as philosophical in his eyes. The answer becomes clearer as Hegel's tirade against the Romantics continues. Hegel goes on to conclude that the Romantics showed themselves to be enthusiasts "for a perverse tendency and subordinate standpoint as if it were something supreme." This "perverse tendency" gave rise to an even greater sin, the use of irony, a device that undermines the serious task of philosophy. Hegel cannot take the early German Romantics seriously, because he believes that they, with their use of irony, do not take the task of philosophy seriously. Hegel misunderstands romantic irony as a path to a sort of nihilism, the "nothingness of all that is objective and that has essential or actual value" (ILA 72 [HW 13:96]). The early German Romantics are *not* philosophers, because they fail, with their irony, to take reality seriously:

The ironical, as 'genial' individuality, consists in the self-annihilation of what is noble, great, and excellent; and thus even the objective shapes of art will have to represent the mere principle of absolute subjectivity, by displaying what has value and nobleness for man in its self-annihilation. This implies, not merely that we are not to be serious about the right, the moral, and the true, but that the highest and best of all has nothing in it, inasmuch as in its exhibition through individuals, characters, and actions, it refutes and annihilates itself, and so is irony at its own expense. (ILA 73 [HW 13:97])

Schlegel was all too accustomed to misunderstandings of his work. His concern with misunderstanding is showcased in *Über die Unverständlichkeit* (*On Incomprehensibility*) of 1800, a chapter he wrote for the final volume of *Das Athenäum*. The journal and its contributors had become the object of derision, for many of the entries in the journal were said to be incomprehensible (*unverständlich*). The charges against the comprehensibility of the journal's entries prompted Schlegel to close the journal with a chapter that tackled this issue of understanding head on. The issue of incomprehensibility comes up in fragments of the period as well.

The *Unverständlichkeit* chapter is more a protest chapter than a straightforward exposition of the nature of understanding and misunderstanding. Schlegel was not only perplexed but also annoyed by the deficiencies of his readers. His playful response to the lack of cooperation from his readers would have remained incomprehensible to those very readers who accused him of incomprehensibility:

Now, it is a peculiarity of mine that I absolutely detest incomprehension, not only the incomprehension of the uncomprehending but even more the incomprehension of the comprehending. For this reason, I made a resolution quite some time ago to have a talk about this matter with my reader, and then create before his eyes – in spite of him as it were – another new reader to my own liking: yes, even to deduce him if need be...I wanted for once to be really thorough and go through the whole series of my essays, admit their frequent lack of success and complete frankness, and so gradually lead the reader to being similarly frank and straightforward with himself...I wanted to show that the purest and most genuine incomprehension emanates precisely from science and the arts – which by their very nature aim at comprehension and at making comprehensible – and from philosophy and philology. (OI 298 [KFS A 2:363–72])³²

The theme of the active role of the reader in helping to bring forth the meaning of the text is summoned – the reader whom Schlegel's work all too often did not find. Schlegel was well aware of the consequences that the incompleteness of knowledge had for the level of comprehension attainable via any given text. As he tells us in *Lyceum* (or *Critical*) *Fragment* no. 20, "a classical text must never be entirely comprehensible. But those who are cultivated and who cultivate themselves must always want to learn more from it" (PF 2 [KFS A 2:149, no. 20]). Unfortunately, too many of Schlegel's readers never appreciated this point, and they blamed his texts for failing to be fully comprehensible (as if it were the task of a text to be *fully* comprehensible). Similarly, his fragments were dismissed as scattered thoughts lacking rigor and philosophical worth.

Yet it would be a mistake to accuse Schlegel of seeking to confuse his readers and generate nonsense with his witty writings. Incomprehension, after all, is not indeterminacy. How could we hope to learn from anything whose meaning was utterly indeterminate? Schlegel's emphasis on incomprehension is no abandonment of a project that was central to his philosophical work, that is, the very process of coming to an understanding of a text, an idea, and so on; rather, it was part of his commitment to comprehension, understood as a never-ending historical process. These claims are in keeping with Schlegel's view of philosophy as an infinite task, something defined in terms of a process of becoming, rather than an accomplished or complete state of being.

Hegel's critique of romantic irony demonstrates that "a great part of the incomprehensibility of the *Athenäum* is unquestionably due to the *irony* that to a greater or lesser extent is to be found everywhere in it" (OI 302 [KFSa 2:368]). Irony is sure to generate misunderstandings for the reader who is not willing to attempt to understand the text "on its own terms." But irony is also a tool that serves as a hermeneutical motor, fuelling the never-ending process of understanding a text. Schlegel asks: "Isn't this entire, unending world constructed by the understanding out of incomprehensibility or chaos?" (OI 305 [KFSa 2:370, no. 69]). Romantic irony is a tool that enables the hovering stressed in *Athenäum Fragment* no. 116, a "hovering [on the wings of poetic reflection] between the portrayer and the portrayed [which] can multiply in an endless succession of mirrors" (PF 32 [KFSa 2:182–83]). Irony belongs to poetry as a mode of representation. Yet it also belongs to philosophy: for it is the result of philosophy's inability to represent the Absolute. Nothing is complete, and irony is the tool used to make the inherent incompleteness of human experience apparent. Romantic irony is playful and irreverent, but it is not the result of any lack of respect Schlegel had for the world and reality. It is rather the result of a deep respect for and commitment to *understanding* reality. Romantic irony makes no mockery of the world; it is not a disparaging attitude toward the world. Romantic irony is not self-annihilating; rather, it is the ultimate show of humility; it is used to show how little humans, all humans, know. Romantic irony is part of the general romantic vision of reality as essentially incomplete, as an approximation toward the distant and unreachable goal of the infinite. As Schlegel puts it, "pure thinking and cognition [*Erkennen*] of the highest can never be represented [*dargestellt*] adequately – this is the principle of the relative unrepresentability [*Undarstellbarkeit*] of the highest" (KFSa 12:214).

This difficulty of representing the highest or the infinite is overcome when philosophy gives up its haughty independence and turns to art for help (KFSa 13:55–56, 173–74). The infinite can only be alluded to indirectly, and this is possible for philosophy only if it is able to go beyond what it represents, by alluding to that which it does not succeed in saying. Philosophy can do this through irony, that is, in becoming aesthetic. For this reason Schlegel claims

that “philosophy is the real homeland of irony, which one would like to define as logical beauty: for wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues – and is not simply confined into rigid systems – there irony should be asked for and provided” (PF 5 [KFSa 2:152, no. 42]). Philosophy that is the product of a mathematically or scientifically deductive method is a philosophy confined to rigid systems. The dialogue form, like the fragment, is a literary form that is part of a philosophical system that combines having and not having system; this “romantic combination” is part of a philosophy informed by aesthetic method, and here we find irony. Irony is a literary tool that lifts the rigid confines of language. And once those rigid confines are lifted, the romantic fusion that makes aesthetic philosophy possible can take place.

Romantic fusion

In *Lyceum* (or *Critical*) *Fragment* no. 115, Friedrich Schlegel remarks: “all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one” (PF 14 [KFSa 2:161, no. 115]). The theme of fusion is a mark of early German Romanticism. We can recall *Athenäum Fragment* no. 116, where we are told that “Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn’t merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature” (PF 31–32 [KFSa 2:182, no. 116]). The call for a fusion of poetry and prose is in part the result of Schlegel’s anti-foundationalism, his rejection of the view that philosophy must begin with a single, absolute first principle.

According to Schlegel, philosophy does not begin from a first principle. In *Athenäum Fragment* no. 84, he claims that, “philosophy, like epic poetry, always begins in *media res*,” and this claim joins others like “poetry and philosophy should be made one” and “where philosophy ends, poetry must begin” (PF 28 [KFSa 2:178, no. 84]). This call for a fusion of the disciplines is the result of a serious, well-considered philosophical commitment. Schlegel’s emphasis on mediality – that is, upon beginning always in the midst of history and not with some isolated, absolute, ahistorical principle – and his accompanying interest in the relation between philosophy, poetry, and science are part of his concern with the nature of knowledge and how we could best frame our understanding of the world. The early German Romantic method, a comparative method that broke with the deductive method which informed the work of absolute idealists such as Fichte, carved out a new space for the role of history and aesthetic experience in philosophy. The starting point of Schlegel’s romantic philosophy is not some dead, absolute first principle, but rather a “living seed”: “Our philosophy does not begin like the others with a first principle – where the first proposition is like the center or first ring of a comet – with the rest a long tail

of mist – we depart from a small but living seed – our center lies in the middle” (KFSa 12:328). Schlegel’s reference to a “small but living seed” is not an unimportant metaphor. Indeed, it brings to mind Benjamin’s reference to the “Goethean quest for the seeds of eternal growth,” a quest that cannot be limited to one isolated discipline. Schlegel’s particular breed of anti-foundationalism commits him to something like life as the framework for understanding reality. Schlegel himself describes his philosophical method as genetic or synthetic, as opposed to deductive or syllogistic (KFSa 12:307). Schlegel’s genetic method is historical; he wants to understand philosophy, poetry, and reality in terms of a relation to what came before. The Romantics bid farewell to the hierarchies endorsed by both Kant (who called philosophy “the *queen* of all sciences”) and Hegel (who positioned philosophy above both poetry and religion). For the early German Romantics, there is a horizon of approaches in our search for truth, not a pure philosophical method that stands above the rest.

In contrast, Hegel clearly had systematic ambitions based on a view of philosophy as a discipline which should aspire to be like a science (*Wissenschaft*) and which is driven by the goals of absolute perfection and completeness. The *literary form* that Hegel uses is not open or playful, even while it is innovative: it guides the reader via strict argumentation to the conclusions that will authoritatively establish the theses defended. This is not to say that Hegel endorsed a strict deductive method. Indeed, the systematic literary form that Hegel favored is somewhat at odds with the coherentist view of truth that he (and the early German Romantics) endorsed.³³ We might call this tension the result of Hegel’s early German Idealism clashing with the more mature and less aesthetic German Idealism that Hegel eventually adopted. As Walter Kaufmann emphasizes, for Hegel, “philosophy did not stand between religion and poetry but above both. Philosophy was, according to him, its age comprehended in thought, and – to exaggerate a little – the philosopher’s task was to *comprehend* what the religious person and the poet *feel*.”³⁴ This view of philosophy’s task is at odds with the romantic conception of philosophy, where philosophy is completed in and as poetry. There is no hierarchy in the romantic vision of philosophy, and religion and poetry do not fall below philosophy as they do in Hegel’s view of the disciplines. Indeed, in the work of the early German Romantics, there is a call to collapse the borders between poetry, philosophy, and science. Manfred Frank understands idealism as “the conviction – made especially compulsory by Hegel – that consciousness is a self-sufficient phenomenon, one which is still able to make the presuppositions of its existence comprehensible by its own means.”³⁵ In contrast, the early German Romantics are convinced that “self-being owes its existence to a transcendent foundation,” which cannot be dissolved by consciousness.³⁶ According to this view of the primacy of Being, the foundation of self-being becomes a puzzle that can no longer be handled by reflection alone, for reflection alone cannot grasp

absolute Being. It needs something more, and the early German Romantics seek this something more in aesthetic experience. The aesthetic turn of the early German Romantics is fuelled by their anti-foundationalism.

Part of what drives Schlegel and his romantic co/sym-philosopher, Novalis, to merge the borders of philosophy and poetry is their conviction that healthy, progressive philosophy must contain a good dose of contingency, uncertainty, and incompleteness. The early German Romantics were not interested in closed systems, and incompleteness was not seen as an imperfection; quite the contrary, they embrace uncertainty and incompleteness. Consider Novalis's claim in his *Logological Fragments*: "Only what is incomplete can be comprehended – can take us further" (NPW 65, no. 86 [NS 2:559, no. 151]).³⁷ In the *Allgemeine Brouillon* of 1798–99, Novalis tells us that "an absolute drive towards perfection and completeness is an illness, as soon as it shows itself to be destructive and averse toward the *imperfect*, the incomplete" (NPW 131, no. 33 [NS 2:384, no. 638]). Many of the fragments published in *Das Athenäum* reflect a skeptical attitude concerning the "proper starting-points" of any scientific investigation and the possibility of certain results, and so of complete systems for the presentation of those results. In short, the full satisfaction of our hunger for knowledge (*Wissbegierde*) is simply not a goal for the early German Romantics. Indeed, for Schlegel a *complete* satisfaction of our hunger for knowledge would take the wind out of the sails of our search for truth. Philosophy, after all, consists of activity; were that activity to end, so would philosophy. The absolute drive for perfection and completeness alluded to by Novalis would mean the end of philosophy as an activity.

Instead of a closed system presumptuous enough to offer a last word on the nature of knowledge, what the philosopher has is a tendency, a path she follows to greater and greater degrees of probability, but never to certain truth, working within limits, but also always going beyond those limits. Consider Novalis's famous imperative:

The world must be made Romantic. In that way one can find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. In this operation the lower self will become one with a better self. Just as we ourselves are such a qualitative exponential series. This operation is as yet quite unknown. By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic. The operation for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite is the converse – this undergoes a logarithmic change through this connection – it takes on an ordinary form of expression. Romantic philosophy. *Lingua romana*. Raising and lowering by turns. (NPW 60, no. 66 [NS 1:545, no. 105])

What does it mean to speak of a philosophy that endows the known with the “dignity of the unknown” or the “finite with the appearance of the finite”? Such a philosophy is one that is at peace with openness and uncertainty, with a search for truth that will never be *fully satisfied*.

Bubner stresses that the early German Romantics, more concerned than their idealist contemporaries with commentary, criticism, and interpretation, also developed a different model of system from Hegel’s. For the Romantics, “the relevant model...is not a godlike creation of a system *ex nihilo*, as it was for the early idealists, but rather an actively sympathetic response on the part of the critic and the philologist to the significant creative works of the past.”³⁸ Bubner’s reference to a “godlike system” recalls Novalis’s critique of the “absolute drive for perfection and completeness,” for certainly only a godlike creation could possibly satisfy that drive. Schlegel, for his part, explicitly rejects attempts to ground philosophy *ex nihilo* in ahistorical first principles, stressing the intimate relation of philosophy to history and tradition, and searching – all too often in vain – for an active and sympathetic response to his own work. Both Schlegel and Novalis welcome uncertainty, contingency, and incompleteness as important elements of progressive philosophizing. Probability replaces certainty as the very fabric of philosophy’s structure, and there is breathing space for life and for the play with meaning introduced by irony. In short, philosophy itself is made aesthetic.

Concluding remarks

Neither Schlegel nor Novalis, two of early German Romanticism’s leading philosophers, ever placed philosophy above art or even the natural sciences. In place of hierarchies, there is a horizon of approaches we can use to come to an (ever incomplete) understanding of the world, with philosophy as one way, on equal grounds with others, to understand the world. And given the anti-foundationalism that shapes the view of philosophy that emerges from Schlegel and Novalis, even philosophy loses its purity. Philosophy must turn to art for help in grasping what it alone cannot understand and so is freed from its sober isolation and joins the more jocular company of poetry, where irony and other literary devices are available to help it grasp something as unlimited as the Absolute. In short, romantic fusion gives way to a philosophy liberated through its relation with poetry. Like romantic poetry itself, romantic philosophy “alone is free” – free to join forces with the other areas of human inquiry to make sense of the puzzle of the infinite and of our place within the world.

The early German Romantics overcome hierarchies to carve new space for the value of art and aesthetic experience. Some two centuries later, we remain burdened by some of the same hierarchies that they fought to overcome.

Their work will only receive the respect it deserves when the very hierarchical thinking against which they battled is finally overcome and when aesthetic philosophy is not dismissed as anything but philosophical.

Notes

1. See Karl Ameriks's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–17. Ameriks's collection on German Idealism is noteworthy for going beyond the standard fare of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and bringing discussions of figures such as Goethe, Hamann, Herder, Hölderlin, Maimon, Novalis, Reinhold, Schiller, Schlegel, and Schopenhauer into the discussion of German Idealism and its legacy. Such diversity is all too uncommon in collections on German Idealism. Of course, there are pitfalls to including the early German Romantics in the company of the system builders, for then unfavorable comparisons between the scientific philosophers (Hegel, Fichte) and the poetic philosophers such as Schlegel and Novalis arise, giving way to the dismissive view of early German Romanticism as merely a literary movement. Indeed, I think that the present volume has opened new space for a consideration of the relation between early German Romanticism and German Idealism, in a way that does not overshadow the contributions of the early German Romantics with the system-building aspirations of the German Idealists.
2. For more on this, see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling," in *Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 117–40.
3. Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of German Idealism*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.
4. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman begin their article, "The Question of Romanticism," with the following claim: "'Romanticism' is one of the more hotly contested terms in the history of ideas" (in *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Alison Stone [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011], 47). I hope, by limiting my examination to a particular period of Romanticism (early) and a particular linguistic/geographic region (German, for I will not consider contributions from beyond the area of what after 1870 became Germany), to remove some of the contention from my account of some of the central philosophical dimensions of the early German Romantic Movement.
5. For a fuller account of the philosophical dimensions of the movement, see Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
6. Theodor Zielkowski, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena. Geist und Gesellschaft 1794–95* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998).
7. From a letter from Friedrich Schlegel to his brother, August Wilhelm, cited in Hans Eichner, introduction to KFSa 2:xliv. "KFSa" refers to the critical edition of Schlegel's work, *Friedrich Schlegel Kritische Ausgabe* (KFSa), 35 vols., ed. Ernst Behler et al. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–). All further references to Schlegel's work refer to this edition, noting volume and page number. Some of Schlegel's fragments have been translated in Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). When I have used Firchow's translation, I have also cited this in the text parenthetically as "PF."

8. For more the misunderstanding of Kant's project as a search for a first principle, especially in the work of Reinhold and Fichte, see Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel*, ch. 5; and Rüdiger Bubner, "Kant, Transcendental Argument and the Problem of Deduction," *Review of Metaphysics* 28, no. 3 (March 1975): 453–67.
9. The continuing interest in Kant is evident by the strong and ever-growing body of scholarship on Kant's work and the recent, new translations of his critiques by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood.
10. The story of these three Swabian friends and their time at the Tübingen *Stift*, where each came to study theology, is told by Franz Gabriel Nauen, *Revolution, Idealism, and Human Freedom: Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel and the Crisis of Early German Idealism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971). In what follows, I limit my discussion to Hegel, leaving Hölderlin and Schelling aside. Hegel's later work provides the sharpest contrast to the path opened by the early text, a path that certainly shaped the work of the early German Romantics.
11. In their chapter, "Representing Self and Other in Early German Romanticism," Elizabeth Mittman and Mary Strand write: "In approaching early German Romanticism as both a philosophical movement and a model for an aesthetic practice, it is tempting to look at the 'Earliest Program for a System of German Idealism' as a conceptual and chronological starting point" (in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. and trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 47).
12. The title to the fragment, found in Hegel's handwriting, but whose authorship has never been decisively established (Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling are each viable candidates) was given to the text by Franz Rosenzweig, who published the text in 1917. It is not descriptive of the contents; certainly, this text is *not* the place to find clues for unraveling the mystery of what German Idealism is.
13. For more on the text and its role in understanding the new mythology, see Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 153–87. The most detailed account of the text is given by Rüdiger Bubner, *Das älteste Systemprogramm. Studien zur Frühgeschichte des deutschen Idealismus* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1973).
14. The references are to the translation of the text found in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. and trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 72–73.
15. *Ibid.*
16. The full citation is, as Nietzsche is wont to be, dramatic and somewhat hostile: "I loathe this notorious 'and': for the Germans love to say 'Goethe and Schiller.' ... Yet there are even worse cases of 'and,' for with my own ears I have heard speak, though only amongst academics, of 'Schopenhauer and Hartmann'" (from *Twilight of the Idols*), quoted in Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.
17. Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism*, 233.
18. *Ibid.*, 234.
19. The matter of how the early German Romantics define poetry is not an easy one to settle. I find myself torn between Beiser and Benjamin on this point. Frederick C. Beiser claims that romantic poetry is an aesthetic ideal. He writes: "According to my interpretation, ... *romantische Poesie* designates not a form of literature or criticism but the romantics' general aesthetic ideal" (*The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003], 8). Certainly, there is a sense in which "romantic poetry" is an aesthetic

ideal, but it is also a form of literature, and it also plays a central role in the early German Romantics' concept of criticism. Walter Benjamin's analysis sheds light on the important relation of prose and romantic poetry. As he writes: "The idea of poetry has found its individuality (that for which Schlegel was seeking) in the form of prose; the early Romantics know no deeper or better determination for it than 'prose.' In this seemingly paradoxical but in truth very profound intuition, they find an entirely new basis for the philosophy of art....The idea of poetry is prose" (Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* [1919], in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996], 173).

20. Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism*, 237.
21. Especially harsh was Schlegel's criticism of Schiller's poem, "The Worth of Women," which appeared in Schiller's journal *Musenalmanach* in 1796. In that review, Schlegel ridiculed Schiller's celebration of the domestic functions of women (see KFSa 2:6). Despite his harsh criticisms of some of the conservative views he perceived in Schiller's work, Schlegel did acknowledge his indebtedness to Schiller's work on aesthetics, especially Schiller's chapter *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. For more on Schlegel's love-hate relationship with Schiller, see Eichner's introduction to KFSa 2.
22. See Eichner's introduction to KFSa 2, esp. xlii–lxxi. In Berlin, Schlegel established a relation with Friedrich Schleiermacher and met the daughter of Moses Mendelssohn, Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit, whom he married in 1804. Both Schleiermacher and Mendelssohn Veit became important figures for the development of Schlegel's thought. *Symphilosophie*, that is, philosophy as the product of thinking and sharing thoughts with another, was an important concept for the early German Romantics. Schleiermacher became a contributor to *Das Athenäum*. Dorothea and Schlegel published a novel together (*Florentin*) and one of Schlegel's most important statements regarding the emancipation of women was written in the form of an open letter to Dorothea (*Über die Philosophie. An Dorothea*, in 1799). See KFSa 8:41–62.
23. Friedrich Schlegel, letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel, quoted in Eichner, introduction to KFSa 2:xlii.
24. This is made clear in many of his fragments. Schlegel's chapter on *Wilhelm Meister* is a tribute to how Goethe's novel opened literature and philosophy to new ways of thought. Walter Benjamin also addresses the ways in which Goethe's novel shaped Schlegel's very notion of the romantic. In making this connection between the "romantic" and Goethe's novel, Benjamin avoids any facile connection between the German term for the novel (*Roman*) and the term 'romantic' (*Romantik*). See Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* (1919), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 172–78.
25. E. O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 326.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Agnes Arber, "Goethe's Botany," *Chronica Botanica* 10, no. 2 (1946): 86.
28. Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities" (1919–22), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 256.
29. Referenced in Arber, "Goethe's Botany," 68.
30. For more detail on Frank's arguments in favor of reading the early German Romantics as realists, see Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997). Part of this text has

- been translated as *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). For more on Beiser's reading of the early German Romantics as idealists, see Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).
31. Beiser, *Romantic Imperative*, 67.
 32. "Über die Unverständlichkeit," in English translation as "On Incomprehensibility," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 297–307. Cited parenthetically as "OI."
 33. I thank Alison Stone for her insight on this matter.
 34. Walter Kaufmann, "The Hegel Myth and Its Method," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1972), 21.
 35. Frank, *Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 178.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. All references to Novalis are to *Novalis Schriften*, ed. Richard Samuel et al. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), hereafter NS. Some of Novalis's writings have been translated in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and I have used her translation, hereafter "NPW."
 38. Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism*, 33.

20

From the Metaphysics of the Beautiful to the Metaphysics of the True: Hölderlin's Philosophy in the Horizon of Poetry

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(translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner)

The dense network of positions summarized under the label German Idealism unites not only some of the most significant philosophers of this period, namely Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. A number of poets are also part of this constellation, foremost among them Schiller, Goethe, and Hölderlin. Into the same context belongs the Romantic movement with its main philosophers Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Together with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and the somewhat younger Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling (1775–1854), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) pursued first a two-year study of philosophy, followed by a three-year study of theology, which ended in the fall of 1793 (for Schelling in the fall of 1795). Both during this time together in Tübingen and afterwards, the young men worked through Immanuel Kant's new critical philosophy. The Hegel biographer Karl Rosenkranz reports that, in Tübingen, they read "*Plato... , Kant, Jacobi's Woldemar and Allwill, the letters concerning Spinoza, and Hippel's life, in ascending order.*"¹ These shared studies, in which Hölderlin participated from the beginning, formed a basis for philosophical discussion.

In 1795, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [Foundation of the Entire *Wissenschaftslehre*] was available for purchase, a text with great significance for the formation of the post-Kantian philosophical systems. From 1794 onward, Fichte was professor in Jena, where he followed Karl Leonhard Reinhold, who had become famous as a representative of Kant's philosophy. While in Jena, Fichte had great influence until the atheism dispute (*Atheismsstreit*) broke out in 1798. Starting in 1794, Hölderlin became the tutor of the son of Charlotte von Kalb, who was good friends with Schiller. Thus, from the summer of 1794 onward he had the opportunity to study Fichte's

Grundlage and also listened to Fichte's lectures in Jena beginning in the fall of 1794. Hölderlin is considered the first critic of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and its first principle, which Fichte called the absolute I.²

In this chapter, I will first discuss Hölderlin's initial critical engagement with Fichte's new *Wissenschaftslehre*. To the absolute I, the first principle of this work, Hölderlin opposes an unprethinkable being as such (*ein unvordenkliches Sein schlechthin*). I will go on to show how Hölderlin reinterprets being as such as the primacy of beauty in the context of his work on the novel *Hyperion*. The true and the good, as well as epistemology and moral philosophy, are subordinated to beauty and aesthetics. Although Hölderlin tried for a long time to determine and pursue as an ideal a highest principle, namely an unprethinkable being, around 1800 he turns more forcefully to the question of the true in reality. The poet Hölderlin searches for a more living and truer expression in his literary work. In Spinoza he finds the notion that the truest truth enlightens both itself and error. In a similar way, Hölderlin sees himself as attempting to think and to realize both the unpoetic and the genuinely poetic aspects of reality in a unified fashion in supreme poetry.

The first principle of philosophy: Absolute I or being as such?

According to Hölderlin, Fichte wants to "get beyond the fact of consciousness *theoretically*, a great many of his remarks show that, and this is just as certainly transcendental, and even more strikingly so, as when the metaphysicians we've had up till now have wanted to get beyond the existence of the world."³ In a letter dated January 26, 1795 to his friend Hegel (who was at the time a tutor in Bern), Hölderlin sets forth his arguments for suspecting Fichte's philosophy to be grounded in an absolute I of transcendence. At the home of the Kalb family in Waltershausen, Hölderlin had not only worked through the first pages of Fichte's *Grundlage*, but, as he reports in the letter, he was also simultaneously reading Spinoza, probably the *Ethics*. Hölderlin's argument proceeds as follows:

[Fichte's] absolute *I* (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, & outside it there is nothing; therefore for this absolute *I* there is no object, for otherwise all reality would not be in it; but a consciousness without an object is not conceivable, and if I myself am this object then as such I am necessarily limited, even if only in time, and therefore not absolute; therefore no consciousness is conceivable in the absolute *I*, as an absolute *I* I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, therefore the absolute *I* is (for me) nothing.⁴

Hölderlin here identifies Fichte's principle of the absolute I, which forms the founding principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, with Spinoza's principle of substance. In fact, Fichte himself provokes this identification by comparing the

absolute I with Spinoza's substance, although he precisely rejects such an identification (WL 101–2, 117–18 [GA I/2:263–64, 280–81]). Hölderlin understands the absolute I to contain all reality, just like Spinoza's concept of substance. Spinoza's substance can be understood as the very embodiment of all being.⁵ And Fichte indeed explicitly ascribes all reality to the absolute I (see WL 109 [GA I/2:271]). Yet in this context reality does not designate existence, but on the one hand it means substantiality (*Sachhaltigkeit*) in a descriptive sense or, on the other hand, it designates reality as the true or reasonable in an appraising, prescriptive sense. Hölderlin argues that, because the absolute I is everything, consequently nothing else can exist, not even an object. Yet, for Hölderlin a subject that has no object cannot have any consciousness. Hölderlin's criticism, which I consider only conditionally true⁶ because it does not do justice to the crux of Fichte's system, had great influence among his philosophizing friends.⁷

Hölderlin may have withdrawn his criticism of Fichte's principle of the absolute I several years later, for he raises the topic again in a letter to his half-brother Karl Gok in March 1801: "*A Deo principium*... I still think the way we used to, but now apply it more concretely. All is an infinite unity, but in this totality there is one supreme unifying *unity* which *in itself is not an I*, and this, to us, is God."⁸ The formulation that the "*supreme unifying unity... in itself is not an I*" can be read as distantly recalling the early criticism of Fichte's principle of the absolute I, although he speaks here only of an "I," not of an "absolute I." On the one hand, in this context God is posited as the principle of unification and of the beginning: "*A Deo principium*" – "The beginning stems from God." Obviously Hölderlin and Gok have agreed in earlier conversations that such an originating principle of unification can certainly be designated as (absolute) I and is better (but not necessarily) named God. This formulation suggests that Fichte's idea of the I, which was previously and frequently criticized, is now appreciated after all. In Fichte's view it stands for a principle that thematizes freedom and self-definition, hence what at that time was often designated as the God in us. Accordingly, for the later Hölderlin the unifying principle in us can be referred to as an I, but is better designated as God.

If one looks back to spring 1795 and the text *Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität* [Being, Judgment, Modality/Possibility], which Hölderlin wrote on the endpaper of a book (possibly that of the *Wissenschaftslehre*), the path of thought laid out there shows that, according to his understanding, subjectivity can never represent an absolute first as such (*ein schlechthin absolut Erstes*), because other aspects always precede it genetically and logically:

Being – expresses the connection of subject and object.

Where subject and object are absolutely, not only partly, united, namely so united that no division can be executed without damaging the essence of that which is to be separated, there and nowhere else one can speak of a *being as such* [*Seyn schlechthin*], as is the case with intellectual intuition.⁹

One should not confuse this being as such with the identity that is thought in the statement “I am I,” namely in Fichte’s first principle (*Grundsatz*) of the absolute I (WL 97 [GA I/2:259]). If the “I am I” is supposed to ground all human knowledge, as Fichte claims it does for the absolute I, then this moves into the sphere of judgment, by which human knowing is articulated. Hölderlin says that the “I am I” accomplishes a “primordial separation of the object and subject intimately connected in intellectual perception,” through which object and subject first enter consciousness as separated and singular. This first primordial distinction he calls an *Ur-Theilung* (primordial separation), a false etymology for *Urteil* (judgment), something that Fichte also employs in his lectures, which Hölderlin probably heard.¹⁰ For Hölderlin, identity, I, and subjectivity refer to a sphere of consciousness that constitutes the specifically human manner of consciousness, one marked by judging, thinking, knowing, or reflecting. This distinguishes the human being from all other creatures, but also places humans into a condition of separation from their original nature. This distinction of the human from the rest of nature and the separation connected to it is to be understood both descriptively and prescriptively. For Hölderlin nature is not only a different condition, which the human has left behind, but also an ideal. In his preface to the *Fragment von Hyperion* [Fragment of Hyperion], which appeared in 1794 in Schiller’s journal *Neue Thalia*, he writes:

There are two ideals of being: a state of highest simplicity, where our needs agree *via the mere organization of nature* and without our contributions, with themselves, with our powers, and with everything with which we are connected and a state of highest cultivation [*Bildung*], where the same would be the case via infinitely multiplied and strengthened needs and powers via the organization that we are able to give to ourselves.¹¹

Those who cultivate themselves, according to Hölderlin, find themselves on an eccentric path between an ideal of nature left behind – a nature that they must leave behind in order to be human – and another ideal that one attempts to reach through correct education (*Bildung*) and the proper path. It is an idea of mature humanitarianism, which the “*organization of nature*” reproduces and reinforces with the powers and possibilities of culture. Hölderlin is convinced that aesthetics and beauty are especially helpful in this. His reflections on this point must now be examined.

Being as such is given to humans as beauty

“Being as such,” which Hölderlin in his 1795 fragment *Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität* considers a better option for a highest metaphysical principle of philosophy than the absolute I of Fichte, soon after is interpreted as beauty. “Being [*Seyn*]”

or “being as such [*Seyn schlechthin*]” is another term for the ideal that was given with the original organization and that had to be abandoned when becoming human. In the rejected preface to the penultimate version of the novel *Hyperion*, probably written in the second half of 1795,¹² Hölderlin again represents this context and goes on to add a new reflection. He writes:

We would have no idea about that infinite peace, about that being, in the singular sense of the word; we would not seek to unify nature with ourselves, we would not think or act as if nothing were the case (for us), we would be nothing (for us) if that infinite unification, that being, in the singular sense of the word, did not exist. It does exist – as beauty; to speak with Hyperion, a new kingdom awaits us, in which beauty is the queen.¹³

Hölderlin claims here that “being, in the singular sense of the word,” is available as beauty. Beauty is worthy of being interpreted as the highest ideal, according to Hölderlin, because it is simultaneously a sensuous, a spiritual, and a normative principle, without one of these predicates dominating over another. It presents an equivalent of the human being as a whole shaped from all sides, not just from one.¹⁴

In letters to Karl Gok, Hölderlin develops arguments for how the three Platonic ideas of the true, the good, and the beautiful have to be understood in their relationship to each other. In Kant and most of the representatives of post-Kantian philosophy, the moral-practical is primary, hence the idea of the good has primacy, as Kant first formulates it in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [Critique of Practical Reason, 1788] and as Fichte emphasizes in the *Grundlage* and then especially in the *System der Sittenlehre* [System of Ethics, 1798]. Hölderlin instead chooses a special path: Primacy goes not to the moral-practical but to beauty.

In two letters to Karl Gok in March and June 1796, Hölderlin lays out a draft of his metaphysics that continues the earlier reflections of *Seyn*, *Urtheil*, *Modalität* and of the preface to the penultimate version of *Hyperion*. The highest being is here explicitly designated as the “ideal of beauty [*Ideal der Schönheit*]” or as “ideal [*idealische*]” being. In these letters the thought is foundational for Hölderlin that a highest principle of all being can be given neither in epistemology nor in morality, but must be sought solely in aesthetics, as he writes to his brother in March 1796:

You say you want to occupy yourself with aesthetics. Don't you think that the *definition* of concepts must precede their *union*, and that for this reason the subordinate *parts* of knowledge, e.g. the theory of right (in the pure sense), moral philosophy etc., must be studied before approaching the *cacumina rerum*? Don't you think that in order to get to know the neediness of

knowledge, and so to sense something higher above it, one must first have perceived this neediness? It's true it is also possible to start from the top – to the extent that the pure ideal of all thought and action, unrepresentable and unattainable beauty, must be present to us everywhere, one has to – but it can only be recognized in all its completeness and clarity when one has found one's way through the labyrinth of knowledge and only then, having keenly missed one's homeland, arrived in the quiet land of beauty.¹⁵

It is explicitly claimed here that aesthetics is concerned with the “*cacumina rerum*,” the highest things. He repeats the idea, already articulated in the rejected preface to *Hyperion*, that “the pure ideal of all thought and action, the unrepresentable and unattainable beauty must be present to us everywhere.” “The pure ideal of all thought and action” can be understood as the pure ideal of theoretical and practical philosophy. One can hence equally say that this concerns the pure ideal of the true and the good, which can only be made present via the “unrepresentable and unattainable beauty.” The ideals or ideas of the true, the good, and the beautiful are neither representable nor reachable for the human being in the purity of thinking and acting. Yet, because beauty resides in two worlds, namely the world of the senses and that of reason, beauty is present in the experience of the beautiful. Hölderlin here advocates a systematic architectonic of the disciplines (*Wissenschaften*), which attributes the highest rank to aesthetics and its ideal of beauty. Philosophy of right or moral philosophy, but also epistemology, which is not explicitly mentioned here, are subordinated to aesthetics.

Hölderlin continues to deepen this systematic architectonic of the disciplines in another letter to Karl Gok on June 2, 1796. Hölderlin sketches his metaphysics for the half-brother, who was searching for insight and truth, as follows:

For this is what true thoroughness is: complete cognizance of the parts, which we must ground and comprehend together as One, and, penetrating to the utmost point of knowledge, deep cognizance of what does the grounding and comprehending. Reason, we can say, *lays the ground*, and understanding *comprehends*. Reason lays the ground with its principles, the *laws of acting and thinking*, insofar as they are related purely to the *general conflict in the human being*, that is, to the *conflict between the striving for the absolute and the striving for limitation*. But reason's principles in turn are themselves grounded by reason, in that it relates them to the ideal, the highest ground of all; and the *Ought*, which is contained in the principles of reason, is in this way dependent on (ideal) being. Now if the principles of reason, which *firmly* command that the conflict of that general, self-opposed striving be *unified* (according to the ideal of beauty), if these

principles in general are exercised on this conflict, then every unifying of the conflict must produce a result, and these results of the general unifying of the conflict are then the general concepts of the understanding, e.g. the concepts of substance and accident, of action and reaction, duty and right etc. These concepts are then to the understanding precisely what the ideal is to reason: just as reason forms its laws according to the ideal, so the understanding [forms] its maxims according to these concepts. These maxims contain the criteria and conditions under which any action or object is subject to those general concepts. E.g. I have the *right* to appropriate a thing which does not dispose of a free will. General concept: *right*. Condition: the thing does not dispose of a free will. The action subject to the general concept: the appropriation of a thing.¹⁶

Depending on Kant's theory of the faculties, which is retained in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Hölderlin here endows reason (*Vernunft*) with a twofold foundational relation (*doppeltes Begründungsverhältnis*), while the understanding (*Verstand*) is responsible for conceptual cognition (*begreifendes Verstehen*). Reason provides a basis for the single disciplines, by furnishing founding "principles [*Grundsätze*]" for "the laws of acting and thinking," thus for practical and theoretical philosophy. These founding principles are related to the "general conflict in the human being, that is, to the conflict between the striving for the absolute and the striving for limitation." With this reflection, first expressed philosophically in the context of the early and then rejected drafts of *Hyperion*, Hölderlin recognizes his indebtedness to Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*.¹⁷ In the *Grundlage* Fichte develops the system of the mind's actions with the aid of a dialectical method, which searches for contradictions in the path of development. These turn out to be mere appearances, as soon as the cohesion already gained is further differentiated by means of the production of new concepts. Hölderlin appropriates Fichte's methodology and expands it to a basic anthropological orientation of human existence (*anthropologische Grundbestimmung des Daseins des Menschen*), which he relates to a conception of the stages of life.

A primordial ideal of the human being's natural condition is connected with childhood. Adolescence is symbolically the time of the formation of the faculties and of the possibilities that are open to the human as a being of culture. In this phase humans step out of their ideal condition and move onto a more eccentric path. Mature humanity is reached when the primordial ideal of nature is recovered on a higher plane, strengthened by the faculties of specifically human attainments of culture.¹⁸ Hölderlin regards the middle phase as a time of conflict due to the knowledge of the lost ideal, which one must regain by "striving for the absolute." Yet it is also the time in which the consciousness of finitude and the sensuous connection of being is formed and hence is

accompanied by a conscious acceptance of finitude, a “striving for limitation.” Hölderlin revealed an enthusiasm for Schiller’s project of an aesthetic education of man, as formulated in Schiller’s two writings, *Über Anmut und Würde* [On Grace and Dignity] and *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* [Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man]. Hölderlin even announces that he will write *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, as he informs Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer in a letter in February 1796.¹⁹ The plan of aesthetic education explicitly attempts to form the entire human being with all of the faculties and is opposed to any form of one-sidedness, whether it be that of the mentally sensible or that of the sensuous faculties of the human being. With its principle of beauty, aesthetics helps particularly well in forming all of the sensuous and spiritual faculties, because it belongs to both worlds, the sensuous (*Sinnlichkeit*) and the reasonable (*Vernünftigkeit*).

Hölderlin’s June 1796 sketch of metaphysics in the letter to Karl Gok previews an equiprimordiality of “the laws of acting and thinking,” hence of practical and theoretical philosophy. The equiprimordiality of theory and praxis is, according to Hölderlin, itself grounded in “(ideal) being.” The conflict in the finite processes of thinking and acting, of theory and praxis, is resolved through a unification “according to the ideal of beauty.” The text can be understood to say that reason articulates itself in the founding principles, that is, in the laws of thinking and acting.

For Hölderlin, theoretical and practical philosophy are equiprimordial, as revealed by the parallel of founding “principles” and “laws of acting and thinking” in the previous quotation, but it is evident also in the aforementioned parallel of theoretical and practical *Urtheilung* (primordial separation) in *Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität*.²⁰ The principle of being as beauty is to be thought and assumed before the finite “laws of acting and thinking.”²¹ For Hölderlin the primacy of beauty is valid in the context of his working on the novel *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland* [Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece]. Its first volume appears in 1797 and the second follows in 1799.

The primacy of beauty is also articulated in the novel *Hyperion* itself, namely in Hyperion’s famous talk on the expanse of ruins of ancient Athens: “For in the beginning man and his gods were one, when, unknown to itself, eternal beauty was. ... The first child of divine beauty is art. ... Beauty’s second daughter is religion. Religion is love of beauty.”²² Without beauty and without poetry, Hölderlin’s Hyperion says that there is also no real philosophy: “The great word of Heraclitus, *εν διαφερον εαυτω* (the one differentiated in itself), this only a Greek could find, for it is the essence of beauty, and before this was found, there was no philosophy.”²³ Hölderlin leads us to understand that beauty is only present where openness for the good and the true exists already.

As I have shown, Hölderlin’s metaphysical outline, which attributes primacy to the idea of beauty before the ideas of the true and the good, is confirmed

in several contexts until around 1800. Although, remarkably, this outline is no longer explicitly taken up and expressed after 1800, it is nowhere explicitly rejected. Yet there are some indications that Hölderlin's philosophical thinking changed in surprising fashion around 1800. During this period of change, Hölderlin worked on his tragedy *Der Tod des Empedokles* [The Death of Empedocles], which remains a fragment. He attempted to make himself financially independent by founding a journal in 1799, and he wrote several contributions for it. Some writings from this project are extant, although his plan for the journal never came to fruition.²⁴ Several of his most famous and most well-known poems originated after 1800. We must now present the philosophical dimensions of this period of change.

Hölderlin's philosophical turn in 1800

Hölderlin wrote a letter to his former Tübingen university friend Christian Neuffer on November 12, 1798, which contains a passage pointing to a marked change in his thinking:

since I am more liable to be destroyed than many other people I must try to extract some advantage from the things that have a destructive effect on me....I must take them up into myself so that when the opportunity arises...I can place them as shadow next to my light, reproduce them as subordinate tones among which the tone of my soul will spring forth with all the more life. Purity can only be represented in impurity and if you try to render fineness without coarseness it will appear entirely unnatural and incongruous, and this for the good reason that fineness itself, when it occurs, bears the colour of the fate in which it arose; and beauty, when it appears in reality, necessarily assumes a form from the circumstances in which it emerges which is not natural to it and which only becomes its natural form when it is taken together with the very conditions which of necessity gave it the form it has.²⁵

This letter is an important witness to the fact that Hölderlin is searching for a new orientation for his poetry and philosophical thinking. In earlier years he had directed his philosophical thinking to comprehend the "striving for the absolute" and its ideal. From around 1798 to his collapse in 1806, he now turns to the question of how his literary work could become richer, livelier in tones, in moods, in affects, and sentiments. He now tries to understand and philosophically reach the goal of "striving for limitation."

The pure, noble, and beautiful should receive the coloring of the real and hence a secondary stress on the "impure," the "common," or "the conditions" under "which it arose." Hölderlin has evidently realized that a concept of life

and poetry, which is committed to the realization of a high ideal, threatens to miss the nearness of real life, because it must appear as “entirely unnatural and incongruous.” Evidently, he is searching for a literary expression that could turn to a pulsating life in its real form. His poetry desires to become more applied, more full of life, than is the case for purely philosophical thought.

Because the singular presentation of the pure ideal appears as “entirely unnatural,” the measure of a living literary expression must be a natural one; it must therefore be sought in nature. At the same time, a natural expression must not only represent nature, but must also be an effort of culture. Although this natural expression may not appear as the “most incongruous,” it is still necessary that it be thought convincingly and be believable. Hölderlin reasons further in his letter to Karl Gok that humans did not remain subject to nature, but created their culture with its “gardens and fields,” with “trade, ships, cities, states,” and with “science, art, religion,” because they wanted to live a better life.²⁶ Humans’ continued education and cultivation of nature must happen in the spirit of humanitarianism, as can be seen in the preeminent minds and their cultural achievements. Yet Hölderlin confirms in general a great lack of development of humanitarianism in the unfolding of human culture. To alleviate this lack is the calling that he took on as a poet. The suffering that accompanies the profession of the poet is also grounded in this lack, as he notes in a letter:

We must seek out perfection, make common cause with it as much as we can, derive sustenance and wholeness from our sense of it and so gain the strength to perceive what is crude and askew and malformed not just with pain but as what it is, what constitutes its character and peculiar flaw.²⁷

Similarly, he writes in the seventh of his *Frankfurter Aphorismen* [Frankfurt Aphorisms]: “Everything depends on the excellent not excluding the inferior, and the more beautiful not excluding the barbaric too much from amongst themselves, but not mixing too much either, *but certainly and without passion recognizing the distance between them and the others, and working and suffering out of this understanding.*”²⁸ The focus is now increasingly on desiring the faulty finitude of being and being obligated to perceive it actively and consciously. Only when the lack of being is understood can the ideal be communicated in a lively and convincing manner. Hölderlin goes even a step further when he states: “What is greatest and what is smallest, best and worst in mankind, grows from one root, and all in all everything is good and everybody fulfils in his own way, some more beautifully, some more wildly, his purpose as a human being, namely that of multiplying, quickening, separating, mixing, dividing and uniting the life of nature.”²⁹

All products of culture, the good and the bad, the small and the great, have a common source. They all derive from nature, as the possibilities of nature are investigated and developed by the efforts of human culture (*Kulturleistungen*). Hölderlin's reflection seems to be increasingly concentrated now on the question of the conditions of finite nature, which can essentially be grasped empirically through experience. It is clearly evident that Hölderlin's poetry turns more and more toward images saturated with experience, which are then, to be sure, referred to ideas. Accordingly, it is not surprising that he writes in a letter on December 24, 1798 to one of his most important friends, Isaak von Sinclair:

[It is] the first condition of all life and of all forms of organization, that no force is monarchic in heaven and earth. Absolute monarchy will always cancel itself out, because it has no object; in the strict sense it has never even existed. Everything is interconnected, and suffers as soon as it is active, including the purest thought a human being can have. And properly speaking an *a priori* philosophy, entirely independent of all experience, is just as much a nonsense as a positive revelation...³⁰

Hölderlin's reflections in this letter to Sinclair are at first glance surprisingly close to his argumentation in the letter to Hegel on January 26, 1795. "Absolute monarchy," he writes "will always cancel itself out, because it has no object." Hölderlin had objected both to Fichte's absolute I and to Spinoza's substance that these principles, thought as absolutes, are "objectless." This recalls the reasoning that Hölderlin penned in Waltershausen after reading Fichte's *Grundlage* and Spinoza's *Ethics*. Yet here Hölderlin goes a decisive step further, as he now refuses a philosophical final grounding in a first and absolute principle. With the claim "that no force is monarchic," he evidently relativizes his own 1795–96 conception, which assumed a "being as such" available as beauty to be presupposed in all being. Here he emphasizes that "in the strict sense it has never existed." This also explains why in 1801 he makes room for Fichte's absolute I, which can be comprehended as the highest principle, although it is better to attribute this to God.

It is also remarkable that Hölderlin here refers to "an *a priori* philosophy, entirely independent of all experience" as an impossibility. He explicitly demands a philosophy that is based on experience. His reflection on the fact that his poetry must turn toward life, liveliness, and reality parallels this demand for his philosophical thinking. In another respect, he may be criticizing Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* without naming it explicitly. It is a construction of consciousness, which is developed in an *a priori* synthetic path that proceeds from a pure, absolute I and passes over to a not-I by means of negation. Both are mediated in the next step. The relation between I and

not-I is the basis for grasping the primordial system of consciousness linguistically and presenting it in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. When Hölderlin writes that “everything is interconnected, and suffers as soon as it is active,” this manner of expression still moves entirely in the horizon of Fichte’s language in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The early criticism of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is primarily directed at the originating principle of philosophy, while Fichte’s methodological concept of reciprocating determination (*Wechselbestimmung*) found great assent among Hölderlin’s philosophical friends.³¹ Furthermore, one should add to the criticism in this context that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is missing any explicit relation to experience.

The whole and its parts: Kant’s principle of objective purposiveness

If one observes the further course of Hölderlin’s expositions directed to Sinclair on December 24, 1798, one sees that Hölderlin also argues with another theoretical context in the background. He argues for the claim that no power can govern monarchically:

Anything made, every product, is the result of the subjective and the objective, of the individual and the whole, and the fact that the share the individual has in a given product can never be completely separated from the share the whole has in it shows once again how intimately every individual part is bound up with the whole and that together they make up *one* living whole which, *individualized through and through as it is, consists of parts which are entirely independent but at the same time intimately and indissolubly interconnected*. Of course, from any one *finite perspective one of the independent forces in the whole will be the dominant one*, but it can only be regarded as temporarily dominant, a matter of degree.³²

It seems obvious to me that Hölderlin is here employing Kant’s teleology, because he discusses relationships of results and products, of parts and wholes, which only together make up a “living whole.” Furthermore, in the context of his teleology Kant places special emphasis on the experiential referentiality of the teleological observation of nature. Kant’s concept of objective purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) plays a great systematic role not only in the expositions in this letter, but also in Hölderlin’s theory of poetry.

According to Kant, an internally “*organized product of nature*,” that is, an organism or living creature, is one “*in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well*. Nothing in it is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature” (CJ 5:376). In line with Kant’s definition of teleological, objective purpose in nature, Hölderlin reflects on the point that “the share the

individual has in a given product can never be completely separated from the share the whole has." This picks up on one of Kant's central thoughts, which stresses:

Now for a thing as a natural end it is requisite, *first*, that its parts (as far as their existence and their form are concerned) are possible only through their relation to the whole. For the thing itself is an end, and is thus comprehended under a concept or an idea that must determine *a priori* everything that is to be contained in it. (CJ 5:373)

Kant argues in more detail than Hölderlin for the transposition, namely that not only the part must be referred to the whole, but also that the whole must explicitly be related to the parts:

But if a thing, as a natural product, is nevertheless to contain in itself and its internal possibility a relation to ends, i.e., is to be possible only as a natural end and without the causality of the concepts of a rational being outside of it, then it is required, *second*, that its parts be combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form. For in this way alone is it possible in turn for the idea of the whole conversely (reciprocally) to determine the form and combination of all the parts: not as a cause – for then it would be a product of art – but as a ground for the cognition of the systematic unity of the form and the combination of all of the manifold that is contained in the given material for someone who judges it. (CJ 5:373)

With this argumentation Kant seeks to highlight the important distinction between the purposes within nature and a set purpose, which the human being accomplishes as a rational agent, as the creator of works of art. In the products of nature, "the idea of the whole" does not determine "the form and combination of all the parts"; that is, the idea of the whole is not a producing cause, but serves only "as a ground for the cognition... of the systematic unity of the form and the combination of all of the manifold." This determination becomes the basis for Hölderlin's reflections on a theory of poetry and his search for new forms of poetizing.

For Kant the most emphatic concept of purposes in nature as organizing being is given with the material objective purposiveness of living beings. Yet this concept still stands under a strong limitation, for, as Kant emphasizes, the purposes of nature are never objects of cognition, but must only be thought for our judgment (see CJ 5:378). Nevertheless he extends the idea of judging nature according to purposes to the whole of nature (as a system of purposes), inasmuch as one must no longer observe only internal purposes of organized

living beings but also external ones, which connect the relationships of things in nature within always greater contexts:

It is therefore only matter insofar as it is organized that necessarily carries with it the concept of itself as a natural end, since its specific form is at the same time a product of nature. However, this concept necessarily leads to the idea of the whole of nature as a system in accordance with the rule of ends, to which idea all of the mechanism of nature in accordance with principles of reason must now be subordinated (at least in order to test natural appearance by this idea). The principle of reason is appropriate for it only subjectively, i.e., as the maxims that everything in the world is good for something, that nothing in it is in vain; and by means of the example that nature gives in its organic products, one is justified, indeed called upon to expect nothing in nature and its laws but what is purposive in the whole. (CJ 5:378–79)

Kant repeatedly emphasizes that the contemplation of nature as an association of internal material and external relative natural purposes does not permit any knowledge of nature but only its judgment (*Beurteilung*) (see CJ 5:379).

Kant's conception of the purposive, living organization of nature and of a system of nature in general evidently offers to Hölderlin a conception capable of bearing the weight of thinking and comprehending a whole that is formed in itself and also of an alternating relation of the whole to the parts and the parts to the whole. Kant's theoretical context confirms Hölderlin's statement that it is "the first condition of all life and of all forms of organization, that no force is monarchic in heaven and earth."³³ Unlike Kant, Hölderlin pays no further attention to the question of whether teleological judgments are merely regulative evaluations of the whole of nature instead of a constitutive insight. A different aspect matters to him, one that cannot be found in Kant, when he writes to Sinclair on December 24, 1798: "Of course, from any one *finite perspective one of the independent forces in the whole will be the dominant one*, but it can only be regarded as temporarily dominant, a matter of degree."³⁴ With this reflection, the contemplation of the whole of being is invigorated. There is no completely preeminent principle, but the governing principle changes over the course of time. As the remainder of the letter has been lost at this point, the reader does not find out how Hölderlin further developed this dynamic system of a whole in reciprocal relation to the parts and its relations of governing.

Kant's teleology of nature provides guidance for how nature is to be thought as something living. The principle of the organization of nature will be transformed by Hölderlin into a principle of the organization of poetry. With such a principle it is possible to think the outline (*Anlage*) of a literary work of art. What is really at stake is the possibility of regaining the original organization

of nature, which closes itself to recognition. This can occur on a higher plane with transformed powers of culture through an analogy in the work of art. This is boldly expressed in Hölderlin's theoretical reflection on the genres of the lyrical, epic, and tragic in the fragment, "Das lyrische dem Schein nach idealische Gedicht..." [The lyric, in appearance idealic poem...].

In reference to the tragic work of art, Hölderlin seeks to determine the "unity with all that lives, which, though it is not felt by a more limited nature, and can only be vaguely apprehended in its highest aspirations, can be recognized by the spirit. ..." ³⁵ Apparently few people feel the unity with everything living or with a higher being. As a mediator of what is higher and more divine, the poet first has to have an inkling of the highest aspirations, in order then to reach artistic aesthetic insight through his spirit (*Geist*). What is primordially unified must open up to the poet's treatment in the work of art,

because the nature of the union in it must not remain always the same, according to the matter, because the parts of the One must not remain always in the same closer and further relation, so that all encounters all, and each receives its entire right, its entire measure of life, and in the continuation each part becomes equal to the whole in its completeness. ... ³⁶

The experience of union – that is, of the united coherence of nature (*Einheitszusammenhang der Natur*), about which Hölderlin speaks so often – must be experienced in its liveliness. Here Hölderlin puts to work the representation of the relations of the parts to the whole and their reversal, which he found in Kant's teleological determination of the objective purposes of nature. Apparently, the artist must create an analogy to the correlation of nature through the work of art. Hölderlin continues to reflect on the fact that

in the continuation each part becomes equal to the whole in its completeness, and by contrast the whole in the continuation becomes equal to the parts in definition, the whole gaining content, the parts intimacy, the whole gaining life, the parts liveliness, the whole in the continuation feeling itself more, the parts fulfilling themselves more. ... ³⁷

This excerpt is representative of many other texts in showing how important the model of the objective purposiveness in nature is for Hölderlin. For Kant it is determinative that "the idea of the whole... [is] the form and combination of all the parts" not as productive origin, but only "as a ground for the cognition of the systematic unity of the form and the combination of all of the manifold" (CJ 5:373). Hölderlin here undertakes a closer determination of this reciprocal relation, which contrasts content and interiority, life and liveliness, feeling and fulfilling, in order for them to determine each other reciprocally at the same

time. In this context he continues to unfold the relationship of feeling and its (aesthetic) apprehending more precisely:

for it is an eternal law, that the whole which is rich in import in its unity does not feel itself with the definition and liveliness, not in that sensuous unity, in which its parts feel themselves, they also being a whole, only more loosely connected, so that one can say, if the liveliness, definition, unity of the parts, where their wholeness is felt, exceeds *their* limits, and turns into suffering and the most absolute decision and isolation *possible*, only then does the whole feel itself *in these parts* as lively and definite as they feel themselves in a calmer but also moved condition in their more limited wholeness. ...³⁸

This excerpt from the fragment “Das lyrische dem Schein nach idealische Gedicht...” gives a brief impression of the way in which Hölderlin reinterpreted and developed Kant’s teleological concept for his theory of poetry.

Yet because living expression, which brings to representation a play of moods, colors, and tones of reality, also belongs to the liveliness of poetry, Hölderlin evidently also learned from somewhere else to articulate the value of sentiments and feelings. In connection to this search for a lively poetry he will work out his teaching on the variation of tones in various theoretical paths of reflection.

The truest truth: The *highest poetry* in which the *unpoetical* becomes *poetical*

There are degrees of enthusiasm. Beginning with merriness, which is probably the lowest, right up to the enthusiasm of a general, who in the midst of battle in his clarity mightily maintains his genius, there is an infinite ladder. To ascend and descend this ladder, is the vocation and bliss of the poet.³⁹

This is what Hölderlin notes in the first of his *Frankfurter Aphorismen*. Speaking of the “enthusiasm of a general, who in the midst of battle in his clarity mightily maintains his genius,” as he does here, may surprise the reader who does not expect such tones in Hölderlin. Yet if one remembers his passion for Homer’s *Iliad*, some of his poems, such as “Die Schlacht” [The Battle] or his passionate veneration of “Buonaparte” (also the title of a poem), one realizes that Hölderlin the poet delights in imagining himself into the “enthusiasm of a general” in the same way as he also learned to ascend and descend the ladder of the pleasures of joy, of enthusiasm, and of many other emotions. Subsequently he developed a teaching of an alternation of tones, in order to be able to grasp

more easily the layers of emotion in poetry and to organize them in conscious ways in the poetic work, thus lending liveliness to his creations.

There are at least two sources that could have provided guidance for Hölderlin regarding how poetry can become livelier and closer to reality in respect to the sentiments and feelings expressed in it. Some evidence points to Shakespeare, some of whose writings Hölderlin studied while he was working on *Empedokles*. In the spring of 1798, Hölderlin wrote to Karl Gok in response to a communication that has not survived:

Shakespeare has taken hold of you entirely – I can well believe it. You too would like to write something of that sort, dear Karl, and I would too. It is no small ambition. You would like to because you would like to have an influence on your nation; I should like to for that reason too, but even more to satisfy my soul, which thirsts for perfection, in the production of such a great work of art.⁴⁰

To his former university friend Christian Neuffer, in the beginning of June 1799, Hölderlin announced his ideas for his own contributions to the journal he had planned. Among some other great poets, these also concern Shakespeare. His intention is

setting out of the peculiar beauty of their works, or of individual parts of them. On...Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, on the characters of Brutus and Cassius in his *Julius Caesar*, on *Macbeth* and so on. All these essays will as far as possible be written in a lively manner likely to be of general interest, mostly in the form of letters.⁴¹

Writings by Hölderlin on Shakespeare are not extant, but he must have come to terms with this poet and the aforementioned dramas, and especially with their dazzling characters and depictions of figures, in order to advance the work on his tragedy *Empedokles*. From Shakespeare, the keen observer of human nature, Hölderlin must have picked up suggestions for composing in a more applied, lively, and realistic manner. A reconstruction of the traces this may have left in Hölderlin's work would be worthwhile, but it cannot be pursued in this context.

Other evidence leads to a different kind of observer of human nature, to Spinoza, whose work Hölderlin studied in the context of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* [Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn] (1785 and 1789), which Hölderlin read during the years in Tübingen and continued until the first reading of Fichte's *Grundlage* during the summer of 1794.⁴² In one of the *Frankfurter Aphorismen*, which can probably be dated to

the year 1799, Hölderlin opens with an image that can be found in Spinoza's *Ethics* and which was also employed by Jacobi and Schelling in their early writings. The reference to Spinoza aims directly at the question of a new liveliness of poetry and its poetic realization. Due to its importance, I will quote Hölderlin's aphorism in its entirety:

Only that is the truest truth, in which even error, because it is placed within the whole of a system, in its time and in its place, becomes truth. This is the light that illuminates itself and also the night. This is also the highest poetry, in which even the unpoetic, because it is said at the right time and in the right place in the whole of the work of art, becomes poetic. But for this a ready understanding is most necessary. How can you employ the thing in the right place if you are still shyly tarrying over it and do not know how much is in it, how much or how little to make of it. That is eternal bliss, is the joy of the gods, that one sets every individual thing into the place in the whole where it belongs; hence without understanding, or without thoroughly organized feeling, no excellence, no life.⁴³

Evidently it has become obvious to Hölderlin that, besides the realization of the ideal of organization, which art can give to the human being, he now especially pursues the truth of the real, which is to be determined with the truth of the ideal of beauty. The truth of poetry, of the work of art, is expressed through a superlative ("the truest truth"), according to which the unpoetic becomes poetic by receiving a proper and appropriate place within the entirety of a work of art. Accordingly, shadow is added to [*gesellt*] light, the ignoble is added to the noble, and beauty must also be seen in the context of real life. In the case of the beautiful, Hölderlin apparently does not dare to speak of its opposite, the ugly.

In order to think through this truth, Hölderlin became attentive to a figure of thought in Spinoza, which the latter formulates as follows in Proposition 43 of the second part of his *Ethics*: "What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false."⁴⁴ The second part of the *Ethics* is devoted to epistemology, in which Spinoza presents especially the sensuous as the first mode of cognition and the rational as the second mode, but briefly also already the third mode of cognition, the *scientia intuitiva*, to which the fifth and final part of the *Ethics* is devoted.

As the truth throws light both on itself and on error, so poetry gains in significance and magnitude when it embraces the poetic and the unpoetic, by placing the occasionally ugly reality side by side with the beautiful ideal. Hölderlin's search for what is lively in the work of art gains important support

and corroboration through this dialectical figure of thought in Spinoza. The reciprocating determination (*Wechselbestimmung*) of contrasts, such as those of truth and error or of light and darkness, is the focus of his interest. Hölderlin has long been comfortable with thinking in opposites, grasping diverging tendencies of life as the main characteristic of being, and enlightening theoretically and poetically the mechanism of reciprocating determination, as Fichte validates it in the early *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is no surprise that Hölderlin discovers such a figure of thought in Spinoza, and uses it.

Not only this figure of thought but the entire context of this aphorism is significant, because it seems to have been drafted entirely in reference to Spinoza. The image that is taken up here therefore must be interpreted in direct correlation to Spinoza. Although the contrasts of truth and error are transferred to the contrast of the poetic and the unpoetic, they are certainly not equal. Truth and the poetic are the norm by which the contrast is measured, but in such a way that the norm itself becomes known through this.

It is with "eternal bliss" and "the joy of the gods, that one sets every individual thing into the place in the whole." This can be interpreted without much ado as a direct affirmation of Spinoza's third mode of cognition, which represents joy and love for God. This becomes possible when cognition penetrates things, relationships, and connections and the individual gains his or her place in the whole. Now it is important to realize that, for Spinoza, putting things in their place also includes everything that concerns affective life. Thus, in this aphorism, Hölderlin draws out implications entirely in Spinoza's sense: "hence without understanding, or without thoroughly organized feeling, no excellence, no life." It is obvious that a systematic and well-ordered cognition of understanding is necessary in order to place the individual in the context of a whole. Moreover, Hölderlin sees that a "thoroughly organized feeling" is also necessary. In my opinion, this sentence points especially to Spinoza, for no one besides Spinoza has provided a theory for exactly this.

Furthermore, this insight stands systematically in a direct relationship to Hölderlin's letters. In the letters, insufficiency of self – that is, being more fragile than others – leads Hölderlin to challenge himself to accept and engage what is crushing, destroying, threatening. No other thinker except Spinoza could have taught Hölderlin to acquire a "thoroughly organized feeling" and to ensure the relationship of feeling and understanding. It is baffling how many of Hölderlin's thoughts on the tones of the soul and the alternation of tones developed in his theory of poetry agree in substance with Spinoza's teaching.

Some of the important points of this teaching of affects can be sketched in the following way.⁴⁶ Spinoza insists that the nature of feelings and their affects are neither good nor evil. Nature does not know good or evil. Human valuing attributes this to them. As part of human nature, affects must first be regarded without prejudice. One must gain a clear view of affects, which all

represent modifications of the one life instinct (*Lebenstrieb*). There are affects that strengthen the power of the life instinct, through which the human being can experience various levels of joy and desire, and there are those that weaken the life instinct, in which the human being experiences pain, agony, or dislike. Some affects occur immediately, but most are accompanied by ideas. Modern psychology here distinguishes between primary and secondary feelings or affects. Primary feelings such as rage, fear, or desire are conditions of the soul that are independent of culture, while very many feelings are culturally formed – in Spinoza's terms, they are accompanied by ideas – and are therefore called secondary affects. Annoyance and suffering that cannot be immediately turned off or changed becomes more bearable, according to Spinoza, if it can be explained and made transparent and when it receives its place in the entirety of associations.

According to Spinoza, if one sees through the nature of affects, their relation to things, to cultural contexts, and to their possible causes, then feelings are more easily transformed in the sense of a self-conscious life. Penetrating familiarity with the nature of one's mind and affect makes it possible to delay immediate desires in favor of more significant goals. Strong unpleasant affects only become stronger if they are directly suppressed by means of devaluing, prohibitions, or self-chastisement.

According to Spinoza, a long and disciplined life of clear meditation and of penetrating insight allows us finally to reach the highest joy, a life in the sense of *amor dei intellectualis*.⁴⁷ Clarifying reflection about strong and unpleasant feelings is also necessary for this. Through this process they gradually lose their power over us. Hölderlin formulates this in a pithy way with the words of the final sentence of his aphorism: "That is eternal bliss, is the joy of the gods, that one sets every individual thing into the place in the whole where it belongs; hence without understanding, or without thoroughly organized feeling, no excellence, no life."⁴⁸ Shaped as he is by Kant and Fichte, Hölderlin would certainly not have been satisfied with Spinoza's ethical utilitarianism, yet according to this aphorism he seems to have taken more from Spinoza than has so far been acknowledged. Spinoza's theory of affects demands a readiness to examine the nature of human consciousness and therefore especially also the nature of emotion, without prejudice. The path is opened for the Kantian, and also for Hölderlin, to make use of Kant's antinomy of freedom in order to regard the processes of consciousness as causal-mechanical, hence free of evaluation, and to subject them at the same time and in another respect to evaluation, to freedom and responsibility, and hence also to morality. In my view it is obvious that Kant's antinomies of freedom and the dual regard of things as value-neutral and value-setting is of enormous importance for Hölderlin.⁴⁹

In this respect the privileged place that Hölderlin grants to feeling is remarkable. He maintains in his *Frankfurter Aphorismen*: "But feeling is surely

the poet's best sobriety and reflection, if it is right and warm and clear and forceful. It is a rein and a spur to the spirit. ...hence the feeling is at once both understanding and will."⁵⁰ For Spinoza, it was extraordinarily important to admit feeling as part of human nature, thus, in Hölderlin's words, to see it as part of the organization of nature. Just as Spinoza worked out a theory of affects in order to correct misguided feeling, Hölderlin similarly notes in his *Frankfurter Aphorismen*:

If his feeling is already so sick, the poet can do nothing better than, since he knows it, in no case, to allow himself to be immediately frightened by it, and only to heed it thus far, that he continues slightly more restrainedly, and employs his understanding as easily as possible, in order to correct his feeling immediately, be it limiting or liberating, and, when he has several times helped himself through in this way, return to his feeling its natural certainty and consistency.⁵¹

This reflection similarly permits us to suppose a penetrating occupation with Spinoza's theory of affects, which Hölderlin sought to make serviceable for himself as a person and as a poet.

As witness to the liveliness and the alternation of tones in his late works of poetry, Hölderlin's "Hälfte des Lebens" [Half of Life] may speak for itself without comment. It appeared in the *Taschenbuch für das Jahr 1805* [Pocketbook for the Year 1805] together with eight further poems under the main title "Nachtgesänge" [Night Songs].⁵²

"Hälfte des Lebens"

Mit gelben Birnen hängen
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.⁵³

"Half of Life"

With yellow pears,
And full of wild roses,
The land hangs in the lake,
O dear inclining swans,
And drunk with kisses
You dip your heads
In the holy, sober water.

Ah, where in the winter will
I come upon flowers, and where
The sun's light,
And shadows of the earth?
The walls stand
Speechless and cold, in the wind
The weathervanes clatter.⁵⁴

Notes

1. Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 40.
2. See Violetta L. Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte, 1794–1800* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 17–48.
3. Friedrich Hölderlin to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jena, January 26, 1795, *Essays and Letters*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth (London: Penguin, 2009), 48 (MA 2:568). References to Hölderlin's work cite the English translation, where available, followed by the corresponding German reference to Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Michael Knaupp, 3 vols. (München: Hanser, 1992), abbreviated MA, followed by volume and page number.
4. Friedrich Hölderlin to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jena, January 26, 1795, *Essays and Letters*, 48 (MA 2:568–69).
5. See Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethik in geometrischer Ordnung dargestellt. Lateinisch-Deutsch*, ed. Wolfgang Bartuschat (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999), pt. 1, propositions 14–15 (pp. 30–31).
6. See Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 27–48.
7. This criticism may have been one of the reasons why Fichte moved away from the idea of the absolute I and from his quantitative method in the *Grundlage* of 1794/95 and turned to the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, which he composed from 1796 to 1799. The quantitative method assumes the totality of the reality of the I in the idea, in order to show subsequently how the quanta of reality under the conditions of finite consciousness between the I and the not-I – that is, between the spontaneous efforts of the subject active in mental accomplishment and its objects – are distributed. Dieter Henrich has devoted a major study to Hölderlin's criticism of Fichte and Hölderlin's draft of a response in *Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität* (Henrich employs the title of the earlier edition, *Urtheil und Seyn*), which also includes the philosophical constellation of time. See Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein. Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992).
8. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Hauptwil, March 1801, *Essays and Letters*, 199 (MA 2:898).
9. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Being Judgment Possibility," in *Essays and Letters*, 231 (MA 2:49).
10. For more detail, see Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 140–43.
11. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Fragment von Hyperion, Vorrede*, in MA 1:489.
12. See MA 3:308.
13. Hölderlin, *Hyperion, "Vorrede zur vorletzten Fassung"*, in MA 1:558–59.
14. The thought of an immanence of the completion of beauty in Hölderlin is also emphasized by Dieter Bremer in his study "'Versöhnung ist mitten im Streit'. Hölderlins Entdeckung Heraklits," *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 30 (1996–97): 173–200, esp. 180–85. Manfred Baum emphasizes that Hölderlin, with his conception of necessary being as such, gives arguments against Kant's claim of a practical "ought" ("Metaphysischer Monismus bei Hölderlin und Hegel," *Hegel-Studien* 28 [1993]: 90).
15. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Frankfurt, March [20], 1796, *Essays and Letters*, 69 (MA 2:617–18). See also Hölderlin in his *Frankfurter Aphorismen* of spring 1799, according to which "all cognition should begin with the study of beauty" (Friedrich Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," in *Essays and Letters*, 242 [MA 2:60]).

16. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Frankfurt, June 2, 1796, *Essays and Letters*, 70 (MA 2:619–20).
17. See Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 132–39.
18. See also Hölderlin, *Fragment von Hyperion*, Vorrede, MA 1:489. Here the stages of life are mirrored in the two ideals of the organization of nature (childhood) and the organization that we are able to give to ourselves (mature humanity), which are mediated by the eccentric path (adolescence).
19. Friedrich Hölderlin to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Frankfurt am Main, February 24, 1796, *Essays and Letters*, 67–68 (MA 2:614).
20. Hölderlin, "Being Judgment Possibility," 231–32 (MA 2:49–50).
21. On the equiprimordiality of theory and praxis in Hölderlin and the accompanying "primordial separation [*Urtheilung*]" of the theoretical and the practical in *Seyn, Urtheil, Modalität*, see also Michael Franz, "Das System und seine Entropie. 'Welt' als philosophisches und theologisches Problem in den Schriften Friedrich Hölderlins" (Ph.D. diss., Universität des Saarlandes, 1982), 41ff.
22. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion; or, The Hermit in Greece*, trans. Ross Benjamin (Brooklyn: Archipelago, 2008), 107 (MA 1:683).
23. *Ibid.*, 109 (MA 1:685).
24. See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin Texturen 4. "Wo sind jetzt Dichter?" Homburg, Stuttgart 1798–1800*, ed. Ulrich Gaiert, Valérie Lawitschka, Stefan Metzger, Wolfgang Rapp, and Violetta Waibel (Tübingen: Hölderlin-Gesellschaft, 2002), 133–262.
25. Friedrich Hölderlin to Christian Ludwig Neuffer, Homburg, November 12, 1798, 109–10 (MA 2:711–12). To attempt to gain an "advantage" from what is destructive sounds like a direct reference to Spinoza's *Ethics*, which counsels us to get from affects what is useful for the drive to life. This may not necessarily apply to what is most proximate, but rather what is more useful long-term.
26. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Homburg, June 4, 1799, *Essays and Letters*, 135 (MA 2:769).
27. *Ibid.*, 134–35 (MA 2:768).
28. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," in *Essays and Letters*, 243 (MA 2:60–61).
29. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Homburg, June 4, 1799, *Essays and Letters*, 135–36 (MA 2:769).
30. Friedrich Hölderlin to Isaak von Sinclair, Homburg, December 24, 1798, *Essays and Letters*, 117 (MA 2:723). This is the only extant letter to the friend with whom he became acquainted during Sinclair's study of law in Tübingen (1792–94) and with whom he presumably lived "in a very comfortable garden house above the city" in Jena in 1795 (according to a letter to his sister on April 20, 1795 [MA 2:582] and to Christian Neuffer on April 28, 1795 [MA 2:583 and MA 3:483]). After his separation from the Gontard house in Frankfurt, Sinclair was Hölderlin's closest friend and confidant from September 1798 until his collapse in 1806.
31. See Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 119–231.
32. Friedrich Hölderlin to Isaak von Sinclair, Homburg, December 24, 1798, *Essays and Letters*, 117–18 (MA 2:723).
33. *Ibid.*, 117 (MA 2:723).
34. *Ibid.*, 118 (MA 2:723). Compare this to a similar statement already in 1795 in the preface to the penultimate version of *Hyperion*, MA 1:558.
35. Friedrich Hölderlin, "The lyric, in appearance idealic poem....," in *Essays and Letters*, 303–4 (MA 2:104).
36. *Ibid.*, 304 (MA 2:104–5).

37. *Ibid.*, 304 (MA 2:105).
38. *Ibid.*
39. Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," 240 (MA 2:57).
40. Friedrich Hölderlin to Karl Gok, Frankfurt, February 12, 1798, posted March 14, 1798, *Essays and Letters*, 97 (MA 2:680–81).
41. Friedrich Hölderlin to Christian Ludwig Neuffer, Homburg, June 4, 1799, *Essays and Letters*, 131–32 (MA 2:764–65). As far as I can tell there are no attempts, besides a couple minor beginnings, to reconstruct Hölderlin's reception of Shakespeare extensively from the few documents. Cyrus Hamlin sets forth the interesting thesis that Hölderlin's obvious monologism in his *Empedokles* fragment is due to examples such as that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. See Cyrus Hamlin, "Hölderlin's Hellenism: Tyranny or Transformation," *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 35 (2006–7): 278–80.
42. Henrich has shown and examined in detail the tremendous significance of Jacobi's work for the origin of early German Idealism in his book, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein*. See also Margarete Wegenast, who takes up this suggestion for her own research purposes in *Hölderlins Spinoza-Rezeption und ihre Bedeutung für die Konzeption des "Hyperion"* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990). For the relationship between the reception of Fichte and Spinoza, see Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 27–48.
43. Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," 241–42 (MA 2:59). For the dating of all of the *Frankfurter Aphorismen* (translated in Adler and Louth's *Essays and Letters* as "Seven Maxims"), see MA 3:389. The commentary to this aphorism in the collected works points out a parallel to Spinoza's *Ethics*. It also refers to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Löwe, 1785), 29. One should add the 1789 edition of Jacobi's *Spinoza-Buch* ([Breslau: Löwe, 1789], 39–40), where Jacobi adopts Spinoza's image in his report about a conversation with Lessing for his own philosophy which goes beyond that of Spinoza. Schelling also employed this image in the preface to *Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (1795), IPP 155. See also MA 3:390. Finally, see Wegenast, *Hölderlins Spinoza-Rezeption*, 68–69, where she compares the relationship between Spinoza and Schelling. She does not comment on Hölderlin's *Frankfurter Aphorismen*.
44. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *A Spinoza Reader: The "Ethics" and Other Works*, trans. and ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pt. 2, prop. 43 (p. 142).
45. For the theory of reciprocating determination, see Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte*, 117–97.
46. For a more rigorous introduction to Spinoza's theory of affects in the *Ethics*, see Wolfgang Bartuschat, *Spinozas Theorie des Menschen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992), 291–310; Reiner Wiehl, *Die Vernunft in der menschlichen Unvernunft. Das Problem der Rationalität in Spinozas Affektenlehre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983); and Thomas Kisser, "Affektenlehre als Ethik. Spinozas Begriff des conatus und die Konzeption menschlichen Handelns," in *Spinozas Lehre im Kontext*, ed. Achim Engstler and Robert Schnepf (Hildesheim: Olms, 2002), 215–44.
47. See also Violetta L. Waibel, "Philosophieren als Weg. Anmerkungen zu Spinoza und Fichte mit einem Exkurs zu Hölderlin," in *Affektenlehre und amor Dei intellectualis. Die Rezeption Spinozas im Deutschen Idealismus, in der Romantik und in der Gegenwart*, ed. Violetta L. Waibel (Hamburg: Meiner, 2012), 200–230.
48. Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," 242 (MA 2:59).

49. See Violetta L. Waibel, "Voraussetzungen und Quellen: Kant, Fichte, Schelling," in *Hölderlin. Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Johann Kreuzer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 90–106.
50. Hölderlin, "Seven Maxims," 240–41 (MA 2:58).
51. *Ibid.*, 241 (MA 2:58).
52. See MA 3:263.
53. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Hälfte des Lebens," in MA 1:445.
54. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Half of Life," in *Odes and Elegies*, trans. and ed. Nick Hoff (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 181.

Part V

Schelling

After [Schelling] comes the violent dissociation of the elements that are held together by the strength of his soul, and as a result we see the *disjecta membra* of his experiences scattered through the following generations: the experiences of the will and the nirvana in Schopenhauer; the craving for the inner return in Kierkegaard; the psychology of the unconscious in Freud; the experiences of Dionysus and of immanent grace in Nietzsche; the social critique of the age and the longing for the Third Realm in the mass movements of Communism and National Socialism; the ominous orgiastic experiences with their anxiety in Nietzsche, in Freud, and in the orgasms of destruction and self-destruction of the General Wars. This scattering of the elements is the signature of the crisis, as their balance was the signature of Schelling's greatness.

— Eric Voegelin, *Last Orientation* (1945)¹

¹ Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas: The New Order and Last Orientation*, vol. 25 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Jürgen Gebhardt and Thomas A. Hollweck (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 241.

21

Schelling: A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Odysseus of German Idealism

Bruce Matthews

Our current understanding of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling warrants replacing Hegel's caricature of him as philosophical Proteus with a historically accurate account, in which Schelling emerges more the Odysseus, whose philosophical journey encompasses far more than just the beginnings and end of German Idealism. Indeed, when we consider the territory traversed in the some sixty years of his philosophical activity, we encounter an intellectual terrain that includes not only the otherworldly summit of German Idealism, but also the stormy summits of German Romanticism that appear below the cloud line, as well as the lush plains of what Schelling calls in his final decades his "system of existentialism." Throughout this odyssey the Schelling who emerges refuses to remain confined within the walls of such static systems and philosophical categories, revealing instead a character whose "primal nature" his first wife Caroline characterized as "true granite" whose destiny was "to break through walls."¹

Born near Stuttgart on January 27, 1775, Schelling died in the Swiss Alps at the age of seventy-nine, on August 20, 1854. A child prodigy, he mastered six languages by the age of thirteen, entered the university in Tübingen at fifteen, published his first scholarly article at seventeen, and with Goethe's support became the youngest professor at the university in Jena before turning twenty-five. In this first decade of productivity, Schelling developed a groundbreaking Philosophy of Nature (*Naturphilosophie*) that would lead to discoveries in both the physics of electromagnetism and the biology of evolution. This work formed the real basis for its idealistic complement, a System of Transcendental Idealism which, offering the first systematic use of the unconscious, provided a history of consciousness coming to know itself that culminates in the philosopher's subjective intuition of the absolute, and the artist's concrete and thus objective revelation of it in the work of art.

Over the remaining fifty years of his life Schelling struggled to create a philosophy capable of comprehending as an integrated unity the infinite diversity

of our world. Thus did he tackle the challenge of showing how Idealism and Realism, *Geist* and Nature, must be understood as oppositional polarities of one relational whole, since it was only through such a dynamic system that Schelling thought it possible to understand and harness the transformative power of myths and logos that animates human consciousness. The goal in all of these efforts was to reveal why and how the absolute manifests itself in creation, how the one manifests itself in the diversity of the many, revealing the ideal of his youth, the *hen kai pan* (one and all), since, as he wrote to his son months before he died, "I know of nothing else save this."²

Early life

The initial conditions of Schelling's life determine the course of his journey to a degree that we are only now beginning to appreciate. The fertile and demanding environment of his youth, coupled with an innate genius for language, gave birth to a youth whom some have called "the Mozart of German Philosophy." Born into a family whose clerical roots ran deeper than historical record, his mother's family offered power of the state and church, while his father provided an autodidact's curiosity and intellectual brilliance. Gottlieb Marie, née Cless, was the daughter of the most prominent family of ministers in Stuttgart, while Joseph Friedrich Schelling was a renowned scholar in philology and philosophical theology, whose life and interests anticipated and informed the foundational contours of his son's philosophy. Philosophically, for example, as primus of his class at the Tübingen *Stift*, Schelling's father submitted a *Dissertatio philosophica* that critiqued Leibniz's doctrine of simples (*Dissertatio philosophica de simplicibus, et eorum diversis speciebus*, 1758), presenting the idea of the simple monad as inextricably linked to the central metaphysical questions of ontological monism versus dualism, whether there is a beginning to the universe, and whether an animate or inanimate universe is more consistent with the responses to the first two questions. In addition to Leibniz, Descartes, and Newton, Schelling's father studied the relevant positions of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Church Fathers, and, as was *de rigueur* for this period, the teachings of Jakob Böhme and his followers.³

Although born in Leonberg, the young Schelling grew up in the magical cloister school of Bebenhausen, a village just outside Tübingen nestled in a small valley surrounded by thickly wooded hills. Appointed second professor in 1777, his father moved his family into the largest building inside the medieval walls of this former Cistercian monastery. Due to his position and the size of his residence, Joseph sometimes housed students, one of whom was none other than Carl Immanuel Diez, who in 1781 not only lived and dined with the Schellings, but was also charged with watching over the six-year-old Fritz. Due to the lack of an adequate school in the village, Joseph directed his son's

education, which consisted largely of Friedrich reading freely in his father's library. At the age of seven he began to learn Latin and Greek, and within a year the barely eight-year-old Schelling was sent to the Latin School in the nearby town of Nürtingen, to study with students five years his senior while living with his uncle Nathanael Köstlin, one of the school's instructors. On account of the age difference and thus "his small size," Schelling "was subject to universal teasing," a fact that prompted Köstlin to ask an older student, Friedrich Hölderlin, to watch out for him.⁴

Although Hölderlin did his best to help out this young child, Schelling was frequently left alone to either defend himself against the older boys with his wit and biting sarcasm, or, more frequently, to retreat into the familiar confines of his uncle's extensive library, where the young Schelling had at his disposal Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, which presents Leibniz's idea of universal substance as the living force of creation, as well as other, more subversive books. In spite of the state church's efforts to control it, Nürtingen at this time was the center of the speculative and unorthodox metaphysics of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger and Philipp Matthäus Hahn. Schelling was particularly drawn to their insistence that all creation was the living and sacred manifestation of God, their integration of the Kabbalah and Plato, and most importantly for his own future philosophy, their grounding of truth in the intellectual intuition of the *Zentralschau* ("central vision" or "glimpse of the center"). Schelling virtually lived in this library, absorbing the ideas of these dissident thinkers whose organic worldview demonstrated the limits of the rational control promised by the Enlightenment. After three years he advanced "so far ahead of the other students, that there was nothing left for him to learn" in Nürtingen, and so, at the age of 11 he was sent back to his father in Bebenhausen.⁵

Schelling returned to private instruction in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew with his father and his new colleague, Professor Johannes Reuchlin. At the age of fourteen his genius with languages became fully evident. He was able to draw from memory parallel passages found in Latin and Greek authors, immediately translate dictated German into Latin hexameter, and summarize and translate passages into Greek, Hebrew, and even Arabic.⁶ Accepted into the university in Tübingen at fourteen, his father delayed his entry for a year to allow his son to mature a bit more.

It was during this year that Schelling received his foundational schooling in philosophy. He was taken under the wing of the more philosophically minded colleague of his father, Professor Reuchlin, who gave him his first books on Plato, Leibniz, and logic, and who devoted himself to tutoring his *praecox ingenium* in the history of philosophy in general, but particularly in Plato's Doctrine of Ideas and Leibniz's Monadology.⁷ This same year Diez returned to Bebenhausen as Vicar, where he spent considerable time discussing Kant and

Naturphilosophie with Schelling's neighbor and family friend, the soon-to-be-famous professor of biology, Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer. The focus of his work was the "organic forces" that drove the evolutionary development of "various organizations" of the *scala natura*, an idea central to Schelling's father's analysis of the *manifestatio sui* of organic life treated in his Magistar dissertation, as well as Oetinger's *ordo generativus* and Hahn's speculative metaphysics. The formative impact that this intellectual milieu had on Schelling's own later constructions cannot be overstated.

Tübingen

Schelling entered the Tübingen *Stift* in 1790 at the age of fifteen, three years ahead of schedule. Due to his father's requests, Schelling's first roommates included the familiar Hölderlin, as well as G. W. F. Hegel, a former student of Schelling's uncle in Stuttgart. Although both were five years his senior, and thus never embraced Schelling as a true friend, the three of them formed a bond of sorts through their shared love of ideas and visions of a future that, in practical terms, did not include careers as ministers of the state church.

The five-year course of study began with two years of philosophy, followed by three years of theology. The quality of professors and instruction at the university were among the best in Germany; whether it be in biblical exegesis, Presocratic philosophy, or logic and the sciences, publications by the Tübingen professoriate were at the cutting edge of their fields. This was especially true of junior faculty, such as Schelling's lifelong role model, the "Kantian *enragé*," Carl Immanuel Diez, and even more so for the scholar of Presocratic aestheticism, C. P. Conz, whom Schelling singled out as the most significant teacher during his first two years at university.

Schelling earned his Magister with the normal comprehensive exams and two essays, and as *primus*, he also wrote and defended his own dissertation, which presented the account in Genesis of the origin of evil as the necessary price of human freedom, and thus knowledge. The quality of this chapter was so impressive that it not only warranted publication but also occasioned reviews questioning whether it was actually authored by a seventeen-year-old student and not an established biblical scholar. Thematically, Schelling announced with this chapter his lifelong interest in the problematic relation of evil and freedom, as well as his conviction that any adequate understanding of this central philosophical problem must incorporate our species' earliest attempts in myth to comprehend this undeniable fact of human existence. This position became even clearer in an chapter published the next year, "On the Myths, Historical Dicta, and Philosophemes of the Most Ancient World" (1793), in which Schelling further developed a new philosophical understanding of

myth as “a historical schematism of nature (that one has not yet begun to explain)” (SW I/1:396). Significant for our purposes is the fact that in these first published writings Schelling announces the core metaphysical questions of myth and evil, freedom and knowledge, as well as the inability of language to adequately answer these questions, that will guide the development of his philosophical corpus.

After Hegel and Hölderlin graduated to become private tutors, Schelling began his theology studies in 1792. Bored by his theological studies, Schelling returned to the family habits of the autodidact, skipping lectures to read the original texts of Plato, Leibniz, Paul, and the Gnostics, as well as the recent chapter by Salomon Maimon on *Progress in Philosophy* (1793), and, most significantly, Fichte’s anonymous review of *Aenesidemus* (1794). Fichte’s idea of the self-positing I echoed the creative *manifestatio sui* of his father’s dissertation, as well as his father’s use of the dynamic opposition between the “Ego” and “Non-Ego” to account for consciousness.⁸ This was the conceptual soil Schelling refers to when he notes how Fichte’s writings “brought to life” ideas “that he had for some time already carried around” (SW I/1:87), and which he laid out in his compact chapter published a few months later, “On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy” (1794). Here Schelling argues that philosophy must display an integrative reciprocity whereby form and content mutually engender each other, thereby establishing a pattern of activity whose *manifestatio sui* repeats in the self-positing of the I of self-consciousness. Schelling later explained to Fichte how this first chapter was only “in part” occasioned by Fichte’s *Aenesidemus* review, a fact that became even clearer in Schelling’s next chapter, *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (1795), in which he approaches this same nexus of ideas from a more substantive standpoint that incorporates a much wider spectrum of ideas in its explicitly stated attempt, following Jacobi, to “uncover and reveal existence [*Daseyn*]” (SW I/1:156).

Just months later Schelling tells Hegel to expect yet another chapter, his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), which he later describes as a “lively polemic” directed at those who derive the “so-called moral proof of God’s existence” from the “opposition of subject and object.”⁹ His central critique again takes aim at the nominalist’s reduction of the Absolute to a mere being (*Wesen*) of abstraction, a “being beyond all being” – instead of the “being of all beings [*Wesen aller Wesen*].”¹⁰ Returning to his core claim made in *Of the I*, Schelling insists that “the main business of all philosophy,” is to make sense of “the problem of the existence [*Daseyn*] of the world” (SW I/1:313). To uncover and reveal this real existence, which he understood as the “oldest and holiest idea of... the unchanging Being [*Sein*] that lies at the ground of all that exists,” was a creative task beyond the reach of philosophers enthralled by the analysis of dead and abstract concepts.¹¹ What was called for instead was a philosophy that sought to disclose and reveal being as art reveals beauty, by allowing this

being to operate as “an inward principle that creates its own material from within,” since “true art, or rather, the divine in art” is precisely this inward principle of being (SW I/1:285).

Acutely aware that he was being received as a disciple of Fichte, Schelling rushed to get into print his *New Deduction of Natural Right* (1795) before Fichte finished his own such treatise (*Foundations of Natural Right*, 1797), since, as Schelling writes to Niethammer, “I would not like it if another published before me and if people thought I had followed in his steps.”¹²

Leipzig

In the spring of 1796, Schelling traveled to Leipzig with the two young barons he had been hired to guide through their first years at university. Finally free of the limits of theological orthodoxy, Schelling intensified his work with the natural sciences which, motivated by his admiration of Hahn, he had begun in Tübingen and continued in Stuttgart, where he had studied the work of his neighbor and family friend, Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer. The time was ripe for new discoveries. Lavoisier’s discovery of oxygen in 1778 effectively refuted Kant’s banishment of chemistry from science, since this discovery made it evident that chemistry was in fact quantifiable and thus more than a mere aggregate of observational statements, as Kant had claimed. The recent discovery of galvanism demonstrated how electricity and the chemical process are integrated at a higher level, indicating to Schelling an underlying order to nature that would, in its scope, exceed the limits imposed upon it by Kant’s metaphysics of nature. The bridge to grasping this order of the world was to be found in our reason, which, as itself an organ developed according to nature’s laws, would lead to an *a priori* science of the causes of empirical phenomena.

That fall Schelling began two manuscripts, the monograph *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, published in late spring 1797, and a series of shorter chapters published over the next several years in Niethammer’s *Philosophisches Journal*. The latter chapters, now known as the *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the “Science of Knowledge”*, were, like all of his early texts, written in great haste as Schelling struggled to earn enough money with his writing to free him from the “golden mediocrity” of the life of a private tutor.¹³ Consequently, these early iterations of his philosophy are to be seen more as installments of an ongoing work in progress.

Yet there is a more important philosophical reason for Schelling’s strategy, one that speaks to his conviction that, just as language can never exhaust the fact of existence, no one thinker or method can ever attain to a comprehensive account of existence. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in a letter of 1796 to Hegel, in which, urging him to finally take the risk of publishing, he writes that philosophy will only advance if “young men” resolve “to undertake

and risk everything, to come together and pursue the same work from different sides – not in one way, but rather from different ways.”¹⁴ Philosophers must engage in an iterative process that incorporates a plurality of methods and approaches, a virtual *Symphilosophie*, which are nonetheless all united in their shared pursuit of the aims of philosophy. Thus in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* Schelling explicitly explains why he does not yet call that work a *completed system*, since this would be impossible given its status as the first iteration of one philosopher. He makes his position even more explicit in his next manuscript, published in May 1798, *On the World Soul: A Hypothesis of the Higher Physics to Explain the Universal Organism*. In the forward he notes what a “service” for “this science” it is “to risk” any preliminary theory, “so that the acuity of others may work to at least discover and refute error” in his words and ideas (SW I/2:447). The magnitude of this science’s subject – Nature as Absolute – takes precedence over the individual thinker’s claims to a complete and exhaustive system. The finite conditions under which humanity struggles to obey our unlimited passion for knowing will ensure, as Schelling writes in 1797, that we will be forever engaged in the “infinite tasks” of science (SW I/1:451). Perhaps the clearest statement of this core principle of Schelling’s philosophical practice appears in his sixth *Briefe*:

Nothing upsets the philosophical mind more than when he hears that from now on all philosophy is supposed to lie caught in the shackles of one system. Never has he felt greater than when he sees before him the infinitude of knowledge. The entire dignity of his science consists in the fact that it will never be completed. In that moment in which he would believe to have completed his system, he would become unbearable to himself. He would, in that moment, cease to be a *creator*, and would instead descend to being an instrument of his creation. (SW I/1:306)

Here we have a succinct articulation of his ethical conviction vis-à-vis the *dignity* of philosophy, which in defending philosophy’s unending struggle with existence’s inexhaustible meaning is wholly opposed to the dream of finality and completeness found in a Hegel or Kant.

Shortly thereafter, Schelling traveled to Jena at the invitation of Schiller and Fichte to attend an event where they have arranged for him to meet Goethe, all in the hopes of securing a position for him in Jena. Schelling charmed Goethe and they spent the next few days engaged in experiments in optics. In June, on Goethe’s insistence, Schelling received the formal invitation to become a professor in Jena. On his way there in August he stopped in Dresden to visit the art collections and make his acquaintance with the budding Romantic Circle: August Wilhelm Schlegel and his wife Caroline, Friedrich Schlegel and his partner Dorothea Veit, Friedrich von Hardenberg, Fichte, and others.

Jena

Schelling arrived in Jena in October 1798 and immediately began a series of lectures titled *On the True Concept of the Philosophy of Nature*. In May 1799 he published these lectures for his students under the still tentative title *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. In both he sought to offer an integrated construction of all of nature's powers, be they organic, gravitational, or chemical, that was grounded in the inner principle of nature's own productivity. The next semester he began lectures that would serve as the basis for his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, published in 1800, advancing a detailed account of the tripartite system he announced as early as 1798, a dialectic in which necessity and freedom emerge as phases in the historical development of self-consciousness. The theoretical pole of this process designates the unconscious and objective evolution presented in his *Naturphilosophie*, which develops into subjective consciousness, whose free actions constitute his practical philosophy of history; both the theoretical and practical then ultimately culminate in the work of art, thereby revealing the unity of freedom and necessity in the experience of art's beauty.

Although his lectures were standing room only, as a junior professor his livelihood depended on the fees students paid to hear his lectures, as well as what he earned from his publications – a fact that continued to drive him to publish as much and as often as possible. His first year in Jena was marred by Fichte's *Atheismusstreit*, ultimately leading to Fichte's dismissal in March 1799. Schelling's loyal defense of Fichte made him an enemy of the conservative, pro-Kantian *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* – a fact exacerbated by his increasingly intimate relationship with Caroline Schlegel, the hostess of the Romantics, and, legally speaking, the spouse of the roaming lothario, August Wilhelm Schlegel. Boxed in by these confines, he wrote to Fichte in Berlin of his frustration with this situation, lamenting that "I am not half the man I wish to be," stating his intentions of leaving Jena for study in Bamberg and then Vienna, in order to finish his study of science and medicine.¹⁵ As rumors of his departure to Vienna circulated through Jena, however, financial constraints forced him to visit Bamberg during the summer of 1800 to study with Andreas Röschlaub and Adalbert Marcus, the two leading figures of the new generation of medicine, and both sympathetic supporters of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*.

Fully cognizant of their budding relationship, August Wilhelm Schlegel escorted Caroline Schlegel and her daughter from a previous marriage, Auguste Böhmer, to meet Schelling and spend the ensuing months together in the environs of Bamberg. Tragically, Auguste contracted dysentery and died. Devoid of any factual basis, Schelling's enemies in Jena spread the rumor that he was to blame for the beloved child's death. The grief of both was immense: Caroline longed to join her daughter in death, and Schelling wished to stay in

Bamberg and never return to Jena. Yet he found it necessary to return to Jena for financial and other reasons, where he lectured that winter on his System of Transcendental Idealism.

During these last months of 1800 Schelling wrote the brief but very important chapter, "On the True Concept of *Naturphilosophie* and the Right Way to Solve Its Problems." Here he again argues that philosophy must "return to its ancient (Greek) division into physics and ethics, which are then first united through a third part (poetic or philosophy of art)" (SW I/4:92). The goal of such a philosophy is not an absolute idealism in the sense of Bishop Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, but rather a "real-idealism" in which "an ideal-realism has become objective" and made real in the concrete work of art (SW I/4:87). Schelling offers a scathing critique of the misuse of the term "idealism," asking if there is "any other way to philosophize than through idealism?" He continues, "Above everything else, I wish that this expression would be made more precise than it has in the past. There is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the self. The former is for me the more originary, from which the latter is derived" (SW I/4:84). He continues that it is only through a "depotentiated [*depotenzirt*] I" that philosophy can begin with nature, and therewith break "out of the unavoidable circle" of subjectivity characteristic of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which, by positing the self as originary, results only in a subjective "philosophizing about philosophy" (SW I/4:85). What Schelling instead seeks to create is a systematic account – a science in the sense of *Wissenschaft* – of the real manifestation, indeed, the revelation of idealism in the objective material world. This is an approach that demands "a different way of seeing all of philosophy and idealism itself," a different way of seeing "which sooner or later will become necessary to do" (SW I/4:87). Again quite frank about the limited and thus iterative nature of this process, Schelling acknowledges that claims of total and exhaustive success are impossible; rather, "one can only say that this particular attempt to present such a science is not yet successful" (SW I/4:93).

Having left Jena during the atheism controversy, Fichte attempted to transplant the "Jena circle" to Berlin, where they would form an institute with its own journal. Although Fichte's vision briefly seduced the Schlegel brothers, Schelling, and Schleiermacher, their inability to agree on who would be in charge of this institute ruined the plan. Another casualty of this failed attempt was the relationship between Fichte and Schelling. Unwilling to sacrifice his own philosophy for the sake of agreeing with Fichte, tensions blew up into open disagreement and a final break, which occurred when Schelling learned that Fichte was now claiming that "Schelling had never understood me" (GA III/5, no. 619). Their last exchange of letters was in January 1802.

In the meantime, Hegel, after coming into his inheritance that released him from financial worry, wrote to Schelling in November of 1800, seeking advice about his career. Although Schelling said that Hegel must "strengthen himself"

with study before coming to Jena, Schelling insists that he come as soon as possible so that he may help him with a new journal Schelling is starting.¹⁶ Hegel arrived in January, and under Schelling's guidance published *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* four months later, and, due to Schelling's rather forceful and controversial advocacy, Hegel completed his *Habilitation* process in fall 1801. After two years of planning, in 1802 and 1803 Schelling issued the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, which provided him with full editorial control over the dissemination of his philosophy. True to his pluralistic embrace of *Symphilosophie*, he refused to attach his name to any of the articles, thereby fueling endless debate about whether Schelling or Hegel was their author.

During the Jena years, Schelling continued to publish at an astonishing rate, driven both by his desire for more systematic clarity and by financial necessity. After completing the *System of Transcendental Idealism* in 1800, it remained for him to show how the dualism of the ideal and real emerged from their primordial unity, as well as to live up to his own demand that philosophy culminate in art, a challenge which could only be met by transforming his own philosophy into a creative form of poesy. The first question he answered with the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* in 1801, followed up by *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* in 1802. The second challenge he responded to in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Art* (1801) and his dialogue *Bruno: On the Divine Principle of Things* (1802).

But by far his most influential work of this time was his published lectures *On University Studies* (1803), which rejected utility as the guiding ideal of a university, instead advancing the principle of absolute academic freedom and with it a modern curriculum. His theories of education would attract the interest not only of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who would later found the University of Berlin, but of the reformers working to modernize the educational system in Bavaria. Schelling was sought out to help design the new curriculum of the university in Würzburg, and in April 1803 he was offered an appointment as full professor of the Philosophy of Nature. There he had the chance to further pursue his scientific studies, as well as enjoy his first salaried position – which he would need to support himself and Caroline, given her recent and very amicable divorce from Schlegel.¹⁷

Würzburg

Schelling and Caroline left Jena in May and were married in June by his father. Days before his arrival in Würzburg that fall, Schelling was asked by the Bavarian authorities charged with secularizing their educational system to keep a low profile, since both his person and his writings had already sparked protests from the mostly Catholic faculty of the university. This was due in

part to the fact that Schelling was now one of the best-known philosophers in Germany who, since he was clearly not a disciple of Fichte, was the object of intense scrutiny and criticism by the conservative establishment, including both the Kantians in philosophy as well as the majority of medical doctors who strongly defended their clysters-and-leeches approach to illness. Such criticism was facilitated by the increasing number of self-proclaimed followers of “the Schellingian philosophy” whose slavish imitations of Schelling’s philosophy was matched in their intensity only by the degree to which they failed to understand and thus communicate his system. Within days of the start of Schelling’s tenure, the Catholic bishop forbade all students of his seminary to attend Schelling’s lectures, a fact which, unfortunately, did not stop others from actually protesting against his lectures.¹⁸

This resistance did not keep students from flooding his courses, nor did it halt the continued development of his ideas, as his lectures offered a new iteration of *On University Studies*, the *System of Entire Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*, as well as a more comprehensive lecture series on *The Philosophy of Art*. Given the hostile environment, Schelling refrained from more direct and public responses, instead channeling his energy into writing a rebuttal to his critics, the most important of whom was his onetime ally, Karl Eschenmayer, who articulated the most cogent version of the widespread criticism that, contrary to Schelling’s claims, philosophy could have no rational understanding of the Absolute.

Appearing in May 1804, the aptly titled *Philosophy and Religion* announced in perhaps its clearest articulation yet the trajectory, form, and substance of Schelling’s philosophical interests. Echoing his writings from Jena, the form of this chapter melded philosophy with art in order to reclaim its substance, which was none other than the central themes of the metaphysical tradition that philosophy had surrendered to religion: the why and how of creation, the freedom of both the creator and the created, the task of revealing the divine glory of creation, as well as the origin and nature of evil. Free of the need to uphold the appearance of a common front with Fichte against the Kantian rear guard, Schelling now fully engaged his program of creating a more positive, poetic philosophy, drawing in this chapter the first explicit distinction between a negative philosophy of logical analysis and a positive philosophy of free existence (SW I/4:43).

In 1805, Schelling published his *Aphorisms as an Introduction to Naturphilosophie* in the first issue of his new journal, the *Yearbook of Medicine as Science*. Here he makes it clear that he wants to be the catalyst for “a school” of philosophy, but only in “the way there were once schools of poetry,” in which there would be “no pupils nor...master.” Instead, Schelling claims that even in his austere *System* of 1801 he had done nothing other than to “furnish the element for endlessly possible insights” into both “nature and the intelligible world” (SW

I/7:145). Describing the course he now pursues, he asserts that the “religion of the philosopher has the complexion of nature”; a “robust complexion of him who with bold courage descends into the depths of nature” in order to discover “the wholeness of nature” that includes the free creation of the world, as well as the reality of evil (SW I/7:144). This account echoes a passage from *Philosophy and Religion* that claims: “Whoever holds that good can be recognized without evil commits the greatest of all errors, for in philosophy, as in Dante’s poem, the path toward heaven leads through the abyss [*Abgrund*]” (SW I/6:43). And it was this path that marks Schelling’s trajectory through the coming decades as he wrestles to integrate the reality of the abyss into a system which, some forty years later in Berlin, would overcome the divide of philosophy and religion through what he calls a “philosophical religion.”

In 1806 Schelling published chapters addressing the central metaphysical problem of *On the Relation of the Finite to the Infinite* and *On the Relation of the Real and Ideal in Nature, or Development of First Principles of Naturphilosophie from the Principles of Gravity and Light*, as well as his *Presentation of the True Relationship of Naturphilosophie to the Improved Fichtean Doctrine*. All three chapters betray his renewed interest in addressing what he earlier designated as “the principal business of every philosophy,” namely the business of dealing with “the problem of the *Daseyn* of the world”; a problem of how to account for “the transition” – and therewith the relation – “of the infinite to finite” (SW I/1:314). For the first time Schelling begins to use Plato’s concept of relative nonbeing (τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) to account for this transition (SW I/7:297), employing it in parallel fashion to account for the relation of “groundless being” to existence (SW I/2:378). Put bluntly, it is precisely this relation, this “band” between the infinite and finite, between groundless being and existence, that generates and unites the being of our world as nature (SW I/2:365). And it is when humanity severs this bond and elevates itself as the center and originator of reality that the destructive desires of our species are unleashed. Directing his critique at all of modern philosophy after Descartes, but specifically at Fichte, Schelling argues that denying this bond of reciprocity and limiting reason to the sphere of the subject “removes the soul” from nature, destroying its “divine principle” (SW I/5:273). Consequently, Schelling charges Fichte with advocating an idealism that “annihilates nature,” since it values its resources only to the degree that they can be “developed” and “used” as commodities for “economic purposes” (SW I/7:110, 117).

Munich

After defeat in the third coalition war, Bavaria was forced to exchange Würzburg for Tyrol, returning the city-state back to the Catholic fold, now under the protection of Austria. The services of Protestant Schelling were then

no longer needed, and he, like the rest of the Bavarian administrators, returned to Munich in April to receive his new appointment. The liberal reforms initiated by the Bavarian government in the first decade of the nineteenth century sought to modernize, secularize, and centralize educational institutions at all levels, including even the highest, the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. Reform here, however, consisted of collecting the best scholars of the land, which for Schelling results in his now being made a member of the Academy. His first public address to the Academy in October 1807, *On the Relationship of the Fine Arts to Nature*, ignited the reading public of Munich in its presentation of art as the manifestation of nature's fullness of being, whose unmediated materiality "elevates it out of time," thereby freeing it and us from the "becoming and decay" of existence (SW I/6:303). Much of the acclaim he received was due to the crystalline clarity and poetic form of his address, testifying in short to the further realization of Schelling's goal to transform his own philosophy itself into an aesthetic work. The success of this talk resulted in his promotion to Secretary of the Academy of Sciences.

This same year Hegel published his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which he levels a rather direct polemic against Schelling. Due to Hegel's tenuous existence in Jena, they had been exchanging letters regularly in Schelling's efforts to secure Hegel a permanent position. Hegel had told him of his first real book, and Schelling was looking forward to reading it. Upon receiving a copy from Hegel, however, Schelling was a bit shocked at the tone of Hegel's words, and he wrote to Hegel asking him to explain his charges. As if to twist the blade of betrayal, Hegel never responded, unilaterally ending twelve years of friendly correspondence.

In May 1809 Schelling published his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (the *Freiheitsschrift*), which, motivated by the charge of pantheism leveled at his system by Jacobi and Friedrich Schlegel, further developed his philosophical retrieval of the religious ideas of divine creation, the nature of human freedom, and the reality of evil. Tying together the themes of creation and the reality of freedom and evil addressed in *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), as well as his more recent attempts to account for the transition and unifying relation of the infinite and finite, Schelling advances an organic understanding of creation in which its divine source exhibits the presence of relative nonbeing. Through the use of his disjunctive logic of organism Schelling recasts the traditional contradictory dualities of philosophy as dynamic contraries whose difference includes their unity, relating in a way similar to the two poles of a magnet. Evil thus becomes the will misdirected toward itself, instead of orientated toward that divine source of life that transcends its own self-interest. Extending his dynamic process to its genetic source, he presents the divine life as the originary being of creation, whose power Schelling can now only adequately describe as desire ("*Wollen ist Urseyn*" [SW I/7:350]), while

the only adequate way to convey such ideas is by further developing the mythopoetic form of his philosophy as art. No longer to be found in the texts of "historical faith," Schelling instead seeks ideas and archetypes in the "immediate knowledge" of experience (SW I/7:416). Interpreting these archetypes, "understanding this unwritten revelation," remains the goal of Schelling's attempt to present the "true system of religion and science" (SW I/7:416).

During a visit that summer to his parents in their new residency in Maulbronn, Caroline fell ill and within two days died of dysentery, the very illness that had taken her daughter Auguste nine years earlier. Emotionally devastated, Schelling retired in January of 1810 to Stuttgart, residing with his brother Karl, now a prominent doctor. His journals document a return to the writings of Oetinger and Hahn, and his intensive engagement with the ideas of his youth. In February he began a series of private talks given to a small circle of friends and relations, now known as the "Stuttgart Seminars." Presenting his system to this circle of intellectually engaged laypeople led Schelling to distill his ideas into their most compact and elegant expression yet, making these lectures one of the most direct avenues into his thought for the contemporary reader.

After returning to Munich in October 1810, Schelling began *The Ages of the World*, a mesmerizing project that sought to present the "true system of religion and science" in an even more robust form of his poeticizing philosophy, which he now designates a "narrating philosophy [*erzählende philosophie*]" in the Homeric sense of *μῦθος*, as story or narrative (WA 63, SW II/3:111). A year before his death he writes that "the Ages of the World is not, as so many think, a historical-philosophical work, but rather deals with the *χρόνου ἀωνίου*," the mystery of eternity becoming time, about which Paul writes in Romans 16:25.¹⁹ Once again Schelling addresses the dynamic relation of difference, not, however, as in the ground-existence polarity of the *Freiheitsschrift*, but rather the even more elemental relation of eternity to time. Yet both treatments must wrestle with the same impossibility of making coherent a polarity in which one pole lies beyond the causal or time series of explanation. As consciousness emerged from the unknowable unconscious in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), or articulate existence arose from an unknowable ground in the *Freiheitsschrift* (1809), here in the *Ages of the World* Schelling wrestles with how myth may well be the only way to make sense of how sequential time arises from eternity. Beyond the simple negations of discursive thought lies a positive unconditioned substrate. Hence the necessity of a narrating philosophy that provides a positive account of these unconditioned beginnings. As he wrote decades earlier at the *Stift*, the only adequate form for narrating the mystery of eternity becoming time is that of mythic narrating, a form of explication whose claim to truth rests on that which precedes all thought, what Schelling will in the coming decades refer to as *das Unvordenkliche* (the unprethinkable).

While Schelling worked on *The Ages of the World*, Jacobi again attacked him in *On Divine Things and Their Revelation* (1811). Schelling's response was as swift as it was effective, charging Jacobi with falsely accusing him of being an atheist. Schelling's case against Jacobi was damning, with the result that Jacobi lost his position as President of the Academy of Sciences. Later that year Schelling married Pauline Gotter, a much younger acquaintance of his deceased wife Caroline, and in the ensuing years she brought him three sons and two daughters. After several years settling into the routine of family life, Schelling received permission in 1820 to lecture as a guest professor at the University in Erlangen, where for the next three years he worked in the welcoming environment of colleagues and newspaper editors who, for once, actually supported his philosophy. Here he finally brought the material generated during the decade of *The Ages of the World* to a public audience, first in his inaugural lectures, *Initia Philosophiae Universae*, then in the original cycle of lectures Schelling now calls *The Philosophy of Mythology*. In 1826 Schelling was appointed professor at the new University of Munich and began his lectures in 1827, when he was also named the President of the Academy of Sciences. In this capacity he became a strong proponent of liberalizing educational policy, most notably introducing new regulations that guarantee students freedom in choosing their courses, as well more freedom to organize and participate in politics.

From 1827 to 1841 Schelling lectured regularly, constantly developing and expanding these final iterations of his system. Schelling struggled with how to integrate the opposing domains of necessity and freedom into a coherent whole. The necessities that drove *The Philosophy of Nature* in 1797 now manifested themselves in the necessary forms of consciousness elucidated in *The Philosophy of Mythology*, whereas the free realm of his philosophy of history became the arena for unfolding the positive existence Schelling addresses in his *Philosophy of Revelation*.

In the ensuing years he further developed his critique of modern philosophy (beginning with Descartes) as a purely negative science of reason, which, exemplified by the anemic method of Hegel's *Logic*, cannot deal with the facticity of existence and thus gives rise to the need for a positive philosophy, a development marked by his lectures in the winter of 1836 on the *System of Positive Philosophy*. Here Schelling locates in Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum* the inversion of thought before being which, purchasing certainty with the price of wholeness, exiles modern philosophy to the solipsistic world of logic, leaving it with no chance of integrating its reflective determinations with the real organic world of living flesh and nature. Schelling's corrective is the progressive method of the positive philosophy, which begins instead with what is transcendent to thought and thus necessarily exists – the *Daseyn* of the world – and then embarks on the never-ending demonstration of the nature and meaning of this real existence.

Schelling's investigation of the connection between freedom and metaphysics allowed ethics to emerge as his central concern. What is predictable, what occurs necessarily, can be presented *a priori* and thus determined in a closed and immanent movement of thought. But on the field of intention, freedom, and history, thinking itself becomes transcendent to the actual present and is thus truly metaphysical. Schelling speaks to this in his 1833 Munich lectures on *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*:

This is most easily seen when we consider that the primary object here is of existence, of free decision and deed: all decision and action are grounded in an inner experience that always includes a thinking that goes beyond the scope of the present reality, that is, it aims at a future configuration of events and is thus metaphysical. It is a thinking that goes beyond itself into decision and action, and is thus a transcendent thinking. In contrast, the *a priori* operations of negative philosophy occur in an unchanging network of pure thought, and thus do not "happen." As static and unchanging, this thinking does not go beyond itself, instead remaining an immanent thinking with itself as its own object. (GPP 101)

The immanent thinking of an idealism concerned only with itself obeys the necessities of its method, with the result that its self-reflexive thinking is powerless to create anything *new*, and is thus locked out of the dynamic realm of existence and historical development. In contrast, the creative thought of Schelling's positive philosophy accounts for the unpredictable freedom of *decision*, which is disclosed or *revealed* only in action and deed.

Around this time Schelling became disillusioned with the increasingly conservative Bavarian government, which in 1835 issued new statutes that rolled back all the liberalizing policies he had helped initiate when the university was founded in 1827. Since that time, Schelling could almost believe that his vision of absolute academic freedom, as laid out as early as 1802 in his lectures on *University Studies*, was finally becoming a reality. This transformation was close to his heart, as the students well knew. Consequently, when in December 1830 student protests broke out that threatened this tenuous new reality, Schelling, just as the government called out the troops, ventured out into the evening streets to address the students directly, successfully diffusing what could have escalated into a bloody riot.

This student unrest, however, followed by the July Revolution in Paris in 1831, frightened the monarchy and gave Bavaria's conservative faction the justification for returning to the oppressive restrictions of student activities and studies, as well as reasserting more centralized control of the university itself. And yet, just as his institutional influence seemed to disappear, Schelling was asked in 1835 to tutor the future king of Bavaria, Crown Prince Maximilian,

who became deeply devoted to Schelling's philosophy. Schelling collaborated with him for the remaining years in Munich, as well as his final years in Berlin, when the now King Maximilian II sought his teacher's advice on matters of state as well as educational reforms, which finally instituted a new liberal order for Bavaria's university system in 1849.

Political setbacks notwithstanding, throughout this final decade of his long tenure in Munich, Schelling enjoyed the broadest support and acclaim of his career thus far. He had economic security, a healthy and sizable family, well-attended lectures, and, as President of the Academy, he had power over appointments and salary, as well as the ear of the crown prince. He received international awards and entertained a host of visitors from Europe and Russia, and, although he had not published recently, his previous works were beginning to be translated into other languages. Yet by the end of 1837 the reactionary conservatives directing King Ludwig's government took direct aim at the Lutheran Schelling and declared that philosophy professors would no longer be allowed to address the theme of religion in their lectures, leaving such matters exclusively to the Catholic Church and its professors. Schelling refused to obey, since to do so would remove the heart of his system of philosophy from his lectures.

It was at this point that he became receptive to requests made from Berlin that he fill Fichte's onetime chair in philosophy, vacant since Hegel's untimely death in 1831. The Prussian Crown prince, Friedrich Wilhelm, was determined to lure Schelling away from Bavaria to occupy it. His repeated overtures were initially turned down by Schelling, but as the political climate changed in Munich, and attacks on his philosophy made by Hegel's followers increased, he gradually became enamored with the idea of leaving his "golden cage" for the "dragon's nest" of Berlin and its zealous Hegelians. It was not, however, until 1840 when the Prussian prince became king, that Friedrich Wilhelm could persuade his father-in-law, the King of Bavaria, to release Schelling from his obligations in Munich, as well as to offer him Germany's most prominent chair in philosophy on terms and conditions that were set by Schelling himself. Requesting guaranteed freedom from the royal censors and the highest salary ever received by a university professor, Schelling arranged to be temporarily "on loan" to Berlin, where, at the age of sixty-seven, he would finally begin the last chapter of his philosophical odyssey.

Berlin

Schelling arrived in Berlin in October 1840, one month before his first lecture, eager to begin building bridges to both allies and enemies, going so far on the later count to even invite Carl Ruge, orthodox left-Hegelian that he was, to attend his lectures. On November 15 he introduced his *Philosophy of Revelation*

to an audience filled with the likes of Mikhail Bakunin, Søren Kierkegaard, Alexander von Humboldt, Henrik Steffens, and Leopold von Ranke, as well as Berlin's most prominent citizens and government officials. In conciliatory tones, he made clear that he was there to reconcile warring factions and restore philosophy to its rightful status as the citadel of all learning and science. During the next four semesters Schelling cycled through the trilogy of his system, consisting now of modified versions of his Munich lectures, in which *The Philosophy of Mythology*, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, and *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, began to assume a systematic form. The lectures were full, and while there was some opposition to his ideas, Schelling enjoyed the acclaim of the vast majority of both his colleagues and the broader public.

Predictably, however, Kierkegaard's initial ecstasy soon turned to disappointment, while Bakunin remained entranced by Schelling's lectures until 1843, when Schelling's one-time friend, Heinrich Paulus, who had watched over him as a child in Bebenhausen, who had published his first scholarly work in Tübingen, and who had supported his first appointment in Jena, now, like an avenging fury, published an unauthorized copy of Schelling's first lectures on *The Philosophy of Revelation*, accompanied by a scathing polemic against them. Schelling had always zealously protected his right to control dissemination of his ideas, and he reacted just as Paulus knew that he would, suing him for violation of those rights and thereby setting the stage for a drawn-out legal battle. Eventually the courts decided against Schelling, which, while extremely disappointing, did not keep him from continuing to lecture and further develop the last remaining element of his system, that of the purely rational philosophy, the negative counterpoint to his new positive philosophy. The challenge here was to create an account of the history and necessity of the negative philosophy, and to show how it integrated with his new system. As he began to bring focus and definition to this last essential member of his system, he decided that, given his health, he should cease his lectures, which he did in March 1846. Although he occasionally lectured at the Prussian Academy of Sciences, the focus of his energy remained on the continued development of his philosophical system.

As he reminded his former pupil and now King of Bavaria, Maximilian II, who, ever the eager student, impatiently waited for the completion and publication of his final system, such an enterprise "is a work *de longue haleine* (long-term work), and the nature of philosophy brings with it that one must with every step see before them in the utmost detail from A to Z everything that has preceded them."²⁰ Realizing that the organic nature of the system he worked on required it to remain as dynamic, open, and incomplete as life itself, he readied his manuscripts for his death, assigning most to the flames, while reserving only a few for publication. On August 20, 1854, while on a cure in Switzerland, Schelling finally succumbed to death. A year later Maximilian II

had a monument built to mark his grave, inscribed with the words, “The first thinker of Germany.”

Fortunately, his sons chose not to follow their father’s orders, and instead preserved most of Schelling’s manuscripts, notes, and letters. Although the flames of Allied bombing raids in Munich did finally consume a portion of his literary estate, subsequent decades have witnessed the discovery of an ever-increasing number of reliable accounts of his lectures. Given the more than sixty years of incessant writing and lecturing, and the depth and expanse of his symphonic view of the world of ideas, it will be many more decades before we will have access to all of his written work. The hurdles faced in transcribing and editing Schelling’s words make manifest the equally daunting task of attempting to comprehend the rich complexity and genius of his philosophical vision. Unlike Odysseus, the odyssey of Schelling and his philosophy will, by its own internal dynamic, never arrive at a final resting place.

Notes

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2. F. W. J. Schelling to King Maximilian II, Berlin, December 26, 1852, *König Maximilian II. von Bayern und Schelling. Briefwechsel*, ed. Ludwig Trost and Friedrich Leist (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1890), 229.
3. Joseph Friedrich Schelling, *Joseph Friedrich Schellings Dissertatio philosophica de simplicibus et eorum diversis speciebus von 1758, Einführung, Text und Übersetzung*, in *Der Monadenbegriff zwischen Spätrenaissance und Aufklärung*, ed. Hanns-Peter Neumann and Franz Michael (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 340–75.
4. Christoph Schwab to Gustav Schwab, Berlin, December 27, 1849, *Schelling Rariora*, ed. Luigi Payerson (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1977), 54.
5. Stefan Dietrich, “Der Philosoph und der Dekan,” accessed December 8, 2011, www.swp.de/metzingen/lokales/ermstal/Der-Philosoph-und-der-Dekan;art5662,591032.
6. G. L. Plitt, *Aus Schellings Leben. In Briefen*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1869–70), 1:20.
7. *Ibid.*, 1:16.
8. Schelling, *Joseph Friedrich Schellings Dissertatio Philosophica*, 363.
9. F. W. J. Schelling, forward to *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 1 (Landeshut: Krüll, 1809); cited in *Schelling Rariora*, 353.
10. F. W. J. Schelling to J. H. Obereit, Stuttgart, March 12, 1796, *Aus Schellings Leben*, 1:88.
11. *Ibid.* See also SW I/1:308n1, where Schelling again cites absolute being as “the holiest idea of antiquity (τὸ ὄν).”
12. F. W. J. Schelling to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Stuttgart, March 23, 1796, F. W. J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 2 vols., ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier, 1962–), 1:66.
13. Plitt, *Aus Schellings Leben*, 1:207.
14. F. W. J. Schelling to G. W. F. Hegel, Stuttgart, January 1796, *Aus Schellings Leben*, 1:91.

15. F. W. J. Schelling to J. G. Fichte, Jena, August 9, 1799, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 2:182.
16. G. W. F. Hegel to F. W. J. Schelling, Frankfurt, November 2, 1800, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 2:285.
17. A. F. Marcus to F. W. J. Schelling, Bamberg, April 30, 1803, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 2:497.
18. Tilliette, ed., *Schelling im Spiegel seiner Zeitgenossen*, 1:143.
19. Schelling, *Schelling Rariora*, 669.
20. F. W. J. Schelling to King Maximilian, Berlin, December 26, 1852, *König Maximilian II. von Bayern und Schelling*, 229.

22

Nature of Imagination: At the Heart of Schelling's Thinking

Jason M. Wirth

The past is known, the present is discerned, the future is intimated.
The known is narrated, the discerned is presented, the intimated is
prophesied.

Das Vergangene wird gewußt, das Gegenwärtige wird erkannt, das
Zukünftige wird geahndet.

Das Gewußte wird erzählt, das Erkannte wird dargestellt, das
Geahndete wird geweissagt.

— F. W. J. Schelling, *Ages of the World* (1815)
(AW xxxv [SW I/8:199])

The consciousness of eternity can only be articulated in the phrase: "I
am the one who was, who is, who will be."

— F. W. J. Schelling, *Ages of the World* (1813)
(WA 263)

Nature as the image of thought

My chapter will seek to suggest something of the character of Schelling's philosophical accomplishment and it will do so by discussing the manner in which philosophy, natural science, art, and history all belong together (without thereby sacrificing their autonomy) as the reawakening of the question of nature. Quite simply: for Schelling, one *cannot do philosophy only by doing philosophy*. Philosophy, as such, entails a commitment to these other modes of thought without thereby usurping their autonomy. I will carefully detail this complex set of relationships in order to bring forth Schelling's *intuition into nature as the image of thinking as such*. What guides Schelling's very sense of what matters as philosophy, what belongs to the philosophical enterprise by right?

This phrase “image of thinking” does not admittedly call forth a well-established philosophical problem, but an appreciation of it is critical not only to the present chapter, but also to an articulation of the value and prescience of Schelling’s philosophical accomplishment. Schelling is through and through a thinker of the problem of the imagination, of the emergence into image of that which in itself has no image. Philosophy, which cannot get in front of its images and the patency of their sense, remains creative and cannot dismiss, as Iain Hamilton Grant tells us, “anything a priori from its remit.”¹ There is no problem or theme that philosophy can dismiss in advance. The future of thinking, including the future thinking regarding what has already been thought, remains, to use Schelling’s celebrated term, *unvordenklich*, unprethinkable. We are always on the way to thinking. It follows that *Naturphilosophie* is inexhaustible – an image of thought, not a philosophical agenda, the infinite exercise of philosophizing and not this or that philosophy.

The phrase “image of thought” was coined by Gilles Deleuze and in his final work, coauthored with Félix Guattari and called *What is Philosophy?*, it is linked to the horizon or plane or “planomenal” element of philosophical concepts:

The plane of philosophy is prephilosophical insofar as we consider it in itself independently of the concepts that come to occupy it, but nonphilosophy is found where the plane confronts chaos. *Philosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it; it needs a nonphilosophical comprehension just as art needs nonart and science needs nonscience.* They do not need the No as beginning, or as the end in which they would be called upon to disappear by being realized, but at every moment of their becoming or their development.²

Nonphilosophy, which Schelling dramatically associates with Jakob Böhme’s *Ungrund* as well as Meister Eckhart’s Godhead (*Gottheit*), is, considered in itself, utterly resistant to thinking, occasioning thinking’s descent into its own underlying abyss of freedom. As he articulated it in the Munich lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*:

That which is absolutely mobile...which is continually an Other, which cannot be held onto for a moment, which is really thought in the last moment (take good note of this expression!) – how does this relate to thought? Obviously not even as a real object of thought; for by “object” one understands something which keeps still, which stands still, which remains. (HMP 152 [SW I/10:150])

Schelling therefore called this intuition *ein nicht denkendes Denken*, a thinking which does not think (HMP 153 [SW I/10:151]), and concluded that the prime matter of thinking is its groundless ground, the plenum of chaos at the heart

of its plane, that which in thinking is not actually thought (HMP 153 [SW I/10:151]). Concepts are not lying about since eternity, either biding their time to at last reveal themselves or waiting around to be discovered. Concepts are not remote to what they would explain nor do they fully explain anything. This dogmatic image of thought is the legacy of Platonism, and Schelling refuses it: "Everything can be in the logical Idea without anything being *explained* thereby, as, for example, everything in the sensuous world is grasped in number and measure, which does not therefore mean that geometry or arithmetic explain the sensuous world" (HMP 147 [SW I/10:144]).³ The concept cannot represent or fix its absolutely mobile ground – each concept is incomplete and cannot settle into itself because it is rent asunder by what Schelling had called in the *Freedom* chapter *ein nie aufgehender Rest*, "an indivisible remainder" that cannot be resolved into the understanding but which, in contesting the understanding, remains the "incomprehensible ground of reality" (SW I/7:360) and what he here calls that which "strives beyond the boundaries" of reason (HMP 147 [SW I/10:144]).

A plane of immanence is the possibility of moving from the nonphilosophical, from the pure plenum of chaos, to the prephilosophical. The latter "does not mean something preexistent but rather something *that does not exist outside philosophy*, although philosophy presupposes it. These are its internal conditions" and as such it "constitutes the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth" (WP 41). The plane of immanence is a "like a section of chaos," a prephilosophical slice of the utterly nonphilosophical, and, as such, it "acts like a sieve" (WP 42). It is like a "desert that concepts populate without dividing up" (WP 36). Working in tandem, concepts allow the prephilosophical ground of philosophy to appear in thinking, but it does not emerge as a phenomenon, but rather a *planomenon* (WP 35), "the horizon of events, the reservoir or reserve of purely conceptual events" (WP 36). The planomenal negotiation of chaos is not in itself a concept, but rather the possibility of coordinated concept creation. It is "the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought.... The image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right" (WP 37).

Nature (*Natur*) is a name for Schelling's image of thought, although by nature we do not restrict ourselves to the provenance of the natural sciences (even the version of them that Schelling advocated). Nature is as much the problem of religion, history, and art as it is of science. The specious image of thought in which Schelling emerges as an indecisive Proteus, unable to take firm control of his project, haphazardly reinventing himself and desperately chasing after his ever-elusive system, has nothing to do with Schelling's central intuition. He was not attempting to nail down a system of thinking like a fool who expects to one day find a way to get closer to the vanishing point.

Nietzsche called thinking's relationship to this more primordial, radically non-dogmatic image of thought *affirmation*, "a new beginning, a game, a wheel that rolls out of itself, a first movement, a holy Yes-saying."⁴ Schelling called it *love*. In the *Freedom* chapter, love emerges as the concession (*Zulassung*) to ground, in *das Wirkenlassen des Grundes*, in letting the ground operate (SW I/7:375). Love is a "unity that is the same towards everything, but clasped by nothing [*gegen alles gleiche und doch von nichts ergriffene Einheit*]... it is the all in all [*das Alles in Allem*]" (SW I/7:409). Love emerges when the human subject relinquishes itself from its own narrow horizon and dedicates itself to bear ever-evolving witness to everything, to affirm each and every thing just as it is.⁵ Thinking is an experience of love, which allows thinking the space and time of its productivity. It originates in nature, which is "an abyss of the past. This is what is oldest in nature, the deepest of what remains if everything accidental and everything that has become is removed" (WA 243). This abyss, however, is not an infinitely hollow lack, a deadly cliff over which thinking falls when it tries to conceive something philosophically. It is the life of thinking, its unpre-thinkable productivity, and its eternal past that is simultaneously its eternal future:

The mistake of Kantism (with respect to time) is that nothing comes into being in time. Rather that in each thing time comes into being immediately from eternity into the new... The beginning of time is in each thing, and, indeed, each thing is the same as the eternal beginning. Each particular comes into being through this cision [*Scheidung*] through which the world comes into being. (WA 79)

Beings are not the reference point for time. If they were, we could rightly think of birth as a being entering into time, its duration as its persistence through time, and its death or destruction as its exit from time. Time is not a form of things (a pure form of intuition), a rule that governs them through their allotment of time. A being is the happening of time, not something in time. Eternity, as William Blake saw, is in love with the productions of time.⁶

To return to the prompt that gave rise to these reflections, I would like to reiterate that I am insisting on this line of thought as a response to the guiding question of this chapter: *What is Schelling's major philosophical accomplishment?* His accomplishment is not any particular idea or position, but rather another beginning – an eternal beginning – of philosophy as such. We cannot automatically assume that the difficult part of this question is to discern what of value, if anything, Schelling contributed to our store of philosophical resources. For Schelling, the more difficult and the utterly critical question asks about philosophy as such. What is philosophy as such when it reduces to no particular philosophy but also gives rise to any possible philosophy? If we cannot first

come to terms with Schelling's image of what counts as philosophy at all, then we cannot assess the value of these contributions.

Insisting on this kind of question invites risk-taking. One who would grapple with it must take a step back and venture some experimental thoughts about Schelling's thinking retrospectively considered as a whole in the hope that they can afford new readers another manner of ingress. Schelling's elasticity as a thinker is notorious. Following Hegel's disparaging remark that Schelling conducted his education in public, he came to be regarded as the Proteus of philosophy. It is true that there is something protean about Schelling's philosophy, about his intuition regarding the nature of philosophy as such, but this is its strength – and not because he failed to figure out what he was really up to and then consistently stick to it. This, along with his daunting range and technical rigor, helped make Schelling a difficult thinker to appreciate. What follows should be read as suggestive hints, as possible avenues into Schelling's thinking, others of which are on display elsewhere in this *Handbook*.

Hence, to pose again my initial hypothesis, but this time with a greater eye for provocation: Schelling's major accomplishment is the image of thinking as a *Divine Comedy of Time*.⁷ This "genealogy of time" (WA 75) is nothing less than the unity within irreconcilable differences of philosophy, natural science, art, history, and religion. Each of these modes of thinking is singular and as such resists assimilation into the others. Nonetheless they are also inseparable and cannot stand wholly on their own and cannot be eliminated from the philosophical enterprise. In the three sections that follow, I examine each of these in turn – natural science, art and history, and finally philosophical religion – each illuminating all that was, all that is, and all that will be, each speaking in its own way to the sublime slogan of Isis, which proclaimed that "I am what was, what is, and what shall be, and no mortal has sublimated [*aufgehoben*] my veil" (WA 187).⁸

Natural science and the question of nature

The past is known... the known is narrated.

I am the one who was.

Bruce Matthews has provided striking evidence that rudiments of the guiding intuition that shaped and directed Schelling's immense and immensely variegated philosophical production were already present to him before he entered the Tübingen *Stift* at the precocious age of fifteen. His father had exposed him to the work of the Swabian "mystical" Pietist Philip Matthäus Hahn, who was dedicated to the "pursuit of the divine in Nature, free of the ideological constraints of working in a university setting. The trajectory of his research precluded explaining Nature as a mechanism, demanding instead that Nature

be understood as the ongoing revelation of the divine life."⁹ Indeed, in the *Freedom* chapter, Schelling would limit the recursive, mechanical account of nature to the "first or Old Testament" of nature "because things are still external to the Center and therefore subject to the Law" (SW I/7:412). It is given to the human to affirm the Center itself, to become the "Redeemer of nature" by fully expressing the Word of nature, which is "in nature as a dark, prophetic (not yet fully spoken out) word" (SW I/7:412). It is given to human thought to originate in the center and to speak from the sovereignty of nature, from *natura naturans*, what in nature is the oldest in nature, from the freedom that is at the heart of its natural necessities as what is in itself primordially otherwise than nature at the heart of nature.

Starting with Schelling's early intuition of a radically incarnational *Naturphilosophie* and through its maturation in his early and middle writings (from the *Naturphilosophie* period that began in 1797 through the 1809 *Freedom* chapter and the various drafts of the *Ages of the World*), we find many important indications of *his image of thought*. The latter shaped Schelling's early conceptual creativity through his engagements with Plato (the "divine" one), his rethinking of Kant's entire critical project from the perspective of what opens up in the third *Critique*, his critical appropriation of the burgeoning natural science of his day and redeployment of it as "speculative physics," his love of the "wondrous" Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88) and the prescient Görlitz shoemaker Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), and his defense of Spinoza (with an interpretive supplement) during the *Pantheismusstreit*.¹⁰

What, however, do I mean by intuition and image of thought in relationship to the question of nature and *Naturphilosophie*?

In his earliest published writings, Schelling relied on the potentially treacherous language of *intellectual intuition*. For example, in the *Vom Ich* chapter (1795), Schelling found an "exquisite" word in German that "contains the entire treasure of philosophical truth." "*Bedingen* [to condition] names the operation in which something becomes a *Ding* [thing], *bedingt* [conditioned], that which is *made* into a thing, which at the same time illuminates that nothing through itself can be posited as a thing. An *unbedingtes Ding* [unconditioned thing] is a contradiction" (SW I/1:166). An intellectual intuition of the becoming thing of that which in itself is not a thing is not a privileged mode of knowledge contingent upon mystical gifts. It does not intuit any kind of special object, it cannot claim personal and private access to otherwise inaccessible modes of knowing, and it cannot complete itself in any thought. It is not an example of what Hegel later derided as the epistemic privilege that only a Christian elect could assume. According to Hegel, Schelling's intellectual intuition appears as if it just "pops into one's head" and hence demands "an artistic talent or genius in individuals that comes only to 'Sunday's children'" (LHP 3:260–61), that is,

to those who are blessed with this non-universal and intrinsically contingent mystical communication.¹¹

To be fair, Hegel is right in claiming that it can appear as a kind mystical shortcut, for that was how many readers understood it, despite Schelling's protestations to the contrary. Schelling does not assume that every single person has it,¹² but the same could also be said for reason itself. How do you reason with an unreasonable person? Even Hegel's famous denigration in the *Phenomenology* of intellectual intuition as the night when all cows are black (PhG §16 [HW 3:22]), which severely wounded Schelling's reputation, was allegedly not a critique of Schelling, but of those who stubbornly misunderstood him to be advocating the magical intuition some kind of mystical plenum where everything is everything else.¹³

The intellectual intuition does not require grace, but is rather the presentation (*Darstellung*) of the unrepresentable and ungrounded at the ground of presentation. One does not grasp a concept, but rather the non-conceptual horizon out of which concepts emerge. One could even say, to use a more contemporary manner of expression, that the intellectual intuition is an early version of what John Sallis has called monstrosity, a discourse or λόγος oriented "to showing (*monstrare*), while also alluding to the monstrosities to which such discourse will inevitably be exposed: that in which nonsense becomes interior to, rather than the opposite of, sense."¹⁴ The monstrous is not itself a thing nor does it imply that things disassemble themselves in their coming to presence. Things come as themselves but they do so monstrously. The latter requires for what Sallis calls *remonstration*:

A discourse that would inscribe the showing of things themselves cannot but transgress the limits of mere explication and violate what was to have been the principle of all principles. The inception of such a discourse marks the passage of phenomenology over into monstrosity. The operation by which manifestation would be brought to double back across itself may accordingly be called *remonstration*, resuming this old word, now obsolete in its pertinent sense but common in that sense in seventeenth-century English. In *remonstrate*, *remonstration*, one hears again the root *monstrare* (to show), and adhering to the older sense one hears in the prefix re- the sense of *again* or *anew*.¹⁵

Schelling's intellectual intuition results from a presentation that remonstrates things in such a way that they cannot account for themselves by themselves. This allows their anterior unthingliness to present itself (in the literal sense of the absolute as *Unbedingt*, not thinged). This allows the always already past of any possible present to show itself precisely as always already gone. "O

Vergangenheit, du Abgrund der Gedanken! [O the Past, you abyss of thoughts!]" (WA xviii).

In his 1827 lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling explicitly took up Hegel's Sunday's children critique, which charged that Schelling's

philosophy, instead of proving the Absolute in the scientific manner, had recourse to *intellectual intuition*, and one did not know what this is; but it was certain that it was nothing scientific, rather something merely subjective, in the last analysis perhaps only something individual, a certain mystical intuition, that only a few favored people could boast of, with the pretence of which, therefore, one could make life easy for oneself in science. (HMP 150 [SW I/10:147])

Although Schelling sought again and again (all the way up to his final Berlin lectures on the internal limits of a purely rational philosophy)¹⁶ to present (*darstellen*) an intuition of the absolute at the edge of reason, he did not propose to prove the existence of any unconditioned ground. As Schelling famously argues in the *Freedom* chapter, the ground of existence does not itself exist. This dark precursor and unruly prime matter – akin to Schelling's appropriation of the "billowing sea" of Plato's *χώρα* (SW I/7:360) – simultaneously precedes and ungrounds while grounding existence. Intuition cannot bring anything to light or grant access to any hidden realms of existence. It is an intuition of the unrepresentability at the heart of existence.

Without intellectual intuition no philosophy! Even the pure intuition of space and of time is not in the general consciousness as such.... Whoever does not have intellectual intuition cannot understand what is said of it, and hence it cannot be taught to them at all. A negative condition of its possession is the clear and heartfelt [*innig*] insight into the nullity of all merely finite knowledge. One can develop intellectual intuition; in the philosopher it must become her or his character, so to speak. (SW I/5:255–56)

In this light we can insist that *Naturphilosophie* is not a philosophy about nature as if nature were some sort of object that could be subjected to the scientific gaze or to philosophical scrutiny. The heart of nature is not a thing that can be shown either to exist or not exist. It is the ground of existence as such. If nature is relegated to the status of an object, which was and is its fate in modern thinking, it is dead, and this nature-cide, Schelling presciently argued, is constitutive of modern philosophy: "The entirety of modern European philosophy has, since its inception (in Descartes), the shared deficiency that nature is not present to it and that it lacks nature's living ground" (SW I/7:356–57). *Naturphilosophie*, therefore, is not a philosophical conception of nature. *It is*

philosophy in the image of nature and, reciprocally, nature as the image of philosophy. By image I certainly do not mean anything like a depiction or illustration – that would reduce Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and its project of a speculative physics to an uncritical dogmatism and to naively representational thinking. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty said of Schelling: he thought of nature as “the oldest of all things and at the same time something always new,” which he tells us means that “nature is always new in each perception, but it is never without a past. Nature is something which goes on, which is never grasped at its beginning, though it appears always new to us.”¹⁷

Schelling’s thinking, therefore, demands that one first enter the *horizon* or *climate* of his thinking. One cannot begin by randomly extracting arguments without first attending to the intuition and the general problem that gave the individual concepts and arguments their life. In order to enter the *horizon* of Schelling’s thinking, one has to enter its image of thought. Consequently, one has to isolate Schelling’s conceptual assemblage from superficial conceptual coincidences with the concepts of other thinkers whose respective horizons originate in a very different sense of what belongs to thinking. As we have seen, we first have to articulate an infinite yet immanent *plane* of thinking, to give voice to his organic image of thought, his intuition of the *χώρα* at the living heart of philosophical concept-production as well as the auto-genesis of nature itself.

Philosophy is not an ongoing series of conceptual recuperations. For Schelling the price of admission is costly: it asks that one first abandon everything. Anyone “who wants to place themselves at the beginning point of a truly free philosophy, must abandon even God” (IPU 18).¹⁸ It is only for one who “had once left everything and who were themselves left by everything” and who, like Socrates on the brink of his death in the *Phaedo*, “saw themselves alone with the infinite: a great step which Plato compared to death” (IPU 18–19). Hence:

What Dante had written on the gate of the Inferno could also in another sense be the entrance into Philosophy: “Abandon hope all you who enter here.” The one who wants truly to philosophize must let go of all hope, all desire, all languor [*Sehnsucht*]. They must want nothing, know nothing, and feel themselves bare and poor. They must give up everything in order to gain everything. This is a difficult step. It is difficult, so to speak, to separate from the final shore. (IPU 19)

None of this should imply, however, that Schelling was somehow reacting against the burgeoning natural sciences. He was, rather, fighting for their living heart, for *natura naturans* at the dark ground of *natura naturata*. Moreover, despite being considered a Romantic, he also refused the regressive fantasy

of a return to a nature unsullied by reason, science, and technology. In the *Freedom* chapter, Schelling dismissed the abdication of reason and thinking as the incapacity to find the “reconciling and mediating basis” without which one declines into the “bleak and wild enthusiasm that breaks out in auto-laceration or, as with the priests of the Phrygian goddess, auto-castration, which is brought about in philosophy by the renunciation of reason and science” (SW I/7:357). The abdication of science and reason is the dark drunken night of the Bacchic orgy (in Euripides’ *Βάκχαι*), when the frenzied Agave, unable to recognize her own son, Pentheus, tears off his head. Philosophy is not therefore the endeavor to represent the world with concepts (rationality with an insane lack of any insanity) – this is *Schwärmerei* (the fanatical fantasy of a categorical agreement with Being). Philosophy is the negotiation of madness, reason’s ongoing encounter with what resists reason:

But where there is no madness, there is also certainly no proper, active, living intellect (and consequently there is just the dead intellect, dead intellectuals). For in what does the intellect prove itself than in the coping with and governance and regulation of madness? Hence the utter lack of madness leads to another extreme, to imbecility (idiocy), which is an absolute lack of all madness. But there are two other kinds of persons in which there really is madness. There is one kind of person that governs madness and precisely in this overwhelming shows the highest force of the intellect. The other kind of person is governed by madness and is someone who really is mad. (AW 103–4 [SW I/8:338–39])

The “highest force of the intellect” is the capacity to stand in a rational relationship to madness and chaos without either exhausting the matter for thought in a concept – it cannot accommodate the “indivisible remainder that cannot be resolved into the understanding” (SW I/7:360) – or losing the concept altogether in the dark night. This intermediary position, the intermediary vocation of philosophy as such, demands intermediary concepts (*Mittelbegriffe*), which, Schelling charged, are severely lacking in contemporary philosophy (SW I/2:150). Schelling sought to navigate the Scylla of regressive Romanticism (the wholesale abandonment of reason) and the Charybdis of repressive positivism (loss of the depths), while not abandoning the powerful insights and discoveries of either. The challenge is to think everything together without excluding anything and without collapsing into the destructiveness of any of the many monocultures of thinking. As Schelling argued in 1799: “*Nature as a mere product (natura naturata)* we call nature as *object* (with this alone all empiricism deals). *Nature as productivity (natura naturans)* we call *nature as subject*” (FO 202 [SW I/3:284]). The challenge is to think *to and from* the subject of nature, from its eternally past and eternally forthcoming center.

Moreover, a study of the depths of nature reveals that they are the same depths found in human consciousness, and a critical examination of human consciousness discovers that its depths extend to all of nature – “like is known by like [*Gleiches von Gleichem erkannt werde*]” (SW I/7:338); or, as Schelling put it at the conclusion of his Introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), “Nature shall make the spirit visible, and the spirit, nature invisible” (SW I/2:56). Schelling calls this depth the Godhead, but by this he does not mean a transcendent object or any sort of existing thing, transcendent or otherwise. As Schelling scolded the hapless K. A. Eschenmayer in 1812: “You want to seek the irrational in the heights and I want to seek it in the depths” (SW I/8:363). Indeed, there is no transcendent dimension, and what exceeds nature is not found otherwise than in its own depths: “None of our spiritual thoughts transcend the earth” (SW I/8:169).¹⁹

In the moral sickness that is evil, however, we take ourselves out of the general circulation of nature and consciousness and retreat to the periphery. We become the subject, usurping it from nature itself.²⁰ In evil, the human reverses the relationship between ground and existence and makes its own existence the ground of itself while nature consequently becomes opposed to it as an object. In the contemporary ecological crisis, which includes our inability to appreciate fully the imageless image of nature that a thinker like Schelling furnishes, we can perhaps see in a new way just how prophetic Schelling was.

Imagination and art

The present is discerned ... the discerned is presented.

I am the one who is.

In refusing to cede the question of nature to the positivists, Schelling sought to respond to our increasing estrangement from nature and to enable the living ground that modern philosophy constitutively represses (SW I/7:361) to come forth. This was the task of what Schelling later dubbed negative philosophy, of moving through *x* to get beyond *x* (*über x hinaus*). This can also be thought of as the movement of philosophical *Depotenzierung*, of bringing something to its limit, of exhausting it in order to unleash what it otherwise represses. Schelling often contended that the nature of philosophical error was not merely being wrong about something, mistaking *x* for *y*, but rather the self-petrification of thought, the congealing of the life of its productivity by reducing it to one of its products, of condemning it “to stand still,” “to clot,” and “to inhibit” the creativity of its progressive forces. Although Schelling retains and refines the techniques of negative philosophy until the end of the Berlin period,²¹ it is only one aspect of thinking. Philosophy does not merely think *toward* freedom (and thereby reopen the possibility of non-regressive and non-repressive modes of

natural science), but it is also called to think *from* freedom, from the living dark ground. “Precisely that which negates all revelation must be made the ground of revelation” (AW 16 [SW I/8:223]). Negative philosophy opens up the space and time of thinking, but, as such, is merely preparatory:

It is negative because it is just busy with clearing the way [*Wegschaffen*]. What is its content? Only the incessant overturning of reason [*der fortwährende Umsturz der Vernunft*] and its result: that reason, insofar as it takes itself as the principle, is capable of no actual knowledge. (POP 152)

What can be known positively, as what has happened so that it can be narrated – the earth as the sublime narrative of natural history – as well as discerned as our present possibilities? When thinking no longer only clears the way to freedom, but also thinks from the center that emerges in such clearing, what are its deeply historical fruits? What is given to thought as it engages the unprethinkability of *der ewige Anfang*, the eternal beginning, the sovereign natality of nature?

It opens the problem of history as such, a problem that cannot be reduced to a Hegelian dialectical account of history (because the Hegelian dialectic always begins and is therefore not an absolutely eternal and infinite beginning, a beginning that would as such always remain utterly unprethinkable). History is, however, not History (History always with a big H), which, as Hannah Arendt powerfully demonstrated, marches through history, enforcing a totalitarian regime according to its ideological account of the laws of History.²² Such stoppage is the very essence of a critical error in philosophical thinking. Schelling’s sense of history – of the productivity that is time – is found, rather, in the realm of the ceaseless natality of art and, as we shall see in the next section, the opening to religion.

Some readers of Schelling regard his turn to positive philosophy as something that occurred to this hapless Proteus out of the blue or as part of an enraged response to Hegel. To the contrary, I think that Schelling’s early embrace of the philosophy of art was a manifestation in an embryonic fashion of what would later fully mature into the problem of a positive philosophy.

Already in the 1800 *System*, Schelling argued that the “aesthetic intuition,” that is, the intuition through which a new work comes into being – an intuition that helps the artist discern what belongs to a work in its very advent, in its unprecedented coming forth – had the opposite trajectory of an intellectual intuition. The latter moved *toward* its infinite ground while the former emerges *from* such a ground – “the fundamental character of the artwork is therefore an *unconscious infinity* [*bewußtlose Unendlichkeit*]” (STI 225 [SW I/3:619]). Schelling, in a manner that foreshadows his work on philosophical religion for the next

five decades, offers the example of Greek mythology. It would be impossible to ascribe the emergence of the Greek world of the gods to a “thoroughgoing intentionality [*Absichtlichkeit*] in their invention” (STI 225 [SW I/3:620]). This contrasts directly and decisively with a work that “merely feigns the character of the artwork [*den Charakter des Kunstwerks nur heuchelt*].” Such objects are born of reflection and are only the “imprints of the conscious activity of the artist.” They are finite copies of other finite works, and do not “proceed from the feeling of an infinite contradiction” (STI 225 [SW I/3:620]). In the 1807 Munich speech, *On the Relationship of the Fine Arts to Nature*, for example, Schelling contrasts “servile μίμησις [*dienstbare Nachahmung*]” (SW I/7:294) and its “tangible lack of life” (SW I/7:300), with “vital μίμησις” (SW I/7:301). Servile imitation, which reproduces and represents forms as if the forms themselves were stillborn, is another expression of the artless nature-cide of positivism. “Death and unbearable severity would be the art that wanted to present the empty husk or delimitation of the individual” (SW I/7:304).

Genuine works “present the infinite in the finite,” producing works that formally range from the beautiful to the sublime, but whose subject – the infinite – is the same (STI 225–26 [SW I/3:620–21]). To speak of the origins of art as subjective, however, has nothing to do with attributing it to some subjective fancy on the part of the artist. The subject of artistic production is not the artist as subject but rather the infinitude of the nonhuman subject. (Even calling it a subject at all has its limitations.) Art expresses in an objective form the “unconscious [*das Bewußtlose*] in acting and producing” and exposes to philosophy its “holy of holies” – the original unity, “burning, so to speak, as if a single flame” of what are torn apart in nature and history, as well as in living and acting, just as in thinking (STI 231 [SW I/3:628]). This was already the call for a new mythology – not a return to the gods of old nor an evacuation of the earth in favor of transcendence, but the return of science to poetry in which the “consummation of philosophy flows like individual steams back into the ocean of poesy” (STI 232 [SW I/3:629]). Art reveals to philosophy that it, too, stands in relationship to the great ocean – the billowing seas of the *χώρα*. Although philosophy should not be confused with art, it also cannot be separated from art, and it enjoys its own creativity, its own dynamic temporality.

In the *Philosophy of Art* lectures, Schelling describes creativity as neither exclusively active nor passive. One who is free for art is “at the same time passive and active, carried away and pondering [*zugleich leidenden und tätigen, fortgerissen und überlegten*]” (SW I/5:358–59). Creativity, neither doing nor the recipient of the action of another, resembles what others have called the middle voice: action without something acting as a subject, but rather the coming to be of something from within itself, its auto-poiesis.²³ Art teaches philosophy that the present is alive, that it is historical, that it is dynamic and progressive.

Philosophical religion

The future is intimated... the intimated is prophesied.

I am the one who will be.

It was Franz Rosenzweig who first insisted on the importance of the 1797 *System* fragment as a key piece of evidence to thwart the charge that Schelling was some wishy-washy, itinerant Proteus of philosophy. Indeed one can already see in this fragment the general frame of Schelling's image of thought. Early in the fragment we read: "At the same time we so often hear that the great multitude should have a sensible religion. Not only the great multitude, but even philosophy needs it. Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] and art, that is what we need!"²⁴ The call for *sinnliche Religion* immediately contrasts with the prevailing sense of religion in the sense of *religare*, which means to bind fast or to connect tightly and which seeks to yoke the world of appearance to a transcendent reality. This is the legacy, not of Plato, but of Platonism, the two-realm doctrine that was the most exhausted and congealed part of Christian metaphysics – Nietzsche's "Platonism for the people."²⁵ *Sinn* and *sinnlich*, like our own *sense* (as well as sensible, sensuous), are extremely ambiguous – sense in both senses of sense. *Sinnliche Religion* does not refer the earth to a meaning or a dimension beyond itself. Its meaning is wholly patent, meaning only itself, but religion nonetheless expresses the life and creativity and dynamic temporality of that patency. "Sense," Schelling later tells us:

is divine in that, although it comprehends the particular, it does so for itself, as if there were nothing outside of it, like it was its own world. It intuits [*anschaut*], unknown itself, a present infinity...hence the inability to be grounded [*Unergründlichkeit*] in everything sensible [*in allem Sinnlichen*], the chaos, the confused plenitude. (SW I/7:146)

The imagination, *die Einbildungskraft*, is the movement that we marked in the previous section, that is, the presentation of the infinite as the finite. The infinite as such is absurd and does not mean anything in itself, but it is the origination of all meaning. Its ground – the billowing seas of the *χώρα* – can only be thought as many, never as *einerlei* (any one thing). Nature is the life of imagination – the depths of its past, the presence of its unfolding, the unprethinkable promise of its future. It is for Schelling a supremely religious mood, but by religion Schelling does not mean anything, even traditional Christianity, that we are accustomed to thinking of as religious. The godhead, what is most ancient in nature, revealing itself creatively in and as the present, is the promise that the future will have a future, that religion

does not despise nature and human affairs, but rather that they are, as are all beings, its expressions.

Hence the very next sentence of the *Fragment* calls for a “new mythology” which has to “stand in the service of ideas... a mythology of reason [Vernunft].”²⁶ This is what Schelling would later in the Munich and Berlin periods call *philosophical religion*. Although it would be uncharitable and grossly unjust to associate this exclusively with the inner life of Christianity, it is important to note that Schelling delimited Catholicism as the Petrine expansion by the sword (A¹) and, although he cedes that Luther was right to protest (A²), the promise of the Protestant Reformation did not resuscitate the life of divine imagination and bring about new works. The earth remained nothing but a hollow allegory of the divine. Schelling dreamed – “the future is intimated... the intimated is prophesied” – of a new Johannine religion of absolute inclusivity, where “without narrow coercion, without external authority, Paganism and Judaism are equally embraced for what they are and the Church exists through itself because each person voluntarily partakes in it, each through their own conviction that their spirit has found a homeland [*Heimat*] in it” (SW II/4:328). This is the religion of the great ocean of becoming, the coming of a new earth, unleashing the utopian promise nascent within philosophy, religion, and art. The coming of a “structure which encompasses everything human [*alles Menschliche umfassender Bau*]” and “in which nothing may be excluded and in which all human striving, wanting, thinking, and knowing are brought to consummate unity” (SW II/4:296). This is not the coming of a new trap in which to measure all things human, but rather the granting of time and space – *das Wirkenlassen des Grundes*, the letting the ground operate (SW I/7:375) – of all of the fruits of human freedom and all of the fruits of the great earth. Philosophical religion “could only be the last product and the highest expression of the completed philosophy itself” (SW II/1:250),²⁷ its awakening to its own life.

This promise within philosophy itself is already succinctly conveyed in the 1806 *Aphorisms as an Introduction to Naturphilosophie*, the second of which reads:

Wherever that revelation [i.e., the divinity of the All] came to pass, even if it was merely transitory, there was always enthusiasm [*Begeisterung*], the discarding of finite forms, the cessation of all conflict, and unity and wondrous consensus, which often cut across long eras. It was accompanied by the greatest spiritual characteristics whose fruit was the general alliance between the arts and sciences. (SW I/7:140)

In the disciplinary and sectarian conflicts that characterize both academic life and human interactions on this earth, this ancient promise seems utterly fantastical, both as ever having happened or ever coming

to be. Nonetheless, in his 1815 Munich address, *The Deities of Samothrace*, Schelling discerned this primordial human trace in the dawning of the religious sensibility on this far-flung island: "According to universal ancient testimony, those who were initiated into the rites were better prepared to live and to die, and happier in both their living and their dying" (SW I/8:348).²⁸

In the following aphorism, Schelling laments the death of this intuition as it collapsed into the nascent war of competing and mutually exclusively territorial claims:

Whenever the light of that revelation faded and humans knew things not from the All, but from other things, not from their unity but from their separation, and in the same fashion wanted to conceive themselves in isolation [*Vereinzelung*] and segregation from the All, you see science desolated amid broad spaces. With great effort, a small amount of progress is made, grain of sand by grain of sand, in constructing the universe. You see at the same time the beauty of life disappear, and the diffusion of a wild war of opinions about the primary and most important things, as everything falls apart into isolated details [*alles in Einzelheit zerfallen*]. (SW I/7:140)

The hell of minutia triumphs – a hell that is hard not miss in all disciplines, including philosophy. In another work of the same year, the 1806 addendum to *On the World Soul* called *On the Relation of the Real and Ideal in Nature, or Development of the First Principles of Nature-philosophy from the Principles of Gravity and Light*, Schelling turned back to Spinoza, who "says, the more we understand individual things, the more we recognize God, and with ever greater conviction we must now also call out to whoever seeks the science of the eternal: *come to physics and know the eternal*" (SW I/2:378)!²⁹ Our differences are not a liability. They are the great asset of nature, our sublime treasure, the secret love implicit within the desire to philosophize.

The war of all against all – religions against religions and against their own heterodoxies, disciplines against other disciplines, dogmas against dogmas, movements against movements, class against class, nation against nation, race against race, everyone against everyone else, and the indifference of humans to nonhuman animals and the great earth itself – has reduced the space of thinking and living to a monstrous sickness, an unremitting din of human subjectivity that Schelling understood as evil.

But will he not, the mere observer of works, after he has given up all hope of comprehending the divine confusion and incomprehensible wealth of

forms with the understanding, also finally be introduced into the holy Sabbath of nature, into reason, where it, resting above its transitory works, recognizes and understands itself as itself. Then it speaks to us to the extent that we ourselves fall silent [*in dem Maß, als wir selbst in uns verstummen, redet sie zu uns*]. (SW I/2:378)

It belongs to the greatness of Schelling to have known this silence as the heart of philosophy's life, indeed, as its most precious treasure. In 1811, still devastated by the loss of his wife, Caroline, Schelling again invoked this *Verstummen der Wissenschaft*, this falling silent of our dominating image of the acquisition of knowledge:

I would like to take this opportunity to say, if it were not too immodest, what I so often felt, and in an especially lively way with this present presentation: how much nearer I am than most people could probably conceive to this falling silent of knowledge [*Verstummen der Wissenschaft*], which we must necessarily encounter when we know how infinitely far everything that is personal reaches such that it is impossible actually to know anything at all. (WA 103)

For Schelling, this was not to be trapped in hell, to be sucked back into the abyss of the primordial past. This was the silence at the heart of the prophetic voice. Schelling's "intimation" of the future speaks of *ahnen*, to have an inkling, a foreboding, a premonition. In this instance, however, to have an inkling of the future as such is not to have a premonition of *something*, of anything in particular. It is to have an inkling that one day the future will actually be the *power or potency of the future*. That of which we have had an inkling or intimation is itself *geweissagt*. The antiquated verb *weissagen* is prevalent in Luther's translation of the Bible, handling a verb that would now be more familiarly translated as *prophezeien*, to prophesy, from the Greek προφήτης, to speak for the gods, whether such speaking be oracular, as in the Greek cults, or a translation of the Hebrew *navi*, the mouthpiece of God. To hear and see and touch the godhead – the miracle of being, the natality of nature – and to find language for such miracles and for the eternity of beginnings, is to be a prophet as Schelling understood it: to speak of and from the Divine Comedy of Time, toward and from the holding together of the past, present, and future as a dynamic whole (A³), to become the visionary who sees "through the hanging together of the times [*der den Zusammenhang der Zeiten durchschaut*]" (WA 83). One need not be overly attached to the Christian vision to see the prophetic power of a utopian future in which all forms of life affirm the creativity of that life.

Notes

1. Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006), 19–20. For more on the problem of the image of thought with regard to Schelling's thinking, see Chapter 3 of my *Schelling's Practice of the Wild* (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 218; henceforth WP.
3. See also the similarly bold claim in the 1832–33 *Grounding of Positive Philosophy*: "The logical represents itself as the negative, as that without which nothing could exist – but like in the sensuous world, for example, where everything can be comprehended in measure and number, yet certainly still not for this reason being the explanation of the world. The entire world, as it were, lies caught in reason, but the question is: How did it come into this net? (Therefore there is still in the world something other and something more than mere reason – even something that strives beyond these boundaries [*etwas über diese Schranken Hinausstrebendes*])" (GPP 222). Except where otherwise noted, all Schelling translations are my own responsibility. Translations that are not my own are occasionally slightly modified so that they accord stylistically with the present chapter.
4. This is the innocent child of forgetting, the last of the three metamorphoses: "... ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen" (Friedrich Nietzsche, "Von den drei Verwandlungen," *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari [Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1988], 4:31).
5. Despite his hasty dismissal of Schelling, Antonio Negri strikingly comes to the same kind of conclusion about love in his remarkable study of the Book of Job. Turning to, of all philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, he describes the virtue of *caritas* as "our extraordinary capacity to love God as he loves himself." Such love "is beyond measure, not because its immeasurableness is chaotic but simply because it cannot be measured; it cannot be measured because love, charity, creativity are not measured but are measuring... Charity cannot be measured because it allows us to participate in the power of creation." This for Negri was the revolution by which labor reclaims the dignity of its creativity. "When power opposes Power, it has become divine. It is the source of life. It is the superabundance of charity. The world can be reconstructed on this basis, and only what is reconstructed in this way will have value; it will continue to not have a measure, because the power that creates has no measure" (Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, trans. Matteo Mandarini [Durham: Duke University Press, 2009], 74–75). Negri, in his own way, especially with regard to the belonging together of immeasurable immensity (*smisurato*), love, and creativity, comes upon a space and image of thinking that we can also associate with Schelling.
6. This is the tenth of the "Proverbs of Hell" in William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).
7. I borrow this idea from Wolfram Högbe: "My thesis is now, said briefly, that in the end this trichotomy of the *Divina Commedia*, and also the quality of the three realms, remained structurally prototypical for the three conceived parts of *Die Weltalter*: The past corresponds to the *Inferno*, the present to the *Purgatorio*, and the future to the *Paradisio*. One could therefore in a certain sense designate *Die Weltalter* as the Divine Comedy of Time..." (*Prädikation und Genesis: Metaphysik als Fundamentalheuristik im Ausgang von Schellings "Die Weltalter"* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989], 31).

8. In the first (1811) draft of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling had planned to begin with the words: "The consciousness of eternity can only be articulated in the phrase: 'I am the one who was, who is, who will be'" (WA 263). It also alludes to Kant's observation in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that "perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or any thought more sublimely expressed, than in the inscription over the temple of Isis (Mother Nature): 'I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and my veil no mortal has removed'" (CJ 5:316n).
9. Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 52.
10. For more on these early influences and their context, see Chapters 2 and 3 of my *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).
11. See Dale E. Snow, "Genius: The 'Sunday's Children' Problem," in *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 62–66.
12. As Robert F. Brown rightly indicates, in the 1803 lectures *On University Studies*, Schelling concedes that "those who do not have intellectual intuition cannot understand what is said of it, and for this reason it cannot at all be given" (quoted in LHP 3:261 [SW I/5:256]). What is given at the ground of the given as such is not universally given. On this critical and hugely consequential issue, Schelling and Hegel part ways. In the end, however, Schelling explicitly brackets a discourse of the mystical. In the Munich lectures, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1827), Schelling warns against the indolent recourse to mysticism in a manner that we would now associate with mystification. Such "mysticism" amounts to "a hatred of clear insight" (HMP 192 [SW I/10:185]). Beyond the confusion of the mystical with the mystifying, Schelling reserved the term $\tau\omicron\ \mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ for negative philosophy's attempt to mark the limit of the thinkable as it touched the hidden and concealed. It marks the monstrosity at the heart of light and in this strict sense Schelling spoke of the ground of nature (*natura naturans*) as secret and as such mystical (HMP 190–92 [SW I/10:183–85]). As we shall see, positive philosophy endeavors to think the discontinuous history of this intrinsically elusive eternal beginning.
13. Hegel and Schelling had enjoyed a robust friendship and philosophical collaboration. Hegel had defended Schelling in *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801), and they had collaborated on their short-lived *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. Despite this, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, without explicitly naming Schelling, Hegel charged that the intellectual intuition annihilates concrete determinations "in the night when all cows are black" and produces a philosophy of identity in which "everything is the same in the absolute" (PhG §16 [HW 3:22]). The intellectual intuition annihilates the force of reason by abandoning it in a monochromatic formalism. Although this account of the intellectual intuition might describe its reception in some of Schelling's dim-witted readers, it would be outrageous to ascribe such a position to Schelling. Hegel was well aware of this and had anticipated Schelling's consternation and tried to forestall its repercussions with an explanatory letter that accompanied an exemplar of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel forewarned that in these incendiary passages "you will not find that I have been too hard on the shallowness that makes so much mischief with your forms in particular and degrades your science into a bare formalism" (HL 80). Ironically, Hegel's infamous allusion to the "dark night" paraphrases Schelling's own words written four years earlier in his 1803 *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*, where he in his own way argues against this kind of interpretation of the intellectual intuition: "Most people see in the being of the

absolute nothing but a pure night and are unable to know anything in it; it dwindles away for them into a mere negation of multiplicity" (SW I/4:401). Schelling was right to be puzzled and concerned. If Hegel had in mind Schelling's readers who had concluded that the point of the intellectual intuition was to drop out of the mundane details and travails of quotidian life and hang out in the absolute where everything is everything else, he easily could have been explicit about this point. Why did he not mention that he was not reinforcing a popular misconception about Schelling but rather defending Schelling on this point? Schelling quickly saw that Hegel's manner of articulating this point would throw the Schelling baby out with the bathwater. Schelling responded to Hegel: "Insofar as you yourself mention the polemical part of the Preface, given my own justly measured opinion of myself I would have to think too little of myself to apply this polemic to my own person. It must therefore, as you expressed in your letter, apply only to a further bad use of my ideas and to those who parrot them without understanding, although in this writing itself the distinction is not made" (HL 80). Hegel never clarified this small but hugely consequential issue in subsequent editions of the *Phenomenology*, and Schelling's legacy still has not fully recovered.

14. John Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 42.
15. *Ibid.*, 104.
16. I am alluding to the lectures that he gave in Berlin called *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*. For an excellent analysis of this remarkable lecture course, see Marcela Garcia, "Schelling's Late Negative Philosophy: Crisis and Critique of Pure Reason," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (fall 2011): 141–63.
17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La nature: Notes, cours du Collège de France*, ed. Dominique Séglaard (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 70, 160. The English translation is available as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2003). For more on Merleau-Ponty's relationship to Schelling on the question of nature, see Jason M. Wirth and Patrick Burke, eds., *The Barbarian Principle: Merleau-Ponty, Schelling, and the Question of Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).
18. *Initia Philosophiae Universae* (1820–21) (IPU) is an early critical edition of the *Erlanger Vorlesungen*, whose lectures formed the basis of Schelling's chapter, *On the Nature of Philosophy as Science* (1821). A new and more complete version is now in the works.
19. For a translation of Schelling's remarkable 1812 letter to Eschenmayer, see the first appendix of my *Schelling's Practice of the Wild*.
20. Despite his admiration of Schelling, in the end Heidegger demoted him to a precursor to Nietzsche's will to power because both consummated the *Occidental Seinsgeschichte* in its culmination in subjectivity and in our self-contained lordship over the earth. As an analysis of modernity and post-modernity, Heidegger's diagnosis of the ascent of subjectivity has much merit. As a reading of Schelling (or Nietzsche for that matter), it is severely lacking. As we can see in the context of the present discussion, Schelling's diagnosis of the problem of modernity anticipates Heidegger's analysis. To use Schelling's own critique of the triumph of subjectivity against Schelling himself is perverse and uncharitable. For a much needed and more balanced reappraisal of Schelling's relationship to Heidegger, see Lore Hühn, "A Philosophical Dialogue between Heidegger and Schelling," trans. David Carus, *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (spring 2014): 16–34.
21. Schelling's final lecture course in Berlin, *Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy*, is a robust exercise in negative philosophy. See note 16.

22. For Arendt, a totalitarian regime operates “neither without guidance of law nor is it arbitrary, for it claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or of History from which all positive laws always have been supposed to spring.” Such a regime “executes the law of History or of Nature without translating it into standards of right and wrong for individual behavior. It applies the law directly to mankind without bothering with the behavior of men. The law of Nature or the law of History, if properly executed, is expected to produce mankind as its end product” (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] [New York: Schocken, 2004], 595). This chilling execution of Nature and History, with their ironclad rules and mercilessly deductive rigor, is the fully unleashed terrorism of the dogmatic image of thought.
23. For more on the problem of art in Schelling, see my *Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), ch. 5; as well as *Schelling's Practice of the Wild*, chs. 5–6.
24. Adapted, with revisions, from Diana I. Behler's translation of “The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism,” in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1987), 162–63. “Das sogenannte ‘Älteste Systemprogramm,’” in *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, ed. Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 110–12.
25. “Denn Christentum ist Platonismus für's ‘Volk’” (Friedrich Nietzsche, preface to *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [1885], in *Sämtliche Werke*, 6:2, 4).
26. “Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism,” 162.
27. F. W. J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* (1842), trans. Mason Richey and Markus Zisselsberger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 174.
28. The translation of the *Samothrace* address is by David Farrell Krell in a forthcoming edition currently under my editorial care.
29. The translation of this seminal work is by Iain Hamilton Grant and has not yet been published.

23

The Hypothesis of Nature's Logic in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*

Iain Hamilton Grant

Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is either considered one of several phases through which his philosophy passed or, as Schelling repeatedly states, it is "one side of philosophy" until at least 1830 (EPh) and, since he wrote his last work on the subject in 1844 (SW I/10:301–90), remains a constant focus of his philosophical trajectory from beginning to end.¹ The latter view is further supported by his declaration that, until 1809, "the author ha[d] confined himself wholly to investigations in the philosophy of nature" (EHF 4 [SW I/7:333]). By that point, according to the "philosophy in phases" account many Schelling scholars later imposed on his work, Schelling is supposed to have passed through his Spinozist, Fichtean, nature-philosophical, and identity-philosophical phases and to be entering instead that of the philosophy of freedom and the ages of the world which would in turn be abandoned for the positive philosophy after 1827.²

Even if the *Naturphilosophie* is a constant philosophical presence, however, this does not warrant the ascription of a consistency to it that it may turn out to lack, nor suggest that Schelling pursues just one method in his investigations under that rubric. Yet if we accept Schelling's testimony, we cannot accept the narrow, phase-based restriction of *Naturphilosophie* to those books, chapters, and journals clearly contributory to it.³ To understand *Naturphilosophie* accordingly requires consideration of Schelling's many articulations of nature, its concept, and its place in philosophy, as a whole, from throughout his career.

We may initially consider the example from his 1830 *Introduction to Philosophy*, noted above, of Schelling's characterization of *Naturphilosophie* as "one side" of philosophy as a whole. While this is consistent with Schelling's claim from 1799 onward, that *Naturphilosophie* is one of the two basic sciences of philosophy, it opens several problems. The first concerns whether, as just "one side," *Naturphilosophie* is incapable of being philosophy as such without the supplementation of transcendental philosophy or the philosophy of the ideal. If this is indeed required, are both merely subsets of Identity philosophy?

Moreover, if not only *Naturphilosophie* but nature itself is accounted only *one side* of what exists, isn't this a dualism rather than anything at least contemporarily recognizable as a "naturalism"? Perhaps, however, "sides" or "aspects" may mislead: what dimension is it in philosophy that separates nature from the ideal? What do we know of the "Ideal" as such?

In the Foreword to *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Schelling draws critical attention to the view that "reason, thought and knowing are accounted to the essence of the spiritual nature first of all" (EHF 4 [SW I/7:333]). That he rejects this view is evident in his complaint that, because "merely reflective humanity" has no idea of "objective reason," it "know[s] only of two worlds, the one consisting of stone and rubble, the other of intuitions and the thinking thereupon" (SW I/6:279).⁴ If stones and thoughts are not divided according to the worlds they inhabit, in what way is the Ideal related to nature? In what respect is systemic reason "natural" at all? Addressing this problem directly, Schelling answers: "long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, that of the cosmos [*System der Welt*]" (SS 197 [SW I/7:421]). We shall see below the importance that Schelling's naturalism attaches to the "law of antecedence."⁵

Yet whatever division is made between nature and the Ideal, the fact that it is made serves to contrast *Naturphilosophie* with what the contemporary Schellingian philosopher Markus Gabriel calls "fundamentalism," according to which some species of matter (water, atoms, fire, etc.) supplies the ground and basis of all that rises, so to speak, from and "above" it, and it can therefore be "reduced" to it or "naturalized" just when nature as such may be treated in terms of one element of it.⁶ Indeed, the failure of a fundamentalist materialism is one of the central arguments of Schelling's Introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Either matter is infinitely divisible or it is not. If it is, then matter turns out to be "the most insubstantial thing we know" (IPN 17 [SW I/2:22]). If it is not, then since matter cannot explain the problem of specific difference in its products, neither are *all* things matter. Perhaps, he offers, "matter has forces," which in turn explain the cohesion and composition of material parts. If so, then either matter acquires forces, which can be explained neither by matter nor by force, or matter must be what we might call a regional state of forces, which was the solution Kant pursued, unsuccessfully on his own admission, in *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*. In both the case that it is infinitely divisible and that in which it is somehow emergent from forces, "matter" is, we might say, "ungrounded."⁷ To be clear, Schelling's claim is not that matter is unreal, but that it can neither be nor provide a "final substratum" of either knowledge or nature (IPN 17–19 [SW I/2:22–25]).⁸

Schelling's diagnosis of the failure of foundationalism both physically and ideally is key not only to the positions at which his *Naturphilosophie* arrives, but also to the method by which it does so. What is often derided, using the title

Schelling gave the journals he edited between 1800 and 1803, as “speculative physics” is speculative in precisely the sense that it is based on hypotheses, as the beginnings of the majority of Schelling’s works attest. Rather than seeking to arrive at a “theory of nature,” the goal of speculative physics is to support its hypotheses by induction not only from experimental results, but also by pursuing, again inductively, a naturalism concerning reason that integrates the latter into those behaviors of nature under examination. Schelling’s naturalism neither attempts to deduce nature from material nor from ideal foundations, but rather from the indissociable interplay between the two. So on the basis of the famous identity hypothesis formulated at the end of the Introduction to the *Ideas*, if it is the case that “nature should not only express, but even realize, originally and necessarily, the laws of our mind” (IPN 41–42 [SW I/2:52–53]), then this realization is not *a priori* in relation to *a posteriori* nature, but rather is itself nature from the first. Schelling’s “genetic” ideal, itself informed by the increasing importance of history in the natural sciences, is realized therefore not in reason grasping nature whole and representing it to itself, but rather in repeated experiments in opening up the subject of inquiry. As he puts it in his last great work devoted to *Naturphilosophie*, “what am I thinking when I think what exists?” (SW I/10:303). In what follows we will see the development of Schelling’s method of hypothesis – the very antithesis, at first sight, of Newton’s famous denial that he made any – throughout the *Naturphilosophie*, and examine the relation between the logical form of hypotheses and the nature not *about* which but rather *by* which these hypotheses are, hypothetically, made.

As a post-Kantian philosopher, there is something clearly radical in Schelling’s method. Like Hegel,⁹ Schelling criticizes the regressive circularity of knowing attendant upon transcendental philosophy’s starting points. That is, if in order to know some X we must first know what knowing is, and if this knowing is itself an instance of knowing, then we have to know that second-order knowing before pursuing the knowing of X.¹⁰ This circularity is not simply a formal error, because it is vicious only when knowing excludes the X to be known from the “pure” knowing of knowing as its precondition. Such knowing excludes everything but its own iterations, entirely without the X to be known. Schelling’s strategy is threefold: first, to retain the iterative structure as both “scientific” and productive. Second, to unground the assumption that experience and understanding are even formally distinct, and to set as the limit of the former not objects escaping the jurisdiction of the latter, but rather the *idea* “that a universe exists.”¹¹ The result so far is a science of the idea indissociable from the *experience* of the existence of everything that is and *that* it is. Third, however, because the limits of experience consist in the proposition “that a universe exists,” why it does, whether it always did, and how it came to be remain elements of an X that is not exhausted in existence.

Thus, when Schelling writes, at the opening of his *Exhibition of Nature's Process*, "what am I thinking when I think what exists?" (SW I/10:303), he reverses the Kantian path from the possession of knowledge to the justification of *my* possession of it, and in its place he sets the problem of *what* it is that is. In other words, Schelling protests the progressive reduction, throughout modern philosophy, of the subject of inquiry, the *logical* subject, as yet undetermined, to the subject that knows it. While therefore Karl Jaspers's thesis is that Schelling is throughout an ontologist,¹² this is clearly exhibited in Schelling's question above, which opens the logical subject, the "what it is" of which something is predicated, to a "what it is" *prior* to predication. If we say that for *Naturphilosophie*, *what* it is *that* is, is "nature," the problem for that philosophy becomes the determination of nature in consequence of questions concerning what it is that are themselves derivative upon its existence, such that "what nature is" is neither reduced to its asserted existence nor to the sum total of thoughts in fact consequent upon it. This is what is distinctive about *Naturphilosophie* as regards its method, the insuperable investigation of anteriority after the fact of existence, the realist insistence on antecedence, on what is prior to experience.

"Prior to experience" is for Schelling an ontological rather than an epistemological category. Following Kant's critique of natural cognition, however, this is not a simple matter of insisting, dogmatically, that what exists does so. Thus Schelling complicates matters when he writes that "there is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the I. For me, the former is the original, the latter derived" (SW I/4:84). Original and derived, that is, are ideal differences, albeit nonetheless real for that *if* nature is anterior to propositions or judgments concerning it.

Naturphilosophie thus remains an idealism, but in what sense? Kant's idealism is not reducibly an epistemology, because it does not bottom out in apperception. The critique of natural cognition operates precisely to eliminate the substrate *in the Idea*, the notion, that is, that in conceiving the conceived changes its nature and becomes, whatever it was, no more than the underpinnings of the conceivings of an I. Conceiving leaks unstoppably into ontology if it is indeed conceiving, but it does not, by nature, leak downward toward things, but upward toward the conceiving. What is specific to the *Naturphilosophie* therefore consists in the actual experiments in and by nature. These are the original of which conceived being is the derivative. Speculative physics does not start beneath, below, or prior to the conceptual engagement in nature, since such engagement is involved, albeit often disavowed, in all experiment by definition. It is *a priori* not in the sense that it deduces conditions of possible experience from which the characteristics of particular experiences may be read off without experiment, but rather *a priori* in that it hypothesizes an antecedent upon which it is itself consequent, something first *just when* some

conceiving is consequent upon it. Hence the first major nature-philosophical hypothesis in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* famously runs:

For what we want is not that Nature should coincide with the laws of our mind *by chance*...but that *she herself*, necessarily and originally, should not only *express*, but *even realize* the laws of our mind, and that she is, and is called, Nature, only insofar as she does so. (IPN 41–42 [SW I/2:55–56])

Nature is the nature that it happens to be, first, only insofar as there is mindedness in it, and second, only when such mindedness is “necessarily” consequent (not *necessary as such*) upon its “original” realization by nature. In the Introduction to the *Ideas*, Schelling writes, “That a universe exists: this proposition is the limit of experience itself. Or rather, that a universe exists is itself only an *idea* [*Idee*]” (IPN 18 [SW I/2:24]). That a universe exists seems a good way to begin a philosophy of *nature*. Yet Schelling is careful to point out that it is a proposition and an Idea, raising the question of the respect in which nature and the idea differ. How then do they differ?

When, in the Antinomy of Pure Reason, Kant addresses the completeness of the world, or “the sum total of all things, insofar as they can be objects... of our experience” (MFS 4:467),¹³ he indicates precisely that the *transcendental idea* – the content of which is the “cosmical concepts” or *Weltbegriffe* (A420/B447),¹⁴ or completeness in composition, division, origination, and dependence within the field of appearances – cannot be applied to experience. When they are so applied, the result is always an antinomy. For example, when the totality of conditions under which the origination of the world is to be thought is at issue, we cannot infer from experience a resolution to the problem of whether such origination has or has not taken place, since all the understanding can do is to reason from conditioned to conditioned, from the most proximate phenomena to the most distant, in accordance with the pure concepts of the understanding, on the one hand, and the pure forms of intuition, on the other. Since the understanding can only proceed regressively from conditioned to conditioned in space and time, no beginning of time, nor limit of space, is to be encountered in it that is not itself conditioned by another. Accordingly, such a regress is never completed, and neither a beginning in time nor the unconditioned totality of conditions can be discovered. The world may therefore be infinite in space and time or it may be an unconditioned infinity of conditions, but neither conclusion can be inferred from experience.¹⁵

The problem is not that Schelling considers these operations of reason spurious, but that their individuation, in the forms of the cosmical concepts or *Weltbegriffe* – completeness or all-ness in composition, division, origination, and dependence – is merely ordered according to Kant’s table of categories, but these latter are not, Schelling claims, “ordered [*angeordnet*] according to any principle

at all" (IPP 65, translation modified [SW I/1:154]). In other words, the separateness of the *Weltbegriffe* has not been deduced, but merely assumed. This is why Schelling's *Timaeus* commentary works hard against Kant's incomplete system, to show that the Platonic *Weltbegriffe* – the unlimited, the limit, the common element, and the cause – are cooperatively causal and together determine the "becoming of being."¹⁶ If this is so, then the understanding separates into its pure concepts what is not separate in reason – for example, completeness in origination from that of division. Hence the *Ideas* pursues the latter form of completeness under the rubric of the grounds of matter, and since it finds that no such grounds obtain, the entailment that matter *emerges* brings into play the cosmical concept of completeness of origination, that is, of an object outstripped by its emergence, whose existence can only be regressively tracked back to its inexistence. Although *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* will offer, as a principle from which the categories may be derived, the not-I derived by negation from the reality of the absolute I – and, since this not-I is consequent upon a negation, this derivation already attests to the operation of the categories – this overtly Fichtean solution remains problematic for Schelling insofar as "the proposition [*Satz*] that the I contains all reality could easily be invalidated if the theoretical idea of a sum total of objective reality outside of the I could be realized" (IPP 91, translation modified [SW I/1:190]). It is this hypothesis that prompts the *Naturphilosophie*.

Yet Schelling does not want, in the *Ideas* at any rate, to resolve the problem of the origin of the world, or of creation. Rather, he wishes to know how that difference arises between Idea and universe, which separation the majority of that work's Introduction traces, following the lineaments of the now desegregated cosmical concepts, on the one hand, and continuing to push the problem of an externality or anteriority (depending on whether we think the concept of completeness in composition or in origination) to that principle.

To explore the separation of Idea and universe and to outline the "problems which a philosophy of nature has to solve," the Introduction to the *Ideas* begins with contrasting philosophy as the work of freedom, or as an idea of *practical* reason, with philosophy as an "infinite science," an idea of *speculative* reason. That Schelling considers the ultimately *moral* reality of Kant's understanding of the idea to be an error becomes increasingly clear as the stridency of his denunciations increases, as does the "economic-teleological" understanding of nature that follows from the primacy of the practical for Fichte.¹⁷ Thus, the contrast between the two accounts of philosophy established in the first paragraph of the Introduction does not dogmatically establish what philosophy *is*; rather, it argues that, insofar as philosophy is a work of freedom, it is "not something with which our mind...is originally and by nature imbued" (IPN 9 [SW I/2:11]). So if it is not original, but therefore derived and conditioned, by what is it conditioned? Schelling's response is methodological: since philosophy is an "infinite science," the idea of that science must be the *result* of

philosophy, not a presupposition of its operation, like the acts of Fichte's I. Therefore, concepts are to "come into being before the eyes of the reader" (IPN 9 [SW I/2:11]). Starting with philosophy is already starting in the middle, so the discovery of its conditions is going to be made regressively if at all, while the invention of what it conditions will follow progressively.

Schelling's pursuit of the progressive series, from ground to conditioned, rejects Kant's view that this series was for philosophy "gratuitous and unnecessary," since this science is to consider "grounds, not the consequences" (A412/B438). The inquiry therefore begins *in medias res*, or *in* a universe: "whoever is gripped by investigations of nature... does not ask whether nature and experience be possible. It is enough that she is there for him" (IPN 9, translation modified [SW I/2:12]). The problem of the existent universe constituting the limit of experience begins to focus: on the one hand, an existent universe is the medium in which research into it takes place, and it *grasps* (*begriffen*) whomever investigates it. On the other hand, the limit of experience is not situated at the *outer border* of experience, so that the thinkable outstrips it; rather, it is precisely constructed in the question of *what it is that is there*. This is why Schelling importantly qualifies the claim "that a universe exists" as a *proposition*: the expression of cognitive activity is realized in the production of an existent object "for him," that is, for a subject. "He has made her real by his very *act*," writes Schelling, "and the question of what is possible is raised only by one who believes that he does not hold the actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] in his hand" (IPN 9, translation modified [SW I/2:12]). Nor is it just by or for *one* subject that a universe exists, for "whole epochs" have been spent researching it, opening the path onto the problems of that universe's origination that follow upon the discovery of the consequent character of philosophical investigations. In posing the question of its possibility, it is *philosophy* that first creates the existent universe *as* a limit of experience, through the proposition. Recalling, dimly, the species' antecedent state, where no question of the nature in which I am absorbed for my food and shelter can arise, reminds the reader not of some utopian identity, but of the insuperability of antecedence upon which philosophy itself is consequent, if it is to be "throughout a work of freedom."

From the cosmological idea of origination, the *Ideas* swings immediately to that of composition. If there is interaction between subject and object, they are of one kind. If one acts on the other, the kind of which both are expressions consists in force:

Man is not born to waste his mental power in conflict against the fantasy of an imaginary world, but to exert all his powers upon a world which has influence upon him, lets him feel its forces, and upon which he can react. Between him and the world, therefore, no rift must be established; contact and reciprocal action must be possible between the two. (IPN 10–11 [SW I/2:13])

What may read at first sight as a somewhat naive condemnation of philosophy instead brings focus to the epistemic significance of "feeling." If there are feelings, they are brought about by something that *lets itself be felt* (whatever this might be) and to which reaction is both possible and effective. Registering pain, I move from the thorn that pricks me, and my feeling alters. Less prosaically, so too does the world or, less dogmatically, that medium within which I have taken action following myself feeling the action it took upon me. Here the limit of experience consists in the variable relations of force by which I feel and act, and the world acts upon me. With regard to feeling, therefore, skin is a better candidate for "limit of experience" than any thought-objects or "chimeras" mistakenly projected beyond it by my mental powers, my *Vermögen*. Between these, too, there is interaction and variable tension, since an excess of reflection hinders an organism's capacity to act, feel, and react. Pursuing this excessive faculty, philosophy becomes a mental illness "preoccupied with dissection," and it must therefore become a "discipline of errant reason" if it is to serve health, that is, an "equilibrium of forces and consciousness" (IPN 11 [SW I/2:14]).

However, the epistemic significance of feeling is not limited to those *physiological* correctives I might induce to spare pain or mental disorder, since it attests to the *identity of kind* between the existent universe and the subject that issues the proposition that this is so. According to a principle established at the outset of *On the World Soul*, since "*real antithesis* is possible only between things of one kind and common origin" (SW I/2:397), some "reciprocal action" between man and world is occurrent. The significance of this is that it demonstrates reciprocity as actual in cases other than the reflective judgments of finite rational beings concerning representations of organic causality, just when there are effects in the environments of my actions and when that environment constrains or "pressures him, hits him, gnaws at him from all directions, forever threatening and restricting his life" (SW I/6:17). Again, this gives rise to Schelling's postulate, in *On the World Soul*, that mechanism, or succession in cause and effect, is restricted by organization, which encloses a succession within certain limits (SW I/2:349).

Whether reciprocal or successive, organic or mechanistic, causality is of one kind, which is *force*, according to the *Ideas*. Feeling is itself an epistemic engine that facilitates inference concerning that environment within which feeling occurs. Neither does Schelling shy away from what contemporary philosophers would call the naturalistic implications of this thesis. Hence his claim in the *Ideas* that "chemistry is nothing else but sensory dynamics (dynamics made intuitable)" (IPN 257 [SW I/2:323–24]).¹⁸ Nor does it license the hypothesis that *force is what nature fundamentally is*, since although the hypothesis states that real antithesis is possible only in things of common kind, from which it would follow that if the forces forge that environment within which reciprocity

between worldly beings causally occurs, then everything in it is force. This claim takes no account of that hypothesis's "common origin" element, which stipulates that the things between which reciprocity occurs are *consequent* upon those forces. To paraphrase a question Schelling poses in *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, if the point of origin were the whole, neither would there be an origin, since it is already the whole, nor would anything at all originate: "Is the beginning point really the whole?" (EHF 73 [SW I/7:412]). A universe so constructed would fail even to construct a mathematical point, since without an origin, it could only ever have always been one.

This tells us that forces too are conditioned. The debate as to whether forces are conditioned by the bodies or essences that possess them, or whether they are "ungrounded," features large in the landscape of contemporary metaphysics of science.¹⁹ Schelling's account of the problem is informative. If we argue that "matter has forces," making forces into its "accidents," then we make it insoluble how matter *acquires* these forces, since either they are divinely implanted or, if they can affect matter at all, then they must be of the same kind as matter. Therefore, matter does not have forces, because matter and forces existing in separation from one another is inconceivable. Rather, forces are the precondition of conceiving what matter is if it is not an eternal, inert mass (IPN 18 [SW I/2:22–23]). Conversely, then, matter, rather than the ultimate ground of physical entities, is itself ungrounded, since it is conditioned by forces or, since the converse entails an insoluble dualism of matter first and force second, is consequent upon them.

At this point, two questions arise, one concerning *fundamentals*, or the grounding of forces, the other concerning Ideas. Fundamentals first – as surely befits a *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling argues that matter is a conditioned product of forces, thus raising the question of whether, and in what, forces might be grounded. Jumping forward to *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* for a definition, we find Schelling noting of the Unground that "one essence in its two operative modes [*Wirkungsweisen*] actually divides itself into two essences" (EHF 71, translation modified [SW I/7:409]). The two "operative modes" of essence are as *ground* and *existence*, and the key is that no finite essence has its ground in itself, but always in another. Something conditioned is finite, and therefore has its ground in another. In what respect, if at all, are forces conditioned? Consider a force that *did nothing*. To what extent would it remain a force? Schelling's solution to this problem, from the *Ideas* forward, is based on the antithesis of positive and negative forces (*On the World Soul*), or of productivity and product (*First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, System of Transcendental Idealism*). Productivity occurs only when there is a product, or there is no productivity; a positive force is only positive when restricted by a negative force. Key to these claims is the fact that forces are

grounded *progressively* rather than *regressively*, that is, that forces exist insofar as there are consequents at all that its antecedents are antecedent. The regressive argument, which Schelling does not make in the *Ideas*, but which first occurs in the *First Outline*, couples the above progressive argument with a regressive one to the effect that forces are conditioned by their inexistence, so that if both propositions are thought together, existence is grounded just when there is creation, when something emerges that was not. This is why the *Naturphilosophie* survives in Schelling's later work as "the concept of creation," on the one hand, "the true goal of a positive philosophy" (EPh 117); and, on the other, as the question of the composition of antecedence or the character of the subject of a judgment: "what am I thinking when I think what exists?" (SW I/10:303).

We may usefully return from this last issue, the composition of antecedence, to the discussion of *Ideas* with which this discussion began. In the consequent grounding of productivity in products we find in the synthesis of the progressive and regressive series (from ground to consequent and from consequent to ground, respectively), and in that synthesis, a further one of composition, division, origination, and dependency. Schelling's claim that "real antithesis is possible only between things of one kind and common origin" surely applies in the domain of the idea, since if it did not, no explanation of the division and ordering of the *Weltbegriffe* would be possible. If they are of one kind, then how does the division arise? We know that reflection "dissects endlessly," but with the ideas we are dealing only with reason. Reason's interest, says Kant, is to seek the unconditioned. Yet if each of the four "cosmical concepts" is conditioned by its neighbor, then either we must conceive of an unconditioned for each of these concepts, or no unconditioned is conceivable at all unless a common origin is found from upon which their separateness is consequent.

In the *Ideas*, as we have seen, Schelling is not heroically battering at the farthest reaches of experience to gain egress into the ocean of speculation, because the universe is neither far from experience nor close to it. Rather, he rather modestly situates feeling in some environment – we may call it "nature" without ontic prejudice – such that consequences may be inferred from it, and concepts arise before the eyes of the reader. In this process, we have witnessed Schelling's curiously existential or physiological claim that a finite rational organism gains in activity what it loses in reflection, and vice versa. Moreover, we have seen that philosophy *disciplines* the errancy of reflection. This is not, like Wittgenstein, to return the philosopher to healthy action from the painful fantasia attendant on conceptual confusion, but rather in order that philosophy *produce* or *invent*, or be proven in its consequences. The consequences of Schelling's investigations so far are (1) "that a universe exists" is the limit of experience insofar as this limit is instituted by reflection, on the one hand, and is demonstrated by feeling, on the other, since this reveals the reciprocity between the behaviors of nature and epistemic states concerning it; (2) that the

progressive as well as the regressive series are necessary not merely in seeking to understand the origin of the world, but in order to understand appearance at all, by which is meant not *seeming* but *emergence*, or indeed the emergence of emergence; (3) that when both series are involved, the boundaries separating composition or aggregation from origination, which Kant holds to issue from the difference in the pure *a priori* forms of intuition, or of division from dependence, or the results of analysis (from conditioned to conditioned) from the issuing of consequence (*that* there is some X), are eliminated when the progressive and regressive series are employed.

These conclusions represent the point of contrast between Schelling's *causal* interpretation of Plato's Ideas²⁰ and Kant's account of their operations in reason and morality. The former has two advantages over the latter. Firstly, in the context of Schelling's conjoint study of Kant and Plato in his *Timaeus* commentary, "cause" is what "mixes and creates"²¹ what Schelling there calls Plato's *Weltbegriffe*. Since Kant's *Weltbegriffe* are derived from the categories, the Platonic account of "the nature that produces" (*Philebus* 26e) resolves the problem Schelling identified in *Of the I*, namely, that the categories are not there ordered according to any principle at all (IPP 65 [SW I/1:154]).

Casting the *Weltbegriffe* as categories of *production* rather than understanding, has the further advantage that this causal account renders the existent universe precisely the universe that it is, not some ersatz universe superimposed on the genuine one by reason, or some universe that, hidden behind appearances, remains for that reason unknown. Hence Schelling's vehement arguments in the *Ideas* and elsewhere against the "thing in itself" insofar as this remains merely thinkable. If a thing in itself is thus only thinkable, then it cannot be antecedent to appearances as what they depend on without incurring the insuperable problems, which Schelling pursues throughout the Introduction to the *Ideas*, posed by any putative *originative* role they might play with respect to appearances. Accordingly, the thing in itself cannot be *antecedent* but only *consequent* or dependent upon appearances, playing no role in their *composition*, but rather *dividing* the totality of possible appearances from what does *not* appear. One alternative, which Schelling rejects, is that things in general are consequents of thought.²² The other alternative, the dogmatic one, makes things in themselves the *beings* on which appearances depend, and although they would not appear through the division of phenomena, they would in the division of the totality.

While all this is revealed by the interaction of feeling and its environment, it does not stop there. Schelling accepts Kant's "critique of natural cognition" (SW II/1:526) insofar as it demonstrates that reality cannot be reached from "the analysis of concepts"; but he inverts the priority Kant accords intuition and understanding, so that intuition becomes "the highest element in our knowledge" (IPN 173 [SW I/2:216]). The problem therefore posed by the thing

in itself, under Schelling's revision, is that of the consequent nature of thought. Before the understanding that divides and before reason that drives, intuition already bonds "feeling and fact" to the universe within which this occurs and to the thoughts that issue from it.

Accordingly, it is the existent universe that *constitutes* the limit of experience within and for the understanding, or the power by means of which this limit is reflected; and it is *only in* this reflected universe, the universe known insofar as it consists in mere objects, governed by the unrealizable idea of their cosmological totality as objects of possible experience, that the understanding divides endlessly. What is Schelling's target here? What is he criticizing? It is clear even in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* that what it is the conscious subject, adopted as the principle of philosophy, must divide itself from, are the objects it reflects in consciousness if it too is not to become an object.²³ In the *Ideas*, Schelling is more overt:

In that I represent [*vorstelle*] the object [*Gegenstand*], object and representation [*Vorstellung*] are one and the same. And only in this inability to distinguish object from representation during the representing itself lies the conviction, for the common understanding, of the reality of external things, which becomes known to it, after all, only through representations. (IPN 12, translation modified [SW I/2:15])

A second-order representing arises above its representings, such that the *reality* of external things, insofar as these are known, is itself a representation. Similarly, if it is not to remain locked into the "sphere of mere conceivability,"²⁴ the I must equally raise itself "above the representation and become... a being free *ab origine* with respect to all representing, who surveys the representing itself and the entire fabric of his representations *beneath* him" (IPN 13, translation modified [SW I/2:16]). Here, finally, Schelling's critical target is in the crosshairs: to gain the "illusion of its freedom" (IPN 172 [SW I/2:215]), a philosophy reduced to the reflections of a conscious subject pursues "nothing but a moralizing of the entire world that undermines life and hollows it out, [evincing] a true disgust toward all nature and vitality except that in the subject, and crudely extolling morality and the doctrine of morals as the one reality in life and science" (SW I/6:19). Ultimately, the primacy of the practical reduces the cosmos to a moral project – "the whole universe *ought to be...*" as Fichte writes (GA II/3:247), leaving the prescription empty – just as the idealism of the I reduces the universe to its product. Thus when Kant, for example, granting that "the absolute whole of all appearances *is only an idea*," contrasts its theoretical with its practical use, he finds that since practical reason is concerned only with following rules, the whole of all appearances becomes "the indispensable condition of all practical employment of reason," that is, the dominion of a moral subject (A328/B385).

Naturphilosophie issues a corrective for a philosophy that reduces *what exists* to *what I am*. Indeed, from a critical perspective, Schelling's introduction of *Naturphilosophie* can be thought of as a protest against the shrinking of the subject that Plato called "itself by itself," the *auto kath'auto* proper to what emphatically is, to the subject that merely accompanies its representations or reiterates its existence as a thinking thing, a philosophy for which "nature does not exist" (EHF 26, translation modified [SW I/7:357]).²⁵ Yet this protest may seem disingenuous when we recall Schelling's care in stating that "that a universe exists" is a mere *proposition*, a hypothesis made true or false not by an existing universe, but insofar as it constitutes the "limit of experience." Either this is a formal device employed by the understanding, such that the existent universe may be exchanged without loss for the "limit of experience"; or because the proposition is both the "ultimate knowledge from experience" and an "idea [*Idee*]," it articulates some copula or bond between experience and the idea.

Schelling's conception of the copula in judgment is worth studying on its own. According to *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, for instance, the copula in the proposition distributes subject and predicate as antecedent and consequent (EHF 14 [SW I/7:342]). Schelling redeploys precisely this function of the copula when he opens *Exhibition of Nature's Process* with the question: "what am I thinking when I think what exists?" (SW I/10:303). Here the copula hinges the consequent character of the hypothesis that is to follow from the undetermined character of the logical subject (the locus of the thinking of what exists) in relation to the undetermined existence it is to think. Whatever follows is already set up as consequent in relation to this invited anamnesis. Similarly, in the *Ideas*, the existent universe becomes the subject antecedent to the "is the limit of experience" that is its undetermined predicate or consequent. Thus the copula "connects the idea to actuality" not by subsuming the former in the latter, as idea in experience or the ideal in the real but, when it is expressed or "spoken out into nature" (EHF 59 [SW I/7:395]), by inducing the sequence of which it is part regressively toward its ungrounding and progressively toward its consequent. Nor therefore is it reducibly ideal. Unless matter, as the chapter *On the Relation of the Real and Ideal in Nature* with which Schelling prefaced the second edition of *On the World Soul* (SW I/2:359) argues, is the root whose ascent from darkness *results* in "all the forms and living phenomena of nature," physics is without "scientific grounds" and reason without the "copula connecting the idea to actuality" (SW I/2:359). That is, matter furnishes the ground of the science of nature not as its substrate, but as the connection between emergence and its ground. Without such a connection, things would remain disconnected one from another, and no *system* of nature would be conceivable. Schelling provides an example of this in claiming that "the empirical magnet" – iron – "must

be regarded the indifference point of the universal magnet" (Pr 171 [SW I/4:156]). The empirical and the idea are not denizens of separate universes; rather, magnetic iron is the copula in the progressive and regressive series of reason whereby the idea forms its abscissae, spreading throughout nature, just as these are consequent upon the nature that generates them.

To return to the proposition concerning the existent universe, the distributive model of propositional function therefore marks the conjunction of a progressive and a regressive series of syntheses. That is, if a proposition, an expression, or a hypothesis sequences ground and consequent, so that every act of predication is hypothetically consequent on its subject, the emergence of that subject as so predicated is equally consequent upon the state preceding the proposition. It is for this reason that, regressively, antecedence is "unpre-thinkable [*unvordenkliches*]," which does not mean it cannot be thought, but rather that it must be thought consequently as what remains unprethinkable with respect to that consequent. The copula or midpoint therefore at once enables the regressive sequencing toward the universe upon which the proposition is consequent, prompting an additional proposition in turn; while it itself is the realization and expression of a progressive series from antecedent to consequent, and as such hypothesizes its own incompleteness with respect not only to the universe it predicates, but also with respect to the unpredicated universe, or the universe antecedent to all expression, which cannot therefore be *said to be* a universe.

Thus the copula is not something underlying the "absolute unity of what exists" as the material from which it is made, but rather the conjunction of experience and idea, not the subsuming of the one under the other that results from the epistemic strategies of empiricism and idealism, respectively. In other words, "that a universe exists" is irreversibly antecedent to the limit of experience, and the entire proposition, therefore, becomes a hypothesis concerning the relation of the real to the ideal. Accordingly, the hypothesis does not so much take place *in* nature as *by* it,²⁶ since if a progressive sequencing of antecedent and consequent obtains, then a universe not only exists but comes to exist, antecedent both to the limits of experience and to the proposition consequently expressing this.

The movement of reason realized in this proposition therefore regresses, in accordance with the totality of division, through the series of grounds, to their elimination, such that even "the concept of original being should simply be eliminated from *Naturphilosophie*" (FO 14, translation modified [SW I/3:12]); but it also progresses, in accordance with the dependence of productivity on product, from groundlessness to production. It is this progressive series that we discover in the famous claim concerning "genetic" philosophy as "the natural history of our mind" (IPN 30, translation modified [SW I/2:39]).²⁷ The "copula [*Band*]" that couples mind and nature cannot coherently be thought if the

former is the ground of the latter, since then we have “no inkling of what nature is.” Nor can nature simply be placed “outside me” without rendering its passage *into* me incomprehensible. Rather, nature itself, “necessarily and originally, should not only *express*, but *even realize*, the laws of our mind” (IPN 41–42 [SW I/2:55–56]). The copula then articulates antecedent and consequent precisely as natural history just when mind is grounded not in itself but in a subject antecedent to mind, or in the subject of nature itself.

This is a crucial gain for the naturalistic protest Schelling lodges against the radical independence of the moral subject for which “nothing exists outside ourselves, only a subjective *Ich*, only the human race,” which amounts to the “final death blow to nature [*völliger Todtschlag der Natur*]” (SS 215 [SW I/7:445]). Rational spontaneity just is the normative bootstrapping of nature into our product, since it recasts origination in fact as the *right to produce*, a right conferrable only by reason-giving creatures. This autochthonous model is therefore an *eliminative idealism*, since it produces a position from which anything whose conditions simply cannot be given as reasons, must be absolutely impossible,²⁸ but premises this on a separation between I and a world original in my acting, which latter admits only of progressive synthesis thereafter. Yet its vulnerability to a regressive synthesis of origination and dependency is evident in the mere question “on what does intelligence depend?” The goal of the autochthonist is the identification of intelligence and its universe, yet, regardless of its nature, such a universe remains precisely the universe in which my acts take place. Were the identity successful and the folding-over of reason onto its ground complete, “there would indeed be a universe, but there would be no intelligence,” since this latter could not now have emerged (STI 117 [SW I/3:484]).

If, therefore, intelligence is emergent – that is, if there is intelligence at all – the “elimination of the concept of original being from *Naturphilosophie*” or the *ungrounding* of the concept of the totality of existence is the cost of this procedure, since if nature produces mind, then mind can only think nature consequently, entailing an “irreducible remainder” (EHF 29, translation modified [SW I/7:360]). Yet this elimination does not happen at once, or on principle, but precisely due to the insuperability of “external” origination, or *esse in alio*, for any product that, *qua* product, is conditioned in respect of its antecedent, as limit is by universe. In other words, it is because this series is regressive that the ungrounding of existence is entailed. But it is also because the ungrounding of existence is entailed that the progressive series issues. The ungrounded but consequent nature of the existent universe is the demonstration of creation. Thus the gain is that thought now arises not from itself, from which hypothesis there arise that series of problems the Introduction to the *Ideas* and the critique of eliminative idealism elsewhere demonstrates to be insoluble, but from a nature that is not ground or substrate, but, just when there is something, may be

predicated as the (consequent) ground of consequent existence. That thought can think this arising, albeit incompletely, is the task of *Naturphilosophie* to demonstrate, as it became the task of the later, "positive" philosophy.²⁹ What it entails in turn is the opening up of the logical subject, itself consequent, onto the existent universe and its grounds. As Schelling writes in the opening lines of the "Stuttgart Seminars," "To what extent is a system ever possible? I answer: long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, the cosmos [*Weltsystem*]" (SS 197 [SW I/7:421]). Systematicity is not reducibly an object of science, but a *natural consequent* just if it was not original.

While nature conceives, nature is not merely its concept.³⁰ If this chapter has principally concentrated on what seem to be merely logical matters, this is for two reasons. First, Schelling's radicalization of the hypothetical form and its entailments given the copula that bonds mind to nature is prevalent throughout his work, and overlooking it is one of the reasons for the false, protean image of the philosopher. Second, that the *Naturphilosophie* is a *philosophy*, or even an "idealism of nature" (SW I/4:84), is as often overlooked by its supporters as by its detractors, yet we are now in a position to see why this is. Its detractors tend to focus on the putative empirical deficit of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, or remain confused with regard to what must surely be, if its author is at all interested in natural *science*, its epistemological basis.³¹ Yet Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is just as often regarded by those more favorably disposed toward it as undertaking a *hermeneutic* exercise,³² the aim of which is simply to recover the veiled goddess for philosophy and so to wrest it from reducibility to the deliverances of the natural sciences. By contrast, I hope to have shown that Schelling's aim was systematic in precisely the sense that a "system," insofar as it is finite, is consequent on rulelessness. He therefore answers the question "how do systems arise?" in two ways: first, on the basis of the "asystasy" (SW I/9:209–11) on which it is logically consequent; and second, on the basis of the cosmos or *System der Welt* (SW I/7:421) on which a logical or rational system is genetically consequent. A system is therefore dependent on what it is not and consequent upon a universe or nature from which it issues. In this sense the proposition "that a universe exists" is the limit of experience in the sense that experience issues from the experienced universe rather than being prior to it. For it is only in the latter case that the existent universe would not limit experience. This limit is not drawn around the outer reaches or beneath the field of phenomena, but in the demonstrable incapacity of a consequent (of a product) to sum or exhaust its antecedent (productivity). The existing universe therefore limits experience because there can be no experience of the in-existent universe antecedent to it. Even a time-traveling device enabling a "chrononaut" to witness the Big Bang would not in fact witness the Big Bang, since she departed consequently upon the universe from which she arose.

As we have seen, however, far from rejecting empiricism, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* embraces its epistemic, speculative, and experimental function. The epistemic function of intuition is central to Schelling's project, just as is the naturalization of the senses. It begins the production of ideas, although ideas are not reducible to its content, since the point of origin is not the whole, and since, were they identical to their content, there would be no ideas at all. The *speculative* dimension of empiricism consists precisely in the reversal of rational to intuitive priority, and the resultant integration of iron into the idea, as Schelling's account of the "universal magnet" shows. The existent universe that is the limit of experience not only *includes* "stones and thoughts," but even *produces* both.³³ The nature-philosopher must not therefore insert some "original being" behind nature, but eliminate this concept altogether. Drawing on the structure of the hypothesis and the system of which it is part, developed in the *Ideas*, Schelling later makes the *productivity* of nature dependent on its *products*, that is, on a progressive series, since productivity without a product is as self-eliminating as consequence without consequent. These products are not *other* than the stones, iron, magnets, and organisms of nature, but are precisely *Scheinprodukte*: *emergent* or *apparent* products, products that *appear for intuition* not merely as representations, but as the *production of intuition itself*, that is, when it is not the absolute exhaustion of productivity (FO 16 [SW I/3:16]). For this reason, Schelling considers the experimental natural sciences to work precisely on the "central phenomena" of nature (SW I/3:279n; SW I/9:244–45). A phenomenon is central just when its activity extends further than its appearance, that is, for example, just when it is finite and emergent, on the one hand, and dependent on other such phenomena, on the other. Were this not the case, there would be nothing for a phenomenon to be central to. Hence *Naturphilosophie's* strategy is to integrate phenomena into the systems they are central to, which integration occurs both insofar as their production or origination, dependency, composition, and individuation form parts of the system that includes the hypotheses consequent upon these phenomena, but logically autonomous with respect to them.

It is possible to summarize the foregoing considerations of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in the following way. The opening of the subject, by regressive synthesis, to the existent universe, and the existent universe to its inexistence, is the negative philosophy *logically* antecedent to what therefore becomes nature's own hypothetical method of origination. It is for this reason that Schelling abandons the phrase *Philosophie der Natur* for *Naturphilosophie*: all the difference in the world is made if philosophy is dependent on nature, rather than the other way round. What is but was not becomes a universe insofar as this consequent issues itself in consequents. The "indwelling logic of nature" consists therefore not in a system already formed and awaiting content, but one in the process of formation that must begin with a mark in the void it can never recover (GPh 161 [SW II/3:103]).

Notes

1. As Hermann Krings argues in his chapter, "Genesis und Materie. Zur Bedeutung Schellings *Timaeus*-Schrift für seine Naturphilosophie," accompanying T, this early work already foreshadows the concerns of his *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling's commentary systematically contrasts Platonic and Kantian accounts of matter, the emergence of the world, and the Idea, and it may therefore be accounted his earliest address to *Naturphilosophie*.
2. Hans Michael Baumgartner, for example, presents five "breakthroughs" in Schelling's philosophical trajectory: "1. The turn from Spinozism to transcendental philosophy; 2. The transition to a speculative nature-philosophy that cannot be followed through seen from the perspective of Fichte's transcendental philosophy; 3. The conception of a philosophy of identity comprehending nature- and transcendental philosophy; 4. The outline of a philosophy of freedom and the ages of the world; 5. The revocation of the identity philosophy in the transition to the later work" ("Vernunft im Übergang zu Geschichte. Bemerkungen zur Entwicklung von Schellings Philosophie als Geschichtsphilosophie," in *Schelling. Seine Bedeutung für eine Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte*, ed. Ludwig Hasler [Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1981], 183). Also in Hasler's 1981 collection, Horst Fuhrmans, having argued for only two great periods in *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1954), revises their number to three, while clearly stating the judgment at its base: "I would like to emphasize once again that there can be no single Schellingian conception, because there is simply no Schellingian philosophy. There is no Schellingian philosophical system, but rather only a series of systems in outline, of which there seem to me, after forty years in the company of Schelling, to be essentially three: the system-outline of the 'identity philosophy' (1801–1806), the 'system of the ages of the world' (1806–1827) and the outline of the positive philosophy. Schelling's outlines up to 1801, I view instead as conceptions 'in progress'" ("Schellings Lehre vom Sündenfall als der 'Urtatsache' der Geschichte," in *Schelling. Seine Bedeutung für eine Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte*, 227). Among those who reject the phase portrait of Schelling are Walter E. Ehrhardt, Heidegger, and Jaspers.
3. These include the books *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), *Von der Weltseele* (1798), *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799), *Darlegung des wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie zur verbesserten Fichte'schen Lehre* (1806), the lectures *System der gesamten Philosophie und der Naturphilosophie insbesondere* (1804), the chapters *Einleitung zu dem Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799), the *Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses* (1800), and various shorter chapters from the journals Schelling edited under the titles *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, *Neue Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik*, and elsewhere, and finally the two sets of "Aphorisms on *Naturphilosophie*" Schelling contributed to the *Jahrbücher der Medicin als Wissenschaft* (1805–8) that he also edited.
4. Among Schelling's targets here is surely Fichte's claim that "the intellect and the thing ... lie in two different worlds, between which there is no bridge" (IWL 21 [GA I/4:196]).
5. Ludwig Geijssen, *Mitt-Wissenschaft. F.W.J. Schellings Philosophie der Freiheit und der Weltalter als Weisheitslehre*. Munich: Alber, 2009.
6. Markus Gabriel, "Realism and Materialism," paper presented at Symposium: Speculations on Anonymous Materials, Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, January 2014.

7. This is both a reference to Schelling's coining of the concept of the unground in EHF 68–70 (SW I/7:406–9), and to its recent usage by Stephen Mumford, whose own "ungrounded argument" is concerned with a problem current in the philosophy of science concerning whether "powers" are properties of subatomic particles and are grounded therein, or whether such powers are ungrounded either in a subatomic particle or in anything else (Mumford, "The Ungrounded Argument," *Synthese* 149, no. 3 [April 2006]: 471–89).
8. In the second edition of the *Ideas*, Schelling reasserts – and to some extent reassigns – the actuality of matter when he calls it "the seed corn of the universe" that should not, as the physicists and philosophers he examines do, be assumed as merely "given" rather than as developmental or "genetic" (IPN 178–79 [SW I/2:222–23]), on the one hand, and as involving the idea, on the other. He later asserts that what applies at the level of natural entities also applies at the level of the ideal, since "the concept of matter is itself, by origin, *synthetic*; a purely *logical* concept of matter is meaningless" (IPN 188 [SW I/2:235]).
9. Regarding cognition, writes Hegel, Kant recommends that cognition be investigated, or cognized, before any cognizing is done: "But to want to have cognition *before* we have any is as absurd as the wise resolve of Scholasticus to learn to *swim before he ventured into the water*" (EL §10).
10. Schelling writes that, before we can have knowledge, we must examine its sources: "At first sight this thought is extremely plausible. Looked at more closely, it is revealed that it is here a question of a knowing of knowing, and that this knowing of knowing itself is, in turn, precisely a knowing. Accordingly it [too] would first require an investigation of the possibility of such a knowledge of knowing, and in this way one could keep on asking to infinity" (HMP 98 [SW I/10:79]).
11. "...that a universe exists; this proposition is the limit of experience itself. Or rather, that a universe exists is itself only an *idea* [*Idee*]" (IPN 18 [SW I/2:24]).
12. "Throughout Schelling's work runs the fundamental question 'what is being [*Sein*]?" (Karl Jaspers, "Schelling: Grösse und Verhängniss," *Studia Philosophica* 14 [1954]: 15).
13. See also B446n: "By nature ... taken substantively (*materialiter*), is meant the sum of appearances insofar as they stand, in virtue of an inner principle of causality, in thorough-going interconnection." Kant continues: "when we speak of the things of nature, we have in mind a self-subsisting whole."
14. In the *Timaeus* commentary, Schelling derives from Plato "four cosmical concepts [*Weltbegriffe*]" as concepts "under which all existence in the world can be subsumed," where "existence" refers not to all objects but "only to the entire universe." Since such things are therefore "primordial (*Ur-*)" with respect to the world, and are not therefore creatures of the understanding (T 63), they are also the causes (*Ursachen*) of the "origin" of the world (T 68).
15. Kant deftly sketches these problems at A417/B445–A419/B447.
16. For Schelling's account of the causal cooperation of four *Weltbegriffe* in Plato, see T 63–69.
17. "Kant accords the ideas no reality except insofar as they are moral by nature" (SW I/6:186). "What is, in the end, the essence of [Fichte's] entire understanding of nature? It is that nature must be employed, used, and that it exists no further than it is used; the principle in accordance with which he views nature is economic-teleological: 'It must be thus,' he says (that is, we must appropriate nature), *so that* human life gains freedom through its own freedom" (SW I/6:17).

18. The physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter furthered this project by experiment by applying a galvanic apparatus to his eyes, whereby he discovered sense to be alterable by electricity, and even by inverting the metal poles of that apparatus.
19. See for example, Mumford, "Ungrounded Argument," 471–89; Brian Ellis, *The Metaphysics of Scientific Realism* (Durham: Acumen, 2009); Alice Drewery, ed., *Metaphysics in Science* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder, eds., *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). A good discussion of this material in German can be found in Michael Esfeld, *Naturphilosophie als Metaphysik der Natur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).
20. Schelling is not alone in this. For example, Bernard Bosanquet writes: "It should be noted once and for all that Plato's symbolism is inherently connected with his idea of causation. Throughout the symbolic series which begins with this passage, as in the analogous discussions of the *Timaeus*, the image or likeness is such because it is made on the pattern, or as an embodiment, of the deeper reality to which it owes its being" (Bosanquet, *A Companion to Plato's Republic for English Readers*, 2nd ed. [London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895], 241). See also Chapter 2 of my *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006) for an extended discussion of Schelling's *Timaeus* commentary.
21. Plato sums up his presentation of what Schelling calls his *Weltbegriffe* at *Philebus* 27b–c: "The first, then, I call infinite, the second limit or finite, and the third something generated by a mixture of these two. And should I be making a mistake if I called the cause of this mixture and creation the fourth?" (Plato, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, trans. H. N. Fowler and W. R. M. Lamb [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925], 27b–c). See T 68–69.
22. "It is not because there is thinking that there is being, but because there is being that there is thinking" (GPh 203n [SW II/3:161n]).
23. *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* undertakes to make "the whole system of human knowledge" into the "original ground [*Urgrund*] of all reality" but places this reality "in the entire cosmos of our knowledge" (IPP 71 [SW I/1:162]). It thus embraces the concept's interiority but extends the transcendental idea of totality to knowledge limited only by the cosmos *we know*. Yet the problem is already evident: the "endeavor to realize the unconditional carries a contradiction in itself. ... Since the subject is thinkable only in regard to an object, and the object only in regard to a subject, neither of them can contain the unconditional because both are conditioned reciprocally. [Nor can] we say that the subject alone determines the object because the subject is conceivable only in relationship to the object [and] this kind of a subject as such is also determinable as an object" (IPP 74 [SW I/1:165–66]).
24. When he notes that it is from outside this "sphere of mere conceivability" that "an object receives its existence" (IPP 75 [SW I/1:168]), Schelling is already integrating the *genetic* problem, the problem of origination, into the problem of the unconditioned.
25. "Die ganze neu-europäische Philosophie seit ihrem Beginn (durch Descartes) hat diesen gemeinschaftlichen Mangel, daß die Natur für sie nicht vorhanden ist" (SW I/7:357).
26. "No sort of combination can transform what is by nature derivative into what is by nature original" (EHF 13 [SW I/7:340]).

27. "We consider the system of our representations not in its *being*, but in its *becoming*. Philosophy becomes *genetic*; that is, it allows the whole necessary series of our representations to arise and take its course, as it were, before our eyes" (IPN 30, translation modified [SW I/2:39]).
28. A paraphrase of STI 186 (SW I/3:571): "anything whose conditions simply cannot be given in nature must be absolutely impossible."
29. "The concept of creation is the true aim of the positive philosophy" (EPh 117).
30. "Because understanding does everything it does with *consciousness* (hence the illusion of its freedom), everything – including reality itself – becomes, under its hands, *ideal*; the man whose whole mental power has been reduced to the capacity for making and analysing concepts knows *no reality*" (IPN 172 [SW I/2:215]).
31. See Barry Gower, "Speculation in Physics: The History and Practice of *Naturphilosophie*," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 3, no. 4 (Feb. 1973): 301–56; Bernd-Olaf Küppers, *Natur als Organismus. Schellings frühe Naturphilosophie und ihre Bedeutung für die moderne Biologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992) responds critically to Marie-Luise Heuser-Keßler, *Die Produktivität der Natur. Schellings Naturphilosophie und das neue Paradigma der Selbstorganisation der Naturwissenschaften* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1986); and the two versions are excellently addressed by Camilla Warnke, "Schellings Idee und Theorie des Organismus und der Paradigmawechsel der Biologie um die Wende zum 19 Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie* 5 (1998): 187–234.
32. See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993), ch. 2; and Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), ch. 3.
33. "Merely reflective humanity has no idea of an *objective* reason, of an Idea that as such is utterly real and objective; all reason is something subjective to them, as equally is everything ideal, and the idea itself has for them only the meaning of a subjectivity, so that they therefore know only two worlds, the one consisting of stone and rubble, the other of intuitions and the thinking thereupon" (SW I/6:279).

24

Religion beyond the Limits of Criticism

Michael Vater

Schelling's philosophy of religion was the work of a lifetime of philosophical activity, considerably larger in ambition and accomplishment than the loose assemblage of questions usually collected under that name: the existence of deity, responsibility for evil, and immortality. Schelling is the most difficult of the "German Idealists" to fit into a consistent historical narrative and the least amenable of that generation of thinkers to philosophical reconstruction or contemporary retrieval. Part of this is due to entanglements early in his career with philosophical alliances and polemics, part with what the public perceived as shifts in his philosophical focus, and part with a refusal to stay on the high road of Kant's narrative about modernity's conflicting claims of rationalism and empiricism, which could only be reconciled in a *critical* recognition of the secure but hybrid nature of empirical knowledge – its content derived from sensation, its form secured by empty concepts furnished by reason. Schelling appreciated well enough Kant's conceptual precision; he chafed, though, at Kant's legislation of the limits of philosophy's competence: a metaphysics of experience, a formalistic morality, strictures placed on the artist's and scientist's imagination, and the reduction of religion to morality without remainder – which meant, in Germany, accommodation with the political status quo. In his willingness to return to pre-critical sources of inspiration such as Plato, Spinoza, and Leibniz, his incorporation of religious themes voiced by heterodox figures such as Giordano Bruno, Joachim di Fiore, and Jakob Böhme, and his seemingly quixotic fight against Newtonian optics and the methods of hypothesis-formation and experimental test practiced by the working scientists of his day, Schelling seemed in his own day to court ridicule. However one tries to fit him into the narratives of other movements and figures – the rise of German Idealism, the end of idealism, the origin of existentialism, the end of metaphysics, Christian systematic theology, the beginnings of psychoanalysis – he presents features that resist incorporation and make him an outlier.¹

Schelling and Hegel both started lecturing on the history of philosophy early in the nineteenth century when they had fairly similar positions, and in their mature years they used these lectures to critique each other's positions. Hegel's students Karl Ludwig Michelet, Johann Eduard Erdmann, and in their wake Richard Kroner, perfected a polemic style of historiography that minimized Schelling's role in the formulation of "absolute" or "objective idealism." Hegel's jibe that Schelling conducted his philosophical education in public had quite a bit of play. At the turn of the twentieth century even a sympathetic critic who called Schelling the "prince of the romantics" found no less than six phases in the development of his philosophy and in a less than kindly turn of phrase dubbed him "Protean."²

In the first decade or so of his philosophical writings Schelling published a prodigious amount at a very fast clip, not troubling himself to carefully note changes in position, and often engaging in behind the scenes machinations with past and present colleagues such as Fichte and Hegel. The times were turbulent: first Reinhold, then Fichte secured some recognition as systematizers of Kant's critical philosophy, but when Reinhold turned from idealistic epistemology to objective logic and Kant repudiated the *Wissenschaftslehre*, there was no obvious successor to Kant. The conversations and literary exchanges between Lessing, his literary heir Mendelssohn, and Jacobi about Spinoza's naturalism or "pantheism" and theistic alternatives to it made the intellectual situation in Germany about as fractious as the streets of revolutionary Paris. Nothing of Schelling's early publications secured him notice as an independent voice until his audacious attempts to graft a philosophical account of nature onto the stalk of Fichte's moral systematization of Kant's philosophy. Indeed his invention of *Naturphilosophie* was the first of three "audacities," if I might use the term – philosophical turns or revisions of outlook that were novel or "unforeseeable" in some sense and resumptive or surprisingly continuous in another. Schelling forces the critic to dance a step livelier than the simple two-step of a pre-critical Kant and a critical Kant, or a logical Wittgenstein and an ordinary-language Wittgenstein. Changes in his system occur in a seismic or geological way – Schelling will later argue that the decision whereby one adopts one's character is preconscious, repressed, and beyond recollection. Less charitably, it has of course been argued that Schelling was insufficiently self-conscious of the drift of his thought.

I do not have the luxury of arguing for it at length here, but let me suggest that an analogy with musical composition might throw some light on Schelling's philosophizing. There are continuous or recurring themes, voiced predominantly or subtly, transposed to different registers and elaborated at length (argument) or with sudden flashes of insight, and executed in progressions of extended dissonance or sudden resolution. This image may capture both some of the complexity of Schelling's work and the uncanny way that nothing ever

drops out or is left aside. But given that, since Aristotle, philosophy has largely hued to the path of propositional truth and eschewed narrative tropes of Socratic irony or Platonic mythologizing, if one took this suggestion seriously Schelling would stand condemned by his own words, for his own account of artistic creativity puts the artist in the service of her work, condemned evermore to do more than she can say (STI 229–33 [SW I/3:624–31]). Making Schelling the philosopher of the unconscious, or the forefather of psychoanalysis, invites the same difficulty.

Be that as it may, there are three movements to Schelling's thought, or *three audacities*: (1) *Naturphilosophie*, or the turn to a metaphysics of nature to show that, *pace* Jacobi's reading of Spinoza, nothing has ever left the absolute – or that the finite does not exist from its own side. Once this absolute or objective idealism is sufficiently articulated, the second audacity is: (2) to leave this ontologically founded idealism behind as a surpassed moment in the *risk of a freedom so radical that it is free from all being, and especially necessary being*. The third audacity is the synthesis of this uncanny mash-up of freedom and necessity in the grandest of all narratives European civilization produced: (3) the history or life-careers of God and humankind, as modeled in the mythologies of various ancient civilizations and *Christian revelation*. Each successive phase brings the prior forward, but fundamentally modifies it. Schelling's philosophy of religion is his whole philosophy, put before the public sequentially over a period of nearly half a century. I think Schelling articulated it for himself in a bare decade and a half, however, from the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* and chapters of the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* (1800–1801) to the 1804 *Philosophy and Religion*, the 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, and the cryptic 1815 lecture to the Bavarian Academy, *The Deities of Samothrace*.³

Why is there something and not nothing?

As a gifted student and young writer, Schelling displayed an ambition to surpass the received wisdom of the day about what were appropriate and inappropriate subjects of philosophy. Student notebooks on Plato's physics and metaphysics of nature thematize the transient nature of the elements, and, rather than focusing on *Timaeus's* pictorial account of imitation of the ideas, concentrate on the plastic nature of the receptacle or primary matter, invoking *Philebus's* category of the ἄπειρον.⁴ Schelling will later argue that *Naturphilosophie*, which can be included within an embracing philosophical idealism because it refuses independent existence to the entities of nature and demonstrates that nature's operations reintegrate difference back into primordial identity, has but one problem: the construction of matter.⁵ A series of early chapters that imitate the structure of the first version of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* share Fichte's vision of completing or systematizing Kant's critical philosophy, but not his

vision of what Kant called “the primacy of the practical.” The young philosopher instead seems to hope for a logical-metaphysical completion of the Kantian project based on Kant’s incomplete deduction of the categories, his discussion of God as the *summum* or *Inbegriff* of all concepts, and his remarks on the necessarily systematic form of philosophy.⁶ Symbolic of differences that will emerge between the two thinkers, where Fichte writes *das Ich* in 1794, Schelling writes “the absolute appearing in us” (SW I/1:208). Remarks on the insufficiency of the ontological argument, the nature of modal categories, and the origin of time are scattered throughout the early writings, but these themes will not converge until 1802–4 when Schelling makes it clear that in intellectual intuition, being cannot be conceived in any way other than as *self-existent* or *necessarily existent*. Coming to clarity on this will be the zenith of Schelling’s early Spinozism. But, as we shall see, since Schelling adopts this concept in the train of Leibniz’s peculiar phrasing of the ontological question – why is there something and *not nothing?* – “necessary being” might not be unequivocally necessary; his acceptance of Kant’s view of modal predicates as conceptual, hence lacking ontological freight, helps eventually to move Schelling to the position that *necessary being* is an inherently dialectical or self-undercutting concept, applicable only to something that contingently exists. This, of course, will not become clear to Schelling until he moves away from the absolutism of the *Naturphilosophie* (or philosophy of identity) and comes up with a novel definition of God’s contingent existence as a state of being consequent upon utter freedom or original decision.

In the midst of disputes with Fichte about the nature and direction of transcendental idealism after Kant, Schelling veered sharply toward Spinozism and its naturalistic perspective, and away from the psychology of the moral life which was the undergirding of Fichte’s 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Though the dialectical argumentation of that work would remain fundamental to Schelling’s elaboration of the *Potencies* or (conceptual) levels of being in the unfolding of his philosophies of nature, freedom, and religion, Schelling’s 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* leveled the charge of subjectivism against Fichte’s idealism and proclaimed itself a “philosophy of identity” (Pr 141–45 [SW I/4:107–14]). Some thirty years later, after he had twice made fundamental alterations in his philosophy in order to recast it as a dynamic and double-sided (conceptual and existential) account of the life of God and humankind, Schelling reconsiders the label and deems all of his work prior to the 1809 meditations on radical freedom *Naturphilosophie*. After Hegel’s death and perhaps anxious to distinguish his own early position from what Hegel had called “objective idealism” and Schelling now called *mere negative* or conceptual philosophy, Schelling returns to 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* which views nature as self-objectification of a transcendental *subject*. In effect, in the Munich lectures on *History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling covers his

tracks and minimizes the extent of his experimentation in his journey from Fichtean disciple to philosopher of nature to Spinozist metaphysician (HMP 120 [SW I/10:107]). Thinking he had placed himself beyond it, Schelling himself invents the “From Kant to Hegel” narrative that will eventually assign to him a role no larger than an *entr’acte* – a stagehand of Spirit.

There are three features of the *Naturphilosophie* 1800–1804 that deserve extensive comment. The first is the uninterrupted and continuous nature of the metaphysical “deduction” (or construction) of being and its potencies and the consideration of the operations of nature which minimize the at-first-glance independence of the items of appearance and reveal that their true being is interdependent or organic. The second is the way that reason’s consideration of the being of the absolute is framed either as an immanent (or nondual) version of the classical ontological argument for divine existence or is framed in highly dialectical spin that Leibniz gave to ontology: why is there something and *not nothing*? The third is the way that the metaphysical question of individuation – or egress from the absolute – is made coextensive with an account of the origin of time, and both are given a voluntaristic account. Individuals have run away from home: the *telos* of unfolding phenomena is to invite the prodigals to return. Looking at these three themes, one might want to say that from early on, Schelling’s primary domain of endeavor is philosophy of religion. As late as 1804, however, in discussions with his Fichtean friend Karl August von Eschenmayer, Schelling will admit of no sense to the term ‘God’ that transcends the absolute that reason can adumbrate, Spinoza’s *deus sive natura* (PREL 43–45 [SW I/6:45–48]). Schelling is not yet ready to imitate the theistic turn that Fichte took after 1800.

From first to last, Schelling insists that the philosopher of nature reenacts the original being of nature, which is active or expressive, self-affecting, and therefore self-structuring in ways that *higher levels or “exponents” of organization reflect and resume lower levels*. Matter or the filling of three-dimensional space is the nadir of nature’s self-expression, and appears to mere perception as passive or inert, subject only to mechanical – externally imposed – motion. But what at first appears to be external and separated turns out to be internally related, active, and pointed toward dimensions of interiority such as sensation, perception, and intuition. The organism, the self-regulating entity that is the home and support for intelligence in humans, is nothing different from matter, but is a knot of activity and purposiveness supervenient upon this lowest and all subsequent levels of inorganic elaboration – phenomena that the physical sciences call gravity, conduction, cohesion, electromagnetism, and reactivity to light. In a suitably subdued and thoroughly predictable manner, nature is a work of *necessitated activity*.

The systematic aspect of *Naturphilosophie* comes from two sources: the philosopher’s reconstruction of the complex web of interconnection and reactions

that nature *does* all at once in a successive or *narrative* fashion, *and* the repetition of basic logical strategies that nature itself enacts *from its own side* in constructing complex strategies. To elaborate the first conjunct, there is emergence, development, metamorphosis – Schelling even uses the Anglophone term *Evolution* – in nature, but this is the philosopher’s free contribution or condescension to the very human need to understand by way of story; Schelling is pre-Darwinian and too Aristotelian to befriend randomness. Regarding the second, nature itself seems to have hit upon a set of basic organization strategies that it repeats, whether one looks at higher-level structures such as inorganic, organic, and intelligent life; mid-level structures (called *dynamic processes*) such as magnetism, electricity, and transmission of light; or the three dimensions of space. All of these are amenable to mathematical treatment; the logical distinctions of identity, difference, and totality (relative identity) can be mapped on a single continuous line and treated as negative and positive numbers. Schelling calls these repetitive structures *potencies* (*Potenzen*) – the term suggests power or capacity, and, derivatively, exponent or mathematical power.⁷ He also makes it into a verb (*Potenzierung*) which suggests an ability to manifest on a higher level or to jump levels. It is part of Schelling’s “deep Spinozism,” never questioned or rejected, that, nothing standing in the way, being entails a capacity to realize itself or more fully express itself: *to be is to strive* (*conatus*). Once the concept of potencies is framed, it never leaves Schelling’s vocabulary.

Despite Schelling’s systematic intent, elaborated in the *Fichte-Schelling Correspondence*, of framing a three-part system with a Spinozistic theory of identity and difference replacing the genetic scheme of activity, production, and intuition modeled in the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling was unable in years following his break with Fichte to produce a philosophy of spirit or consciousness equal in detail to his *Naturphilosophie* – with the exception of some lectures on the philosophy of art in 1802 that prefigure his interest in mythology and religion but were highly dependent on Stephan August Winkelmann’s classicism. Versions of Schelling’s system published in 1801 and disseminated in lectures in 1804 keep Spinoza in the foreground. Thanks to the increasingly general idea of the potencies, Schelling is able to move from metaphysics – the account of the embracing character of the absolute and the pseudo-independence of finite particulars – to the general and then the increasingly more specific features of nature. Schelling had taken a naturalistic turn in his disputes with Fichte and, though he showed great ingenuity in turning to Platonic theory of Ideas in trying to solve the problem of individuation or the apparent self-separation of the individual from the absolute, he has much greater success in arguing that nature is *a physical proof of idealism* in the way that its operations and processes themselves undo separation.

Though *Naturphilosophie* takes its proximate inspiration from Spinoza and takes the Platonic *Timaeus* as its template, and so unsurprisingly depends on

the notion of the absolute's *necessary existence*, there is an element of insecurity or nonbeing included in the concept from the first. It is this element of dialectical vulnerability that makes necessary existence *contingent* and eliminable in later phases of Schelling's thought, where the divine itself gambles away the "sure thing" of its necessary being to risk a career of freedom and a life as spirit. We will come to this knot of difficult and original ideas in due time; for now I wish to show that early in his career as an absolute idealist or one of the co-inventors of *negative philosophy*, there was something wobbly in what was claimed was the absolute's intrinsic nature: that its very idea guaranteed its reality.

In the first announcement of the so-called system of identity, Schelling claims that once it has turned aside from subjectivism, from the *I* and its perspectival representations, philosophy can function in the pure ether of *reason*. It reconceives the items of experience in a fundamentally mathematical or geometrical form; its philosophical task from that point on is to rationally *construct* (we would say "reconstruct") on metaphysical and naturalistic lines the particulars and genera of our experience until we achieve the degree of closure and validity that a hypothetical or nonfoundationalist account permits. To this constructed absolute and the intuition of the philosopher who does the constructing is ascribed not factual being, but logical-mathematical necessity. Yet there is a suspicion that this whole logical edifice is a fable, what Kant would cheerfully call a *Hirngespinnst*. Schelling announces, "Reason's thought is foreign to everyone; to conceive it as absolute, and thus to come to the standpoint I require, one must abstract from the one that does the thinking" (Pr 145–46 [SW I/4:114–15]). But can we humans abstract from ourselves? Ought we to try?

Three years later, in the *System of the Whole of Philosophy*, Schelling rethinks the identity theory which grounds *Naturphilosophie* in a more rigorous way, working again from Spinoza, but not a literal reading of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza had largely been content to elucidate the unity and necessary existence of substance through preliminary definitions and axioms. Instead Schelling fashions an ontology of power in which primal being is seen not just to be self-constituting but self-expressive; the concept of *expressivity* explains what Spinoza could not explain, how attributes and modes follow from substance's self-sufficient being. When it comes to expressing how the absolute or god/nature exists, Schelling invokes the ultimate question that "vertiginous intellect" can pose: *why is there something rather than nothing?* And he finds that in luminous, lightning-like clarity reason is pulled back from the abyss and realizes the *impossibility of nonbeing* (SW I/6:155). I have elsewhere called this Schelling's Hitchcockean moment, his ontological cliff-hanger⁸ – not just because there is a moment of high drama in this isolated text, but because, once articulated, the suspicion that *nothing was not in fact impossible* turns into the worm coiled in the fruit of Schelling's whole previous philosophy and which turns the ruby

promise of necessary existence into the mundane brown rot of contingency. Schelling will return to Kant and admit that modal predicates are just predicates, while existence is something else: God or the absolute exists necessarily, *if it exists* (POP 154).

The third feature that Schelling carries forward from the identity-theory phase of *Naturphilosophie* to the later philosophies of freedom and religion is the notion that the finite particular's self-positing – its decree, as it were, that *it* is the point of origin from which all perspectives are to be calculated – is its positing of time. While existing in the absolute or in the idea it is essentially the same as the universal, and so related to every other particular, but when it separates itself from the absolute or “falls” into finite existence, its relationships to others are parsed out as successors to some and predecessor to others, or as past and future. The individuality of the particular entity in its ersatz declaration of independence constitutes its “finite identity”: its point of view, its subjectivity, or to say the same in Kantian terms, its temporality (Br 151, 180–81 [SW I/4:251, 282–84]).

While the doctrine of the “fall” of finite beings is a somewhat quizzical feature of *Naturphilosophie*, where it provides another opening for the critique of Fichtean subjective idealism, the idea of free decision and the ability of a free being to abandon modes of being formerly necessary (or at least “in character”) gives Schelling the occasion for defining what radical freedom might be: not “arbitrary choice” – which at best would signal only confusion about one's character and environment – but putting what has been *compulsory* or purely necessary behind oneself as “*past*” and moving on into the novel. The time of freedom comes from futurity; the accounting of necessity embraces the past, and if we find the later Schelling believable, stops there. Falling into addiction is a story of conditioning and the economy of neurotransmitters; entering recovery is quite different. As we shall see, the life of God is an experiment in recovery – from addiction to necessary being and from isolation within it.

Decision: Separating the divine yes and no

We have just had to make a move from abstract ontology to lived human psychology in order to understand a move that Schelling makes. While his stock of erudition in classical philosophy, the history of Christian theology, and the cultures of antiquity replete with their myths and artistic accomplishment grows weightier as he ages, Schelling's approach to philosophy and religion becomes simpler or more classical, and less burdened with the methodological and epistemological self-consciousness of modernity. Increasingly the mature Schelling adopts the standpoint of medieval Christian and Renaissance philosophies that place humankind in the center of things and work by analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm. As the first text of the radically

new philosophy of freedom announces, "Only man is in God and is capable of freedom through this being-in-God. He alone is a being of the *centrum* [ein *Centralwesen*] and for that reason he should also remain in the *centrum*. All things are created in it just as God only accepts nature and ties it to himself through man" (EHF 72 [SWI/7:411]).⁹ This antiquarian guise will hardly endear Schelling to the empiricist, or one who waits for science to endorse her philosophy. It frankly returns the reader to a prescientific framework where myth, narrative, and religious traditions trace the horizons of human consciousness. And if we are not entirely comfortable with this when we read the arguments of the German Idealists hoping for a retrieval that meets *our* current needs, we should remember there was quite an obstinate antiquarian streak, extending even to a love of things medieval and Catholic, which seized the souls of their literary and artistic friends.

Although it is conventional to distinguish Schelling's middle philosophy or philosophy of freedom from his late philosophy or philosophies of mythology and revelation, there is considerable overlap between the two. As one might gather from the title of the work that inaugurated the middle philosophy, the 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Matters Connected to It*, Schelling's interest is philosophical and his method is argumentative; a great deal of the work is devoted to showing that the systematic intent of the earlier *Naturphilosophie* can only be carried out by substituting a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason for the concept of the sameness or identity of the different that had previously been advanced as the system principle. Schelling concedes that his earlier philosophy had hoped in vain to find a logic connecting the orders of nature and that of spirit (self-conscious agents). Now a dynamic principle is invoked instead, *freedom*, the logic of which demands that novelty can occur or that existence float free of conditioning ground. On the basis of this new way of thinking first things, Schelling is able to fashion a narrative in which a living God is able to leave primordial or necessary existence, risk life in creative freedom, let nature and humankind go forth as separate, in order to become spirit and reunite with created spiritual being. A smaller problematic, the possibility and origin of evil, and where to place responsibility for evil, is embedded in the larger scheme – the classical project of theodicy. The late philosophy, begun in 1820 but not widely disseminated until twenty years later, takes over this narrative of the divine and human life careers, but attempts to trace it out in great detail in the mythological narratives and religious views of prior historical civilizations, calling itself *positive philosophy* or *philosophy of revelation*. Though Schelling claimed he was in no sense dependent on Christian dogma and it was not his intent to do systematic theology, he comes close to a complete elaboration of the so-called "truths" of Christian revelation, but in a historical or "empirical" mode.

Another thing to note as we embark on the philosophies of freedom and revelation is that although Schelling continues to criticize the subjectivism of a narrow idealism, when he rejects Fichte's idealism he is rejecting the *primacy of the apparent I* and its incessant *monologue* about perceptions and arbitrary choices. He has learned from the Pietists, the poets, and from the detailed argumentation of the first *Wissenschaftslehre* that there are *many* prompters, deciders, valuers, and judges packed into our skins and that Fichte's watchword – *my being is my own deed* – was true in many senses that consciousness most often will not or cannot acknowledge. As Goethe's Faust rewrites the gospel, "*In the beginning was the deed*," putting "word" and the obvious mental process under erasure.¹⁰ The generation of critics who want to view Schelling as the forefather of psychoanalysis finds ample support in the writing of Schelling's middle phase: the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, the "Stuttgart Seminars," and the drafts of *Ages of the World*. Schelling does not think, however, that the divine is a projection of the human imagination, as Feuerbach, Freud, and perhaps William Blake thought, but that the two mirror each other in identical intertwined careers.

In this section, we will look closely to two central issues: Schelling's definition of freedom and the nature of the two principles of being that allow for it. I shall not stress his treatment of the issue of evil and the question of divine responsibility for it, for in the middle period Schelling seems prone to relapse into pantheism just when he declares himself free of its snares. The account offered in the philosophy of religion is more successful and more difficult to argue: creation entails that God excretes the non-divine element within itself, and this rejected element becomes the cosmic Christ wherein humankind is created, falls, and is redeemed in Christ's acceptance into deity. The simple account of Schelling's theology is that the *Menschwerdung Gottes* implies the *Gotteswerdung Menschen* and vice versa, and that in a process of clarification or refinement (*Verklärung*) evil and the "irreducible remainder" of nature will somehow be sublimated (Br 222 [SW I/4:328–29]).¹¹

Before we can appreciate Schelling's novel 1809 definition of freedom, both human and divine, we must carefully look at a defense of Spinozistic necessity or "decidedness" that Schelling offers in 1804 in the context of a discussion of the demands of a *religious morality*.

Neither so-called arbitrary choice nor empirical lawfulness, the standards advanced by Kant, will suffice, says Schelling, but only an unconditional trust in the *necessity that rules all*. Spinoza, especially in his teaching on the "intellectual love of God," recaptured the ancients' sense of virtue: not arbitrary freedom but *choiceless resolve* (*Entschiedenheit*) for the right.

The highest moral and cognitive standard that religion can advance is *conscientiousness* (*Gewissenhaftigkeit*), not the subjective standard of devotion or feeling offered by contemporary theories (SW1/6:554–58). There is no absolute

standard of right (*Sittlichkeit*) that is the achievement or possession of the isolated individual; one is *sittlich* or virtuous only insofar as one is bound to do what is right *without* any consideration of its opposite.

This is as impassioned a piece of argument as one can find in all of Schelling's writings. He is not seeking easy solutions or conceptual loopholes; this is a soldierly morality that he espouses, one that commands fidelity to the situation the agent finds herself in. And it is absolutely consistent with Spinoza's teaching of universal necessity – which, when understood and trusted, is *amor intellectualis dei*. Schelling takes aim at Enlightenment fables of human perfectibility, infinite moral (or revolutionary!) progress, and the futurity of blessedness, and longs instead for the recurrence of a golden past, morality as spokes of a wheel radiating from a single hub, not the spectacle of humanity wandering in a circle. This is the morality of necessary being, the divine decree (SW I/6:559–64).

What can be said to alter this rigid view? What alternatives can there be, when the necessity of the necessarily existent has defined the position of every point and the conditions of every “agent,” when inner determinations of *virtue* and *power* correspond only to outer determinations of *destiny* and *fate*? First of all, there is no need to soften the view: what is viewed from the outside as necessary is seen on the interior as *decision* or free act of will. Kant had articulated this basic view when he argued that the free act is outside of all causal connection, or outside of time. Empirically, the only evidence for a free act is the occurrence of new series of phenomena, but the decision or free act itself is outside of time – and even the agent has no privileged access to it. What the addict really wanted or did when she nominally started on a “recovery” will surprise her as much as those around her when the consequences of her new course of action unfold. Fichte had said: *the I is its own deed*, consciousness is self-positing. The I is really nothing other than self-positing, remarks Schelling, but it is not coextensive with consciousness. All self-apprehension or cognition presupposes something deeper, being which is *fundamental willing*, which makes itself into something and is the ground of all modes of being.

But this account of the individual's deed, if it settles the smaller question of the individual's freedom, character, and responsibility for the good or evil that in a sense it *is*, raises larger questions that Schelling struggles to answer in light of his prior commitment to an identity of different principles in the absolute and his new stance of looking at the development of spirit in terms of will, or of a conflict of wills. In moving from the pantheism of *Naturphilosophie* to the creationism of the *Investigations*, ontological commitments have shifted: in the former there was one agent (*natura naturans*) and one self-conscious being (finite spirit, the last level of the deployment of organization in *natura naturata*). Now there are two agents in one complex structure of being, both capable of spiritual activity and destined to be reunited in love. It is striking

that the definition of *love* Schelling offers here – *that two beings capable of being independent of each other nonetheless strive to be together* – is a reprise of a description first offered in 1804 as a depiction of attraction between sexually dimorphic animals. The logic of love and of lust is identical (cf. EHF 70 [SW I/7:408]; SW I/6:407–8).

One striking feature of the *Investigations* is the effort Schelling makes to show that the systematic intent of *Naturphilosophie* can be fulfilled only if its core logic of the essential sameness (or indifference) of phenomenally distinct orders can be translated into a dynamic framework suitable for agents as well as entities. The distinction between *ground* and *existent*, employed occasionally in the 1801 philosophy of nature to characterize latent and emergent stages of the same phenomena or potency, is now used to demarcate basically different modes of being, roughly nature and spirit, or put in voluntaristic terms, the *will to evil* and the *will to good*. Actually the orders of being (the contractive will of the ground and the expansive will of love) are prior to and ontologically necessary for the moral order. The factors that are distinguished but indissolubly united in God are contingently united, and so dissoluble, in the human being; the possibility for good *or* evil, grounded in God's nature, becomes in humans the reality of good *and* evil. That there are human individuals with good and bad wills, or who have chosen egoistic or altruistic characters, according to Schelling's earlier nonvoluntaristic meditations, depends on their character and their "resolve" or fidelity to their different situations. The conclusion that God is therefore the ground of possibility of good and evil, but is absolved of responsibility for their actuality, seems unsatisfying. Oppenheimer had a pretty definite intuition of what he had done when he saw the first atomic explosion and uttered, "We have become like gods." What he had done did not correspond to his original intention to solve a problem in physics. Schelling's attempt to translate original principles of being into modes of willing seems less than successful too. When he declares with utter generality and sweeping rhetoric, "Will is primal being [*Ursein*] to which alone all predicates of being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation. All of philosophy strives only to find this highest expression," his translators remark that he has overstepped himself and promised more than he can deliver (EHF 21 [SW I/7:350]). Heidegger too was critical of Schelling at this point, seeing in the turn to a philosophy of will a slip back into the metaphysics of presence.

Whatever its argumentative shortcomings, the *Philosophical Investigations* shows a total shift in Schelling's philosophy, from a static ontology of nature to a dynamic philosophy of religion. While the basic story is that of the emergence of moral beings, with will and responsibility, *from* the natural principle, this can in no way happen *within* that principle. Freedom must be a withdrawal from nature, as it were, like Prometheus's theft of fire, and God and humanity

must be sundered as agonal combatants before they can be reunited in a spiritual bond over the course of history. Before this explanatory structure can be fleshed out – the basic narrative of *The Philosophy of Revelation* – a more satisfactory account for the independence of nature and humanity from God must be discovered. This is work of the multiple drafts of *Ages of the World*, where Schelling offers a sketch of how the potencies evolve, contest, and fall into succession in a dream-like exercise of imagination *before* the creation. The potencies are now viewed not as external classifications but as ontological structures in their own right, self-impelled if not totally autonomous agents functioning not as explicit *will* or decision, but as dream-like apparitions of yearning and inchoate desire which deploy themselves in ghostly forms which time and again fall back into their sensory and appetitive elements. Schelling distinguishes between a violent and unpremeditated scission (or “decision”) among the potencies that now and then (eternally) erupts and gives one temporary hegemony, and the creative, presumably conscious, decision of creation wherein God posits what is nature in it as past – that which is necessity or the play of mere imagination and desire – and enters into an ordered realization of the proto-possibilities (AW 12–13 [SW 1/8:320]). Schelling again comments that the deed or act of will that is the agent of decision – and in fact ecstatically ejects the existent from the basis of being – is preconscious and repressed (AW 107–8 [SW 1/8:344]). What is past is locked away as eternally past, and what is there for consciousness is eternally cut off from its nature basis, “the irreducible remainder.”

The entry into the philosophy of religion proper, that is, the yoked negative and positive philosophies, comes with a double intensification of these themes: (a) the play of nonbeing or necessity in God’s natural basis prior to the decisive separation is rethought as a leap over being, the assumption of a freedom so radical that it is *freedom to be or not to be*, that is, a complete rejection of the “prior” state of necessary existence, and (b) the scission between will and consciousness is deepened in the realization that the truth and reality of this whole narrative is beyond conscious grasp or conceptual explication. All philosophy that is merely negative – that is, rational, conceptual, and driven by logic and argumentation – can only lead up to the bare idea of an entity with this sort of freedom, at which point it can and must reach out in experiment or exploration to an actuality beyond necessity and all concepts of existence.

To be or not to be?

I suggested earlier that there is something like a process of musical composition in the makeup of Schelling’s entire philosophy, with themes voiced briefly and subtly early on swelling into prominence later on, and conceptual elements at first seemingly discordant eventually brought into harmonic resolution. If

there is any merit to the metaphor, it implies that Schelling must be judged by his whole *oeuvre* as well as by the cogency of its elements or phases. The philosophy of religion and, more particularly, the late philosophy of mythology and revelation, must be taken as Schelling's single accomplishment. For both the necessitarian ontology of the early *Naturphilosophie* and the volitional ontology of *Human Freedom and Ages of the World* are brought forward and intertwined in surprising ways in Schelling's final position. As we shall see, there are two overwhelming obstacles to appropriating this philosophy, first, *the problem of scale* or detail and, secondly, *the problem of essentialism*.

In his 1841–42 Berlin lectures on *The Philosophy of Revelation*, Schelling first presented the philosophical outline of the positive philosophy, then its historical and theological content which he regarded not as mere application but as its enrichment or fulfillment. In our eyes I fear it cannot but count as an obstacle that Schelling's narrative encompasses almost the whole of Christian doctrine as well the mythologies of various ancient cultures. Our way of doing philosophy is to isolate and reconstruct historical positions, preferably in sparse form, and to test the merits of their premises. Admittedly, all the German Idealists cause grief in this regard, but the cumulative nature of Schelling's argument causes special difficulty.

The positive philosophy begins with the critique of the absolute idealism of Schelling's own *Naturphilosophie* and Hegel's system of philosophy, which moved solely in concepts in abstraction from things or sensory intuitions, and so attained a mere conceptual legitimacy. These philosophies were systems, indeed, but detached from any foundational reality. They could count as no more than *negative philosophy*, an analytic propaedeutic to a treatment of reality that was never furnished except in outline, at the end, and as the result of the analytic process. Schelling essentially attained this position in 1809 and attempted to put the Spinozism of the *Naturphilosophie* behind him, seeing that his earlier philosophy has begun and ended in the concept of the absolute as a necessary or self-existing being. When the godhead sets out to become life, spirit, and God, the earlier philosophy must be abandoned, but it cannot be abandoned by any move less drastic than having the divine will, emergent from nature, bury its eternal past and become a life. But how can one undo necessary existence?

I have argued that there is thinness to this idea of necessary existence from its first introduction in the identity-theory of the *Naturphilosophie*. If the ontological question, properly voiced, is the "vertiginous question" – why is there something and *not nothing*? – then from the very start being has been conceived dialectically as infected with nonbeing, if not actually, then at least possibly. The odor of fishiness that explorers of the ontological argument have always smelled, though some chose to cover it with frankincense, was clearly discerned by Descartes: God was a necessarily existent entity, *if it existed*. From

the side of the thinker and her thinking, necessary existence is eliminable. As Kant saw, existence is not a concept, but a contingent fact dependent on the state of the world.

The novelty of Schelling's philosophy of religion is that God clues into this situation ahead of the philosopher and remedies the lack by exercise of will. This point is where the narrative of the 1809 *Investigations* becomes unclear and the drafts of the *Ages of the World* fail to illuminate except by arguing that deed or will must precede the arising of consciousness and must be structurally buried underneath consciousness in such a way that retrieval is impossible. We shall investigate some of the ways that Schelling tries to argue this transition in the next section, but will first have to deal with the difficult fact that Schelling, in attempting to think outside the conceptual, has left the *a priori* for the realm of the *a posteriori*. Schelling calls his new venture "philosophical empiricism," acknowledging that it can be but an open system and can have authority only for those actively seeking along its lines (POP 144–47; cf. SW I/10:227–31). This is a form of thinking whose object is not given prior to thought, but is actively produced by it. Its object stands beyond thought rather than being a product of thought. Only in this way can Jacobi's demand for some *reality* beyond human feeling and imagination be met (POP 138, 148).

Since positive philosophy is an experimental rather than an analytical enterprise, a voyage of discovery and not a cartographical expedition, Schelling's texts in this period are full of neologisms and overlapping conceptual distinctions, none of which can be said to exactly designate their objects. Earlier attempts to talk of deity as the self-distinguishing process of

Ground *and* Existence (EHF 69–70 [SW I/7:408–9])

Being [Seyn] *and* the Existent [*Seyendes*] (SS 208 [SW I/7:436])

are superseded in the 1841–42 lectures by

unvordenkliche, blind, or necessary Being

and

Ontological capacity [*Seinkönnen*], will, or godhead [*Gottheit*]

(POP 163–64, 167–69)

Furthermore, all versions of these contrasts are pervaded by the late Platonic contrast between nonbeing and being ($\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ and $\delta\upsilon\nu$), the dark and light principles which from the earliest days had occupied Schelling's imagination and which could function in either natural or moral environments, becoming *contraction* and *expansion* in the former, and self-will (evil) or universal will in the latter (SS 209 [SW I/7:436–37]).

Crucial to the positive philosophy is the situation that the subject, not the observing philosopher, makes these distinctions, which means that by the power of necessary and inconceivable being, *contingency* emerges from necessity and, uniting necessity and contingency in itself, becomes God – Lord over being. As in the middle philosophy, Schelling thinks this occurs through *willing*, primordially a withdrawal from necessity or the assumption of freedom over both being and not-being. The necessarily existent wills itself as *Sein-und-Nichtsein-Können*, or contingently existing (POP 164, 169). This breaks primordial being, hitherto the undisturbed tranquillity of groundlessness and beginninglessness, into opposing factors: being and freedom, nature and spirit, B and A.

In making necessity or its own primordial being other than itself, God makes it an independent power of being and turns its natural necessity (which is a kind of relative nonbeing) into real possibility, capacity for being. In so doing, the contingently necessary or living God first becomes objective in its necessary counterpart, and only here is the possibility for consciousness situated. God finds itself in “unprethinkable” being before it thinks, and it must wrench itself from this blind or mute being before it can become a thinker or knower. Here, Schelling announces, is his point of divergence with Jacobi who would posit the being and consciousness of God simultaneously. “*Instead we must proceed from an original being of God that precedes him*” (POP 165–66). There would be no point to consciousness if its sort of knowledge were not the cognitive side of contingent being, the registry of what happens, not of what is eternally the same.

How is this separation from primordial being possible or conceivable? Schelling no longer seems to prize the simple category of *will*; it is contingency, ability *to be or not to be*, that asserts itself over blind or monotonous being and first reveals the law of being, to which even God is subject: nothing is to remain hidden, unclear, latent – *everything is to be brought to decision*. Schelling calls this the “idea” in the inchoate divine imagination, the intuition that it is fundamentally other than the capacity for being which is connected to its eternal or necessary being (POP 168–69; cf. 178–79). This idea is the idea of *freedom*; to see it is *will*; to act on it is to depart from the security of being. Reality itself is inherently dialectical, says Schelling, in such a way that the possible has more value than the actual, the contingent than the necessary, and the novel and risky than the ever-present. Reality is evidently popping with possibility!

The other-than-divine becomes the locus of creation: humankind, and in the human, the natural world. The potencies, or capacities for being which evolved out of the primordial blind being, become independent powers, as it were, and in succession shape the epochs of human historical existence – which are also the phases of God’s self-revelation. Thus the abstract and ontological side of positive philosophy turns toward history, the unfolding of

human cultures, the mythologies that are the flowering of deity in so-called pagan cultures, and the mystery-cults of ancient Greece that lead one to the truths of Christianity: creation, fall, redemption through a humanly suffering God, and immortality (of sorts). This all makes for a vast narrative. We will have to confine ourselves to three topics: creation and the human status of Christ, Christ's divinization and the generation of the Trinity, and the future of human spiritual evolution. Schelling had vast amounts of learning at his disposal in classical languages and literatures, the history of religions, and Christian scriptures and theology, so his narratives are engaging. What I find interesting is the economy of his account: the *three potencies* in their dialectical unfolding structure human history, the phases of religious consciousness in ancient peoples; they also determine the internal relationship of the deity, the so-called different "persons" of the godhead. Also interesting is Schelling's argument that if revelation is universal, it cannot be confined to one people or one cultural epoch.

Creation and the Christ: The *Naturphilosophie* pictured humankind's (structural) evolution inside nature, while the philosophy of freedom did the reverse, showing nature to be a process within the cosmic creature, humanity. The positive philosophy situates both within what Johannine theology called the preexistent *Logos*, the medium of creation. While orthodox Christian thinking identifies the *Logos* with the second person of the Trinity and the earthly Christ, Schelling identifies it with the excluded blind or pre-personal ground of the living deity, within which humanity both takes its origin and falls from union with the divine (POP 194–95, 197–98, 204–7). It is the historical adventure of various human cultures to mark out stages on the return to God – the basic pattern marked by Ouranos, Chronos, and Dionysus in Greek culture, and their female counterparts Demeter, Persephone, and Cybele. These are shapes of God, phases in revelation (POP 214–18).

Within the Hebrew culture, Christ plays the same role as Dionysus and Cybele – mediation with the ancient, harsh gods and redemption through suffering. Christ is essentially human, the pure human, divinized by God in response to his obedient suffering, and thus incorporated into the godhead. That this is a purely Arian account does not bother Schelling, who insists he is doing *philosophy*, not dogmatic theology (POP 260–71; cf. 296–99).

With the acceptance of Christ into the godhead, the Spirit is generated as the bond between Father and Son, the principle of sharing, and outreach. Revelation marks out stages in human history, conceived as a single narrative with universal meaning, with the age of the Father covering ancient times and civilizations, the age of the Son coinciding with the domination of Rome and Europe, and the age of the Spirit yet to come, marked by the withering away of the difference between ecclesial and secular communities. Schelling borrows this historicized version of the life of the Trinity from the writings of Joachim di

Fiori (POP 318–21). As far as eschatology goes, Schelling continues to maintain that a form of immortality or life after death is possible, with a sort of distillation or *Verklärung* of one's moral personality; the ontological possibility of such a transformation rests on the resonance of the human *Gemuth* (soul) or the hidden unity of psyche and body with the divine *Geist* (spirit), as Schelling argued in the final pages of the 1810 "Stuttgart Seminars" (SW I/7:476–84).

Conclusions

I have indicated that the immensity of Schelling's narrative poses obstacles to its acceptance; so does the fact that it is quite Eurocentric, despite Schelling's attempt to argue for the validity of non-Christian religions as being necessary steps toward God's full revelation in the Christian narrative. Weightier than the problem of scale, however, is that Schelling thinks that terms such as "God" and "man," "being" and "ontological capacity" designate universal essences. Informed by evolutionary biology, neuroscience, genetics, and emergent genomics, we have a difficult time ascribing anything other than a statistical validity to entities that we think take shape discretely but which we continue to denominate in the old vocabulary of sortal nouns. Reality seems to unfold in micro-events far below the threshold of our unaided perceptions. Though Schelling seems to have anticipated something like the process philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne, particularly in his valorization of *contingency* over *necessity*, his religious imagination seems anchored in classic Christian dogma and the Renaissance tradition of placing "man" in the center of a single process of divine revelation. Paul Tillich, the one theologian obviously influenced by Schelling, followed him closely only in matters of terminology and periodization of the epochs of revelation. But he accepted Schelling's core thought only in an agnostic and relativistic sense. It is convenient to call godhead or the Father *abgründig* – one need say no more. And it is likewise convenient to define the Christ only in terms of his acceptance as Messiah by early communities, and entirely prudent to talk of the Spirit's presence in human communities and institutions as *ambiguous*. But this is quite a dilution of Schelling's daring as Christian thinker.

Notes

1. One example of the German Idealist "From Kant to Hegel" narrative is Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977). Walter Schulz argued that Schelling begins the rebellion against idealism in *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1975). Karl Jaspers finds in Schelling the origin of existentialism; see *Schelling; Größe und Verhängnis* (München: Piper, 1955). Martin Heidegger finds a regrettable turn to

- onto-theology or “metaphysics” in Schelling’s philosophy of freedom. See Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985). Paul Tillich wove Schelling’s thought deeply into the structure of his monumental quasi-existentialist reinterpretation of Christian theology in his *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). Two recent thinkers who see in Schelling a foreshadowing of psychoanalytic theory are Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom: Ages of The World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and S. J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2012).
2. Wilhelm Metzger, *Die Epochen des Schellingschen Philosophie von 1796 bis 1802* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1911).
 3. Robert F. Brown is one critic who has consistently pointed to Schelling’s “musical” practice of anticipating later development in his thinking either by insufficiently noticing how novel turns of thinking have entered his repertory or failing to meet “crisis points” or loci of systematic stress head-on when he first encountered them. See Robert F. Brown, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Deities of Samothrace* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974); and Robert F. Brown, “Is Much of Schelling’s *Freiheitschrift* (1809) Already Present in His *Philosophie und Religion*?” in *Schellings Weg zur Freiheitschrift: Legende und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Hans Michael Baumgartner and Wilhelm Jacobs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromann-Holzboog, 1996), 110–31.
 4. F. W. J. Schelling, *Timaheus*, ed. Hartmut Buckner (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromann-Holzboog, 1994), 59–75.
 5. F. W. J. Schelling, “Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses oder die Kategorien der Physik,” *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik* 1, no. 1 (1800): 100 (SW I/4:3–4).
 6. See Schelling’s early meditations on time and modality, SW I/1:217–27. Schelling will later reverse his course of thought and assign *necessary existence* to the initial position of thesis, and (real) possibility or *contingency* to the final position of the synthesis.
 7. F. W. J. Schelling, “Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses oder die Kategorien der Physik,” *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik* 1, no. 2 (1800): 83–87 (SW I/4:75–78).
 8. Michael Vater, “‘In and of Itself, Nothing is Finite’: Schelling’s Nature (or So-Called Identity) Philosophy,” in *Kant, Fichte, and the Legacy of Transcendental Idealism*, ed. Halle Kim and Steven Hoeltzel (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, forthcoming).
 9. Schelling anticipates this idea of the human as “the central being” in a quasi-materialistic fashion in the conclusion of 1804 *Naturphilosophie*, where he argues for the analogy between the entire natural universe and the human brain. The human is not so much a being *of* the center, he says there, but is itself the center. See SW I/6:488–91.
 10. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie, Erste Teil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), vv. 1223–37.
 11. On *Verklärung* and the dependence of that hope upon a bond between the divine and nature reestablished by Christ, see F. W. J. Schelling, *Clara, or On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 60–61; and also EHF 70 (SW I/7:408). For the “indivisible remainder,” see EHF 29 (SW I/7:360).

25

The “Keystone” of the System: Schelling’s Philosophy of Art

Devin Zane Shaw

In his Introduction to the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling states that “the objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy – and the keystone [*Schlußstein*] of its entire arch – is the philosophy of art” (STI 12 [SW I/3:349]). Artistic production, which is grounded in what Schelling calls aesthetic intuition, realizes what philosophy intuits in the ideal: the identity of subject and object, consciousness and unconscious activity, as well as self and nature. The philosophy of art, he argues, overcomes the limitations of both practical philosophy and nature-philosophy. On the one hand, practical philosophy, which begins by positing the subject’s activity, is limited to the infinite task of approximating – but never objectively realizing – the moral law. On the other hand, nature-philosophy, which begins from the object, can demonstrate nature’s productivity, although this productivity remains unconscious. While both parts of the system proceed from the intellectual intuition of the identity of subject and object, neither can demonstrate this identity; they fail Schelling’s demand, found in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), that the system should show that “Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature” (IPN 42 [SW I/2:56]). Thus he introduces the philosophy of art, which demonstrates how the intellectual intuition of the identity of subject and object “become[s] objective” through an aesthetic intuition – the production of the work of art (STI 229 [SW I/3:625]). Finally, the importance of the philosophy of art extends beyond Schelling’s metaphysical and epistemological concerns, for artistic production, in demonstrating the identity of freedom and nature, opens the possibility of a new mythology.

However, upon completion it seems that Schelling had already begun to raze the system itself. In 1801, he publishes the *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (hereafter, *Darstellung*), in which he rejects the so-called subjective idealism of Kantian and Fichtean transcendental idealism in favor of a philosophy of absolute identity that proceeds from the standpoint of reason itself

(which he defines as "the total indifference of the subjective and objective") (Pr 145 [SW I/4:114]). Whereas Schelling was once content to posit the parallelism of transcendental idealism (which proceeds from subject to object) and nature-philosophy (which proceeds from object to subject), his absolute idealism seeks to explain the parallel, the identity, the indifference, of subject and object as knowledge of reason or nature itself.

According to what I have called elsewhere the standard interpretation of Schelling's thought, once he introduces his system of absolute idealism or identity-philosophy, the philosophy of art is relegated to the periphery of the system.¹ To tarry with the architectural metaphor for a moment, from the standpoint of absolute idealism the philosophy of art is an ornament rather than the keystone of the system. For example, Antoon Braeckman argues that the transition from transcendental idealism to absolute idealism "is the result of the transposition of the inner structure of the work of art, as it is conceived in the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, to the inner structure of absolute reason in the *Darstellung*."² In other words, the philosophy of art, and the importance granted to aesthetic intuition, is only necessary when the philosopher posits the self's activity as the first principle of philosophy. From the standpoint of reason, Braeckman claims, art "is no longer needed."³

I will argue, on the contrary, that the philosophy of art is a central part of Schelling's philosophy from 1800 to 1807. Though Schelling dispenses with the subjective idealism of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, he maintains that it establishes the "general framework of construction, whose schematism must also be the foundation of the completed system" (FPr 224 [SW I/4:410]). The philosophy of art is the keystone of the system, he argues, for the following reasons (which I call the conditions of the philosophy of art):

1. What philosophy constructs in the ideal, art produces in the real. Thus artistic production is the highest human activity because practical philosophy can only approximate its object, which is the moral law.
2. While both the natural organism and the artwork embody the same identity of real and ideal, of necessity and freedom, the work of art overcomes these oppositions through the identity of conscious and unconscious production, whereas the organism's activity is unconscious.
3. Artistic production has a socio-political task: it aims to overcome the fragmentary condition of modern life through a new mythology and artistic renewal.⁴

In this chapter, I will show that these conditions are present in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the lectures later collected as *The Philosophy of Art*, and the address delivered to the *Akademie der Wissenschaften* on October 12, 1807 on the occasion of the King's Name-Day, *Concerning the Relation of the Plastic*

Arts to Nature (hereafter, *Münchener Rede*).⁵ In the next section, I argue that the impetus for the philosophy of art is Schelling's critique of the primacy of practical reason in transcendental idealism. While Schelling associated his early work with Kant and Fichte, he came to view the concept of freedom, "insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason" (CPrR 5:3), as restrictively formalistic. The philosophy of art, I claim, subverts the primacy of practical reason by conceiving of freedom as a power of the productive imagination. In the third section, I maintain that Schelling's treatment of the systematic role of the imagination demonstrates the continuity between the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and his system of absolute idealism. In the fourth section, I contend that while nature-philosophy plays an important role in Schelling's system, the philosophy of art maintains priority over it because artistic production presents the identity of the real and the ideal after their separation. Even in the natural-historical ontology that grounds the *Münchener Rede*, artistic production reconciles the divine with nature after their separation in humanity, a separation which is necessary because it opens the possibility of both evil and the realization of free creativity in beauty. I conclude by considering the politics of Schelling's idea of a new mythology in light of Jacques Rancière's work on the politics of aesthetics, and I show that the very aesthetics that makes the idea of a new mythology possible also points to its impossibility as a form of politics.

The subversion of transcendental idealism

When Schelling states that the philosophy of art is the keystone of the system, he is subverting the primacy of practical reason in transcendental idealism. There are two claims in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* that set the course for both Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and Schelling's early work. First, Kant declares that "the concept of freedom, *insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason* [my emphasis], constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason" from which all other concepts "get stability and objective reality" (CPrR 5:3–4). And second, Kant subsequently suggests that a comparison of the two *Critiques* would raise the "expectation of perhaps being able some day to attain insight into the unity of the whole pure rational faculty (theoretical as well as practical) and to derive everything from one principle – the undeniable need of human reason, which finds complete satisfaction only in a complete systematic unity of its cognitions" (CPrR 5:91). Although Kant did not complete this project, he indicated that a single principle could unify the entire system of philosophy – perhaps that principle which is the keystone of the system, that is, "freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason." Following Kant's suggestion, Fichte presented a system of knowledge, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in

which theoretical and practical reason are unified by the self's activity: the practical subject who strives to realize the regulative ideal of an absolutely unconditioned self, through a dialectic of activity and reflection, also provides the ideal foundation of theoretical reason. The often acerbic Coleridge would follow Kant's metaphor and note that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* "was to add the *key-stone* [my emphasis] of the arch...by commencing with an *act*, instead of a *thing* or *substance*."⁶

Schelling associated his early work with that of Kant and Fichte. In the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795–96) (hereafter, *Letters*), he argues that criticism is superior to dogmatism because it makes the freedom of the subject the first principle of the system, while dogmatism risks extinguishing the possibility of freedom by positing the object as the first principle. Despite his strong sympathy for Spinoza, Schelling ultimately defends the Kantian or critical system due to the primacy it gives to freedom. Even in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, the first presentation of the system of nature-philosophy that was to become a crucial point of contention between Schelling and Fichte, Schelling writes that philosophy "is throughout a work of freedom" (IPN 9 [SW I/2:11]).

It would seem, then, that Schelling's philosophy of art introduces a radical break with these earlier claims concerning the primacy of freedom in the system, but it is instead the fruition of his initial insight – in fact, the philosophy of art forms a bridge between his early work and the philosophy of freedom and revelation that begins with the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809). Chapters such as his *Letters* and his texts on the philosophy of art share an emphasis on creativity. Rather than think freedom as conformity to the moral law, according to practical reason, Schelling comes to think freedom from the standpoint of an aesthetic intuition or as a power of the imagination – as a free, creative act. In the *Letters*, Schelling maintains that philosophy, as an act of freedom, is creative: were a philosopher to believe the system to be completed, at that "very moment he would cease to be *creator* and would be degraded to an instrument of his system" (DC 172, translation modified [SW I/1:302]). It is *creativity* that differentiates Schelling's account of free activity from Kant's formalism – the stipulation that freedom must be conceived "insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason" – and from, as Coleridge would later write, the "ascetic, and almost monkish, mortification of the natural passions and desires" of Fichte's ethics.⁷

In the *Survey of the Most Recent Philosophical Literature* (1797–98; hereafter, *Survey*), Schelling conceives of philosophical creativity as an aesthetic sense. He suggests that philosophical inquiry

belongs properly to aesthetics....For this science [aesthetics] opens *access* to all of philosophy, because it is only by means of [aesthetics] that we can

explain what the philosophical *spirit* [*Geist*] is. To philosophize without it is no better than to exist outside of time or to write poetry without imagination. (TE 103, translation modified [SW I/1:402])

Without an aesthetic sense – for those pedants with “unaesthetic minds” – it is impossible to grasp philosophical ideas, which Schelling says can only be presented through inconsistent or contradictory expressions (TE 106). A similar sentiment is expressed in the anonymous fragment, by turns attributed to Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin, now entitled the *Earliest Program for a System of German Idealism* (hereafter, *System Program*): “The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic force [*Kraft*] as the poet. Those human beings who are devoid of aesthetic sense [*ästhetischen Sinn*] are our pedantic philosophers. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy.”⁸

Though Schelling conceives of philosophy as a creative activity, aesthetic sense is not equivalent to what he calls, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, aesthetic intuition. To use his terminology, the philosophical expression of aesthetic sense is ideal, while aesthetic intuition is intellectual intuition become objective or real. His references to aesthetic sense – an aesthetic power that animates philosophical creativity – are similar to Hölderlin’s. While numerous commentators have noted Hölderlin’s influence on Schelling’s metaphysics, I think that this influence extends to Schelling’s considerations on art, from the discussion of tragedy in the final epistle of the *Letters*, to the idea of aesthetic sense, to what Schelling calls aesthetic intuition.⁹ Hölderlin had sought from October 1794 onward, under the influence of, and in response to, Friedrich Schiller, an aesthetic solution to the problems of Fichte’s philosophy. In a letter to Immanuel Niethammer, dated February 24, 1796, Hölderlin elaborates:

I want to discover the principle which explains to me the divisions in which we think and exist, yet which is also capable of dispelling the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, yes, also between reason and revelation, – theoretically, in intellectual intuition, without our practical reason having to come to our aid. For this we need an aesthetic sense [*ästhetischen Sinn*]. ...¹⁰

If Schelling and Hölderlin had discussed aesthetic sense, they both conceptualized it as a philosophical – that is, theoretical or ideal – problem. When Schelling introduces the philosophy of art, aesthetic intuition is the real production of what philosophy expresses ideally. Or, in Hölderlin’s terms, aesthetic intuition is that activity which is “capable of dispelling the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world, yes, also between reason and revelation”; aesthetic intuition is intellectual intuition become objective.

Though there are hints present in the *System Program*, and though he announces in the final installment of the *Survey* a philosophy of art to overcome the divisions between practice and theory as well as freedom and necessity (SW I/1:465), the *System of Transcendental Idealism* presents the first systematic expression of Schelling's philosophy of art. There he argues that the system must derive objectivity from the self's productivity: the philosopher begins by positing the identity of subjectivity and objectivity, and then proceeds to demonstrate how objectivity arises out of the limitations to the self's productivity. Productivity is not, for Schelling, an intellectual category; instead, productivity designates an activity that is both natural and intellectual. In the *Survey*, he underlines this point when he states that the first principles of the system "are *genetic*, and the mind becomes and grows together with the world" (TE 104, translation modified [SW I/1:403]). By introducing the concept of productivity, Schelling bypasses the problem of circularity that plagued Fichte's account of the self's activity (see EPW 131 [FW 1:77]; WL 93–94 [FW 1:92]). As Dieter Sturma notes:

There is absolutely no need to discover ever new metaphorical ways of supposedly overcoming the logic of immanent circularity that attaches to self-consciousness. In Schelling's eyes, all that is required is to interpret the transcendental conditions of subjectivity in a developmental and historical fashion. If it is indeed possible to grasp the given and the conditions of subjectivity in terms of a systematic and developmental prehistory of the fact of subjectivity itself, then there can be no pure self-relation on the part of subjectivity in the first place. According to this perspective, human subjectivity is not condemned ceaselessly to move solely within a closed circle of its own.¹¹

Rather than conceiving of the self's activity within a circle of reflection, Schelling claims that the self produces along a continuum that runs from intellectual intuition to aesthetic intuition. While Kant suggests that the freedom of practical reason could unify the system of transcendental idealism, for Schelling it is the creative freedom of the productive imagination or aesthetic intuition – as the imagination grounds the concept of production throughout the system – that unifies the system.

For our purposes, we will focus on Schelling's distinction between the activity that characterizes practical philosophy and that activity which characterizes artistic production. Both proceed from contradictions, but while practical activity results in the transcendental illusion of freedom, the aesthetic intuition results in the work of art, which renders objective the identity of subjectivity and objectivity, self and nature. Schelling argues that practical activity is a necessary part of the system because it is through practical activity

(and the intersubjective relation of *praxis*) that the self becomes conscious of itself as an individual within the world. The theoretical section of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* is dedicated to showing how objectivity and representation become possible through the self's productivity as it strives toward consciousness. While this section explains the origins of intuition, limitation, and production, Schelling holds that these activities remain nonconscious. By becoming self-conscious as an individual, the self's activity sunders the identity of subject and object that is the basis of its productivity, and the limitations that accompany objectivity and the self's feeling of necessity remain in an unrecoverable past that can only be explicated by transcendental inquiry (STI 58 [SW I/3:409]). The self becomes conscious of itself as willing, but not as producing. Thus, Schelling argues, practical reason is based on a contradiction between the will and the "compulsion to represent" (STI 176, translation modified [SW I/3:558]). In practice, the self will strive to transform the external world according to its will; the difference between ideal and the object "engenders the drive to transform the object as it is into the object as it ought to be" (STI 177 [SW I/3:559]). Like Kant and Fichte before him, Schelling holds that practical reason leads to an infinite task of approximating the moral law. However, for Schelling the difference between will and objective representation produces the transcendental illusion of freedom, specifically the view of ordinary consciousness that the self's free activity is fundamentally separated from the necessary laws that order the natural world. Freedom is a transcendental illusion because in itself, the self is both productive and willing, though the practical self only grasps itself as willing. The identity of subject and object, which grounds the self's productivity, "cannot be evidenced in free action itself, since precisely for the sake of free action ... it abolishes itself" (STI 213 [SW I/3:605]). Echoing Schiller, Schelling claims that if philosophy remains at the standpoint of practical reason and proceeds no further, then "man is forever a broken fragment, for either his action is necessary, and then not free, or free, and then not necessary and according to law" (STI 216 [SW I/3:608]).¹²

Since artistic production or aesthetic intuition reveals the identity of subjectivity and objectivity, freedom and necessity, and self and nature, the philosophy of art addresses the whole human being (STI 222, 233 [SW I/3:616, 630]).¹³ While practical reason arises from the diremption of subject and object, and freedom and necessity, aesthetic intuition commences from their identity. To demonstrate how intellectual intuition becomes objective through artistic production, Schelling analyzes the activity of aesthetic intuition as both a free and yet necessary activity, and then proceeds to explicate the unique character of art.

As a subjective activity, Schelling argues that aesthetic intuition unites conscious and free activity, and the unconscious productivity of nature. For his

account of the subjective activity of artistic production, Schelling provides a phenomenological account of this dynamic: from "the testimony of all artists," it is possible to infer that artistic production begins due to a contradiction between freedom and necessity and ceases when this contradiction is resolved (STI 222–23 [SW I/3:616]). On the one hand, artists freely and consciously set out to create, yet, on the other hand, they are "involuntarily driven to create their works, and...in producing them they merely satisfy an irresistible urge of their own nature" (STI 222 [SW I/3:616]). The basis of the feeling of compulsion or necessity in aesthetic intuition is the result of what he calls the "obscure concept of genius" (STI 222 [SW I/3:616]). In the Introduction to the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling argues that nature as producing (*natura naturans*) strives toward, but never comes to, self-consciousness – that is, nature produces blindly. However, with genius freedom and necessity are united, and thus the activity of genius, artistic production, is neither merely subjective nor merely objective but rather both. The act of genius exhibits both the creativity of freedom and the "unfathomable depth which the true artist, though he labors with the greatest diligence, involuntarily imparts to his work," that natural compulsion that drives the artist to produce (STI 224 [SW I/3:619]). To contemporary art historians and theorists, who have demonstrated the imbrication of artistic production in the manifold of social and political relations in which artists work, the idea of genius is, as Schelling concedes, "obscure," if not altogether trapped in romanticized accounts of art. Nevertheless, for Schelling, it is through artistic production, through genius, that natural productivity metamorphosizes into conscious production and free creativity into objective necessity.

Thus aesthetic intuition produces the work of art, which is a "complete presentation [*Darstellung*]" of the identity of subject and object, of self and nature, and of freedom and necessity (STI 220, translation modified [SW I/3:614]). While practical activity is an infinite striving toward an objective world as it ought to be, aesthetic intuition produces complete and objective works. The artwork, Schelling argues, presents the infinite in finite form; to present the infinite in finite form is what he calls beauty. More specifically, he argues that the artwork is a symbol and unity, in finite form, of an infinity of purposes or meanings that exceeds the conscious intentions of the artist. He compares the infinite meaning of the artwork to that of Greek mythology:

the mythology of the Greeks, which undeniably contains an infinite meaning and a symbolism for all ideas, arose among a people, and in a fashion, which both make it impossible to suppose any comprehensive forethought in devising it, or in the harmony whereby everything is united into one great whole. (STI 225 [SW I/3:619–20])

The artist neither imitates nature nor applies preestablished rules in producing art; rather, he or she creates an artwork that presents its own internal rule that expresses its own mythology, as a symbol of the ideas of philosophy. That is to say, to reiterate what I have defined as the first condition of Schelling's philosophy of art, artistic production is the real expression of what philosophy constructs in the ideal.

The absolute imagination

At this point, we should consider whether or not the role of the philosophy of art changes in the transition from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* to the absolute idealism or identity-philosophy announced by Schelling's *Darstellung* of 1801.¹⁴ In the latter text, he abandons the subjective idealism of transcendental idealism for *his* system, which begins from the standpoint of reason itself, what he calls the point of indifference (or identity) of subjectivity and objectivity. In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the ground of inquiry is self-consciousness alone – “self-consciousness is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but it casts its light ahead only, not behind” (STI 18 [SW I/3:357]) – but during the period of absolute idealism, Schelling aims to explicate the intellectual intuition *behind* self-consciousness. In other words, it is from the standpoint of absolute idealism that he can explain the common origin of what he had previously presented as parallel and complimentary systems – transcendental idealism and nature-philosophy.

Many commentators have argued that, once Schelling turns to the system of absolute idealism, the philosophy of art becomes a tertiary aspect of the system. Broadly speaking, this interpretation defines the importance of artistic production according to its subjective features.¹⁵ By contrast, I think that an analysis of Schelling's concept of imagination reveals the continuing importance of the philosophy of art during the period of absolute idealism. As we have seen, art is produced by the resolution of the contradiction between freedom and necessity or self and nature, but the “obscure” concept of genius does not explain the power by which the contradiction is resolved. Near the end of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling indicates that these contradictions are resolved due to the productive imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), that power “whereby we are able to think and couple together even what is contradictory” (STI 230 [SW I/3:626]).

This does not, however, mean that the imagination is sovereign over or superior to philosophy.¹⁶ Instead, Schelling argues that the “poetic gift” of aesthetic intuition “is merely productive intuition, reiterated to its highest potency [*Potenz*]” (STI 230 [SW I/3:626]). Indeed, it is the imagination that also mediates the central contradiction of practical reason by producing the ideals that drive practical activity, the difference being that, while practical reason is

produced by the separation of willing and object, aesthetic intuition is the real expression of what philosophy produces in the ideal world. Thus the imagination does not emerge at the end of the system, above or beyond philosophy, but rather it is the basis of the continuity of production from intellectual intuition to aesthetic intuition. As Orrin F. Summerell writes:

The imagination is, then, not simply one faculty among others; it is instead for Schelling the capacity which underlies everything in its being, the very dynamic of the absolute itself as the identity conditioning all opposition. Viewed in this sense, imagination is the creative force of identity, the identifying of identity. In the work of art as a product of imagination, then, identification is concretely at work in displaying the original determination of things as what they actually are.¹⁷

In this passage, Summerell is discussing Schelling's *Philosophy of Art*, but his claims hold in general for the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. In fact, Schelling radicalizes the role of the imagination during the period of identity-philosophy; whereas art once held a subjective-transcendental importance, in *The Philosophy of Art* he argues that art "is the presentation of the absolute world in the form of art" (PA 7 [SW I/5:350]).

Schelling contends that the system of absolute idealism begins from the standpoint of reason, which is the indifference of subjectivity and objectivity, and proceeds to articulate the various determinations of things as they are in the absolute. Each finite thing, he claims, is a potency (*Potenz*) of the absolute that has an existence which is either predominantly real or predominantly ideal. Schelling struggles to elaborate the transition from the absolute to the finite world because he argues that the derivation of such a transition cannot be thought qualitatively, that is, as a negation or limitation of the absolute (Pr 360 [SW I/4:130]). Instead, he proposes that the transition from the absolute to the finite should be thought quantitatively (as unity, plurality, and totality), so that each finite thing is a potency of the absolute, determined according to its "amount of being" or "magnitude of being" (*Größe des Seyns*) as predominantly real and objective or as predominantly ideal and subjective (but never absolutely real or ideal) (Pr 355 [SW I/4:123]). Thus Schelling maintains that the three domains of philosophy correspond to the differentiation of potencies: nature-philosophy considers that which is predominantly real (knowledge), the philosophy of history considers that which is predominantly ideal (practical activity), and the philosophy of art explicates that which is the indifference of real and ideal (art); the point of indifference or identity is the highest potency because it expresses the essence of the absolute (the indifference or identity of subject and object) (PA 15, 29 [SW I/5:367, 382]). These distinctions also obtain as Ideas: nature-philosophy is concerned with Truth, the

philosophy of history with the Good, and the philosophy of art with Beauty. Art is the highest potency because it is the indifference of necessity (which is real) and freedom (which is ideal), and it is therefore a fuller expression of the absolute world. As Schelling writes, the “degree of perfection or of the reality of a thing increases to the extent that it corresponds to its own absolute idea and to the fullness of infinite affirmation, and thus the more it encompasses other potencies within itself” (PA 29, translation modified [SW I/5:381]).

Art is the highest potency of the system because it is a product of the power of imagination. Beauty, Schelling argues, is neither merely real nor merely ideal; instead, it is “the complete interpenetration or mutual informing [*Ineinsbildung*] of both” (PA 29 [SW I/5:382]). The key word is *Ineinsbildung*: that the real and ideal can be formed into a unity is made possible by the imagination. Schelling defines the imagination as “the power of *mutual informing into unity* [*Ineinsbildung*] upon which all creation is really based,” the power whereby the ideal is simultaneously real, the soul simultaneously the body (PA 32 [SW I/5:386]). Nonetheless, we cannot conclude that the imagination is superior to philosophy. Though art is the highest potency of the system or the ideal, only philosophy in general can explicate or deduce the archetypes or Ideas of Truth, Virtue (*Sittlichkeit*) or the Good, and Beauty from a common source, because philosophy in general explicates the rational structure of the absolute itself. For Schelling, philosophy and art are complementary. Philosophy constructs the universal archetypes of the absolute, while art presents the archetypes in particular forms (this is the meaning of the opposition found in the text between *Urbild* (archetype) and *Gegenbild* (literally “counter-image”): art is the “*real* presentation of the forms of things as they are in themselves”; with Beauty the “rational as rational becomes simultaneously phenomenal or sensuous” (PA 32, 29 [SW I/5:386, 382]). Thus, whether we consider the *System of Transcendental Idealism* or *The Philosophy of Art*, we are lead to the conclusion that what I have defined as the first condition of the philosophy of art holds true: for Schelling, what philosophy constructs in the ideal, art produces in the real.

The natural history of art

The value of the philosophy of art does not lie only in the fact that art expresses in the real what philosophy thinks ideally. In this section, we will examine what I have identified as the second condition of the philosophy of art: while both the natural organism and the artwork embody the same identity of real and ideal, of necessity and freedom, Schelling argues that the work of art overcomes these oppositions through the identity of conscious and unconscious production, whereas the organism’s activity is unconscious.

Nature-philosophy, first proposed in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), was Schelling’s first distinct contribution to German Idealism. At the outset,

it had a twofold task: first, to demonstrate that nature cannot be explained mechanistically as a series of causes and effects; and second, to undermine the dualistic standpoint that defines, and renders problematic, so much of modern philosophy – from Descartes's distinction between thought and extension to Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena. Fichte presents the most extreme iteration of modern dualism, one which posits the self's activity at the cost of a concept of nature: "Intellect and thing are thus two exact opposites: they inhabit two worlds between which there is no bridge" (WL 17 [FW 1:436]). By contrast Schelling attempts to demonstrate the common genesis of nature and self-consciousness. He argues that "Nature *should* be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature" (IPN 41–42 [SW I/2:56]). Not only is this a claim about the relation between mind and nature, but it is also a claim about what is entailed by a complete and systematic philosophy, which *should* demonstrate or make visible the common origins of self-consciousness and nature.

We have already seen how Schelling attempts to show the natural basis of the self's productivity in the theoretical section of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. In the "parallel" to this text, the Introduction to the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), Schelling shows that nature must be thought as both productive (the Spinozist *natura naturans*) and product (*natura naturata*) (FO 202 [SW I/3:284]). Though, according to Schelling, nature-philosophy treats the identity of natural productivity and natural product – of, in other words, subject and object – nature remains unconscious. The task of philosophy, however, is to make the identity of subject and object conscious and intelligible. Neither practical reason nor nature-philosophy can do this. On the one hand, practical reason, though it makes the self's productivity conscious, is premised on the infinite separation of subject and object, while, on the other hand, nature-philosophy shows the identity of subject and object in nature's productivity and in natural organisms, the fact that this identity is not sundered prevents the identity from becoming conscious. While the identity of subject and object can be shown indirectly in nature-philosophy, it "is *directly* proved in the case of an activity at once clearly conscious and unconscious, which manifests itself in the productions of *genius*" (FO 193 [SW I/3:271]). Thus the necessity of the philosophy of art in the system: artistic production makes nature's productivity conscious through genius while it also reconciles the separation that prevents practical reason from being completely, objectively realized. Though the system of identity-philosophy that underpins Schelling's *Philosophy of Art* dispenses with the subjective features of this schema, he continues to maintain that, although the "organic work of nature" presents the identity or indifference of real and ideal, this identity remains prior to separation or antithesis and is thus unconscious. By contrast, the artwork overcomes (*aufgehoben*) this separation of real and ideal by informing – through the imagination – freedom and nature into a totality (PA 30 [SW I/5:383–84]).

Schelling does not, however, always consider the relation of art to nature in these schematic terms. In the *Münchener Rede* (1807), he presents a natural-historical ontology that takes artistic production as the model of human freedom or creativity. Indeed, this text is a turning point in Schelling's thought; it dispenses with the formalist and axiomatic basis of identity-philosophy and introduces a historical revelation of nature and human history that is similar to the philosophy of freedom that Schelling articulates in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, though the later text replaces the philosophy of art with a theological and ecstatic account of human freedom. Nevertheless, the three conditions of the philosophy of art are present in the *Münchener Rede*. On the one hand, art is the real historical expression of the natural-historical series of revelations conceptualized by philosophy. On the other hand, art is a higher potency than nature because artistic production overcomes the conflict of the passions that separates and elevates humans over nature. We will address the third condition, concerning the socio-political ramifications of the philosophy of art, in the next section.

In the *Münchener Rede*, Schelling presents a new and dynamic account of his metaphysics of the potencies, in which finite things are expressed according to an ascending series of complexity and perfection.¹⁸ During the period of identity-philosophy, he defined the potencies as logical or "ideal determinations" that explain the diversity of forms in the absolute (PA 14 [SW I/5:366]). In the *Münchener Rede*, the task of philosophy is to discover in natural and artistic production the potencies as real historical powers:

Nature, in its broader sphere, always presents the higher simultaneously with its lower: *creating* the divine in man, it produces in all other products the mere material and ground [*Grund*] thereof, so that essence [*Wesen*] as such shall appear in contrast to it. ...Hence, where art operates with more of the manifoldness of nature [art] may and must exhibit, alongside the highest measure of beauty, its groundwork and, as it were, the material of the latter in its own forms [*Bildungen*]. (MR 339, translation modified [SW I/7: 308])

Dieter Jähnig argues that the metaphysics of the *Münchener Rede* anticipates Schelling's later concepts of ground, appearance, and essence; as the passage above demonstrates, the existence or appearance of nature and art in time is necessary for the ground to become essence.¹⁹ Or, as Schelling states in the "Stuttgart Seminars," opposition is the basis of life and history: "without opposition [there is] no life" (SS 208 [SW I/7:435]).

Thus in the *Münchener Rede*, the revelation of natural-historical time is necessary for the *Urkraft* (the primal potency of nature) to be transfigured into divine love. According to Schelling, nature ascends from a primal potency

to a severity of form, revealing an epoch of natural time in which the "creative spirit" appears "entirely lost in form" (MR 342 [SW I/7:310]). Moreover, Schelling maintains that the first appearances of an art will be severe and lost in form, such that in the beginning of Greek sculpture, Athena was the "only muse of plastic art." This, however, is only the beginning, for the severity of form must be tempered by grace (*Anmut*) so that nature and art can be elevated toward beauty and the divine. With grace emerges the soul; the spirit that had previously laid dormant in nature is revealed. Grace, as Schelling defines it, becomes possible when the soul or the creative spirit of nature is separated from form but remains in equipoise with it. In nature, the monstrous forms of the primal epoch of nature give way to natural beings that exhibit, as we might say in the terminology of nature-philosophy, the point of indifference between being and activity. In terms of human historical time, grace emerges in Greek antiquity, revealed in the equipoise of body and soul, spirit and form, in sculpture. With grace, the muse of sculpture becomes Aphrodite rather than Athena. This is similar to Schelling's claim in *The Philosophy of Art* that the Greeks were closer to nature than the moderns, or, in other terms, that Greek mythology is embedded in nature, while Christian mythology is characterized by an opposition and separation – through freedom – between humanity and nature (PA 61 [SW I/5:430]).

Therefore, while the emergence of grace introduces the division between human history and natural history, when humans are separated from nature, this separation is defined as equipoise between humanity and nature rather than opposition. For divine love to become possible, the separation between humanity and nature must become an opposition that is reconciled by the creative powers of humanity: "living unity can show itself in action and activity only as the result of the forces composing it being incited to rebellion by some cause or other and departing from their equilibrium" (MR 341 [SW I/7:309–10]). Schelling argues that the passions introduce the discord that destroys the equilibrium between humanity and nature, opening the possibility for rebellion and the inversion of principles – what he later calls evil. The creative power of artistic production serves to moderate the passions, not by negating them, but by subordinating them to the superior powers of either beauty or the sublime: "the true requirement is to oppose passion by positive force. For just as virtue does not consist in the absence of passions, but in the power of the spirit over them, so beauty is not safeguarded by their removal or reduction but by the power of beauty over them" (MR 341 [SW I/7:310]). There are two consequences of the artistic production of beauty. On the one hand, the creative power of artistic production overcomes the passions and reveals what is divine in humanity; that is, through the creation of the artwork the artist reveals an *ethos* or activity that is superior to the passions. On the other hand, the struggle of humanity with the passions provides an interpretive key

for the content of art. Thus, for instance, tragedy is sublime because it presents the grace of accepting fate as a freedom greater than acting contrary to virtue (which is evil) (MR 345 [SW I/7:313]). To complete Schelling's discussion of Greek sculpture, the revelation of divine love is revealed in the figure of the goddess Niobe – the Florentine Niobe (a replica of an earlier work) moderates, through beauty, the horror that has befallen her.

Nonetheless, Schelling argues that sculpture is not the highest potency of art; because sculpture “presents its ideas by corporeal things,” it is limited to “the perfect equipoise between soul and matter” (MR 347–48 [SW I/7:316]). By contrast, the “boundless universality of painting” – represented by the Renaissance masters Michelangelo, Correggio, and Raphael – reveals natural-historical sequence of the severity of form, grace, and divine love through the highest potency of divine love. First, Michelangelo's work exhibits the “untrammelled powers” of the primeval world, and just as the profound “power of nature [*Naturkraft*]” predominates over grace and feeling, his painting exhibits the “highest achievement of purely sculptural vigor in the painting of recent times” (MR 350, translation modified [SW I/7:318–19]). Then, Schelling inserts Correggio as the painter of grace between Michelangelo and Raphael – “regardless of all chronology,” as Jean-François Marquet notes.²⁰ Correggio's painting expresses the sensuous soul in chiaroscuro, exhibiting an equipoise between light and darkness and body and soul that manifests the soul in corporeality and elevates the body to the level of spirit (MR 350–51 [SW I/7:319–20]). Finally, Raphael reveals the “pure equipoise” of the divine and the human:

After the confines of nature have been overcome and the monstrous, the fruit of the initial liberty, is suppressed, shape and form are beautified by the presentiment of the soul: the heavens brighten, the softened earthly is able to merge with the heavenly and the latter, in turn, with the gently human. (MR 351, translation modified [SW I/7:320])

Raphael, for achieving the goal of art, revealing natural history and human history as the revelation of divine love, is “no longer a painter, he is a philosopher, a poet at the same time” (MR 351 [SW I/7:320]).

At this point, we can establish that the first two conditions of Schelling's philosophy of art obtain in the *Münchener Rede*. First, by recapitulating the potencies of nature's productivity in the form of art, ancient Greek sculpture and Renaissance painting present in the real what philosophy identifies in the ideal. Second, Schelling argues that art moderates passions through the artistic production of either beauty or the sublime; art is a higher potency than nature because it demonstrates the identity of nature and the divine after the appearance of their separation. As we will see below, the third condition also obtains. Although Schelling does not call expressly for a new mythology, he states that

the purpose of examining the art of the past is to think through what makes it valuable today. The artist should not aim to imitate the content or particularities of previous art, for "different inspiration falls to the lot of different epochs. ... [A]n art the same in all respects as that of past centuries will never come again; for nature never repeats itself"; instead, the artist should aim to cultivate the creative inspiration of nature's productivity, whereby the artwork "might reveal, in a rejuvenated life, a splendor resembling that which is past" (MR 356 [SW I/7:327–28]). We will examine the social and political implications of this call for artistic revival below.

The new mythology

We will conclude by considering the third condition of the philosophy of art: Schelling holds that artistic production opens the possibility for overcoming the fragmentary condition of modern life through the creation of a new mythology. In *The Philosophy of Art*, Schelling envisions an art and a philosophy both dedicated to the production of a new mythology, which must overcome the divisions between freedom and necessity, humanity and nature, and, moreover, the individual and society. On the one hand, he argues that the necessary law of modern poesy is "that the individual form that part of the world revealed to him into a whole, and from the subject matter of his own age, its history and its science create his own mythology" (PA 240, translation modified [SW I/5:154]). One such embodiment of modern poesy is the novel, which through narrative draws on the various elements and fragments of poetry, history, and science to create a unified whole; the novel "should be a mirror of the world, or at least of the age, and thus become a partial mythology" (PA 232 [SW I/5:676]). On the other hand, Schelling states that it is the task of nature-philosophy to reveal the organic totality of nature and humanity's place *within* nature (rather than *above* nature): "in the philosophy of nature, as it has developed from the idealistic principle, the first, distant foundation has been laid for that future symbolism and mythology that will be created not by an individual but rather by the entire age" (PA 76 [SW I/5:449]). The philosopher and the artist mutually inform each other's task: art makes the ideas sensuous and concrete, while philosophy constructs the speculative ideas that art ought to embody.

The explicitly political dimension of the idea of the new mythology is first articulated in the *System Program*. There, we find similar claims about the relationship between art and philosophy. The author proposes that a new mythology, a "mythology of reason," "in service to the ideas," will emancipate humanity from the "whole wretched human apparatus of state, constitution, government, and legislation" that treats free human beings as mere cogwheels in its mechanisms, the priests of superstition, and pedantic philosophy. A new mythology is possible because the author recognizes that the supreme act of

reason is simultaneously an aesthetic act – the production of the idea of beauty, which unifies all the ideas of philosophy. By recognizing the production of beauty as the highest act of reason, the philosopher returns to poesy a higher dignity, and when all other arts return to the poesy from which they came, “in the end she will again become what she was in the beginning – *the instructress of humanity*.”²¹ When poesy and philosophy merge, a new mythology will emerge, one which, informed by the ideas, will be rational, and by being rational, will make the ideas aesthetic or sensuous and available to the people. This new mythology will tear down the distinctions that separate humanity from itself: “the enlightened and unenlightened must at last clasp hands. ... No longer will any force be suppressed; universal freedom and equality of spirits will then prevail.”²² As conceived in the *System Program*, the new mythology is emancipatory and egalitarian, freeing humanity from the oppression of the state’s mechanisms and religious superstition.

Like the *System Program*, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* the utopian potential of a new mythology is opposed to the state’s mechanisms and the concept of freedom that it presupposes. By relying on concepts derived from the idea of natural right, freedom operates under a “mechanical conformity to law.” Moreover, while the state provides legal mechanisms to guarantee individual freedoms, it lacks moral force because it relies on blind mechanisms to do so. The state may govern individuals or citizens, but it cannot unify a people. By contrast, the new mythology offers the utopian possibility of the reconciliation of freedom and nature, and individuals and the social body. Just as Greek mythology presents “the harmony whereby everything is united into one great whole,” Schelling argues that a new mythology “shall be the creation, not of some individual author, but of a new race, personifying, as it were, one single poet,” which could arise “in the future destinies of the world, and in the course of history to come” (STI 225, 233 [SW I/3:619–20, 629]).

In subsequent discussions of the philosophy of art, Schelling continues to hold that artistic production can unify a people into an organic whole, but this process becomes a moment in the realization of the nation-state. There is, then, a marked shift in Schelling’s idea of the state. Whereas he previously conceived the state mechanistically, in the *System of the Whole of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*, he argues that the state is an organic whole (SW I/6:575). A truly public sphere, emerging through a new mythology, makes the organic state possible:

Lyrical poetry lives and exists truthfully only in a universally public life. Where all public life collapses into the particulars and dullness of private life, poetry more or less sinks into this same sphere. Epic poetry requires chiefly mythology and is nothing without it. But even mythology is not possible in the particular; it can only be born in the totality of a nation

that as such acts simultaneously as identity and individuality. In dramatic poetry, tragedy grounds itself in the public law, in virtue, religion, heroism – in a word – in the holiness of the nation. A nation that is not holy, or which was robbed of its holy relics, cannot have true tragedy....The question of the possibility of a universal content of *poesie*, just as the question of the objective existence of science and religion, impels us to something higher. Only in the spiritual unity of a people, in a truly public life, can true and generally valid *poesie* arise – as only in the spiritual and political unity of a people can science and religion find its objectivity. (SW I/6:572–73)

Rather than opposing the people to the state, as in the *System Program* or *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the state becomes the highest expression of the people. While the potencies of science, religion, and art are partial expressions of the absolute, the state is *Potenzlos*, which means that there is no opposition within the organic community of the state.

I have argued elsewhere that a comparison of these texts on the role of the philosophy of art and the new mythology shows that Schelling's thought moves from an emancipatory, anti-statist enthusiasm (and I mean this term as a compliment) to the mythologization of politics. In the choice of the phrase "mythologization of politics," I mean that casting the political community as an organic whole to be realized in a state through the communal force of a new mythology risks excluding those who are not considered part of the community because "the a priori conception of universality *as organic totality* ignores or disregards the fact that the political space itself is the domain of the struggle over what the definition of universality (and political inclusion) is."²³

Here, I will use the work of Jacques Rancière to reconsider the political implications of Schelling's philosophy of art. Admittedly, Rancière's aesthetics and Schelling's philosophy of art are premised on very different ideas of what art does. While Schelling holds that modern literature (in poetic or narrative form) should strive to form the fragmentary experiences of modern life into a totality, Rancière argues that aesthetics and literature are political insofar as they transform what he calls a given "distribution of the sensible" – the distributions and divisions of "space and time, place and identity, speech and noise [and] the visible and the invisible" – by introducing "new objects and subjects onto the common stage."²⁴ Literature is political because it introduces new relations between words and things, not because it articulates a political program. In a sense, the idea of a new mythology demands a new relation between words and things – Schelling's work is most important when he seeks to undermine the traditional distinctions between philosophy and art, or reason and the imagination. Rancière's definition of aesthetics gives us a new way to consider the claim found in the *System Program* that the highest act of reason is aesthetic. The idea that philosophy is a practice that introduces new relations between words and

things accords with Schelling's definition of philosophy as a creative practice. In addition, when he argues, in *The Philosophy of Art*, that literature "should be a mirror of the world," he demands a new relation between art and contemporary life (the consequences of which he did not entirely foresee) – a relation that does not merely reflect its fragmentary character, but also introduces new relations between words and things as literature (and, concomitantly, that new critical categories would be required to think these relations).

Moreover, Rancière's account, I think, identifies how the possibility of a new mythology, whether in its utopian or statist forms, becomes an impossibility. The politics of aesthetics, on Rancière's account, is premised on the possibility that ever new relations of words and things – of "space and time, place and identity, speech and noise [and] the visible and the invisible" – can transform a given distribution of the sensible. This leaves open the possibility of novelty, change, dispute, and misunderstanding. The idea of a new mythology, by demanding that the politics of aesthetics give way to "the living power of the community nourished by the sensible embodiment of its idea," requires the complete realization of the community as a totality.²⁵ If we consider Schelling's claim in the *System of the Whole of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular* that the state is *Potenzlos*, we can render the implications concrete: the very idea of the realization of a new mythology implies that the potential for change and creativity gives way to the state or stasis of actuality. In other words, the complete realization of the community through a new mythology forecloses on both politics – those egalitarian moments of struggle in which new ways of being, saying, or doing challenge and transform the inegalitarian apparatuses that structure everyday life – and the politics of aesthetics. To paraphrase Schelling's discussion of philosophical creativity in the *Letters*, once the community realizes itself completely, at that very moment it would cease to be creative and would be degraded to an instrument of its system.

The persistence of philosophical imagination

I have argued that the philosophy of art is the keystone of Schelling's philosophy from 1800 to 1807 for the following three reasons:

1. What philosophy constructs in the ideal, art produces in the real. Thus artistic productivity is the highest human activity because practical philosophy can only approximate its object, which is the moral law.
2. While both the natural organism and the artwork embody the same identity of real and ideal, of necessity and freedom, the work of art overcomes these oppositions through the identity of conscious and unconscious production, whereas the organism's activity is unconscious.

3. Artistic production has a socio-political task: it aims to overcome the fragmentary condition of modern life through a new mythology and artistic renewal.

That the philosophy of art gives way to the historico-theological ontology of the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and his subsequent work does not mean that Schelling was a protean thinker, ever shifting in his philosophical commitments. Instead, I have underlined how the free and creative character of artistic production demonstrates the continuity of Schelling's early critical idealism, his philosophy of art, and his later philosophy of freedom and revelation. If anything, his willingness to relentlessly interrogate the very ground of philosophical thinking demonstrates Schelling's abiding fidelity to, as the anonymous author of the *System Program* once phrased it, the "polytheism of the imagination."²⁶

Notes

1. Devin Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art* (London: Continuum, 2010), 89–90.
2. Antoon Braeckman, "From the Work of Art to Absolute Reason: Schelling's Journey toward Absolute Idealism," *Review of Metaphysics* 57, no. 3 (March 2004): 551. See also Joseph P. Lawrence, "Art and Philosophy in Schelling," *The Owl of Minerva* 20, no. 1 (fall 1988): 5–19.
3. Braeckman, "From the Work of Art to Absolute Reason," 554.
4. I defend these theses in more detail in Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*.
5. The lectures collected as *The Philosophy of Art* were delivered in 1802–3 in Jena and 1804–5 in Würzburg. Henry Crabb Robinson's notes on "Schellings Aesthetick" (the lectures from 1802–3) have been published and translated in Henry Crabb Robinson, *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010), 66–115. The 1804–5 lectures were published by K. F. A. Schelling in *Schellings sämtliche Werke*, and have been translated as *The Philosophy of Art*.
6. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols., ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1:158.
7. *Ibid.*, 1:160.
8. Quoted in David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 24.
9. Noteworthy is Manfred Frank's proposal that the impetus for Hölderlin's *Urtheil und Sein* was Schelling's *Vom Ich* rather than Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. See Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 97–111.
10. Friedrich Hölderlin to Immanuel Niethammer, Frankfurt/Main, February 24, 1796, *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 131–32.

11. Dieter Sturma, "The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 219.
12. Compare to Friedrich Schiller's "Sixth Letter" in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: The practical spirit (Geschäftsgeist) judges "all experience whatsoever by one particular fragment of experience, and of wanting to make the rules of its own occupation apply indiscriminately to all others"* (trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], 39).
13. I will use "aesthetic intuition" and "artistic production" as synonyms, though it does seem that the activity of aesthetic intuition encompasses and exceeds artistic production; that is, aesthetic intuition also seems to be necessary for the spectator to recognize the "absolute" value, as it were, of the artwork.
14. I will use "absolute idealism" and "identity-philosophy" as synonyms.
15. See, for instance, Braeckman, "From the Work of Art to Absolute Reason," 553.
16. See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 73–87.
17. Orrin F. Summerell, "The Theory of the Imagination in Schelling's Philosophy of Identity," *Idealistic Studies* 34, no. 1 (spring 2004): 89.
18. Schelling uses the term *Kraft* in this chapter rather than *Potenz*.
19. Dieter Jähnig, *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1969), 2:259.
20. Jean-François Marquet, "Schelling et le destin de l'art," in *Actualité de Schelling*, ed. Guy Planty-Bonjour (Paris: Vrin, 1979), 85–86. Here are the chronological dates: Michelangelo (1475–1564), Correggio (1489[?]-1534), Raphael (1483–1520). Marquet argues that the different interpretations of these painters found in *The Philosophy of Art* and the *Münchener Rede* demonstrate the profound differences between Schelling's identity-philosophy and his subsequent work.
21. Note the similarity of this claim to Schelling's claim that the poesy of mythology is the "primal matter from which all else issued, the ocean, to use an image the ancients themselves used, from which all rivers flow out and to which all flow back" (PA 52 [SW I/5:416]; see also STI 232 [SW I/3:629]).
22. All quotations from the *System Program* are drawn from Krell's translation in *Tragic Absolute*, 22–26.
23. Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*, 117.
24. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 4.
25. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 37.
26. Quoted in Krell, *Tragic Absolute*, 25.

Part VI

Hegel

All the great philosophical ideas of the past century – the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis – had their beginnings in Hegel; it was he who started the attempt to explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason which remains the task of our century. ... [N]o task in the cultural order is more urgent than re-establishing the connection between on the one hand, the thankless doctrines which try to forget their Hegelian origin and, on the other, that origin itself. ... There would be no paradox involved in saying that interpreting Hegel means taking a stand on all the philosophical, political, and religious problems of our century.

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (1948)¹

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 63.

26

Hegel – Life, History, System

Andreja Novakovic

Casting Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) in his historical setting is not a generic enterprise, one that can be undertaken in the same way with just about any philosopher. For Hegel more than others, the times in which he found himself were of essential relevance to his philosophical project. They provided him first and foremost with the questions that came to preoccupy him. In this respect it would be true to say that Hegel was trying to think through the implications of modernity, and that his thinking as a whole was dedicated to this task.¹ But they also provided him with the answers to these questions, answers that became available at a certain moment in history. In a telling passage, Hegel concedes that philosophy is beholden to its own historical advantage, which may place limits on its normative aspirations, but nevertheless puts it in a privileged position to understand: “When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then a shape of life has grown old, and with grey on grey it cannot be rejuvenated [*verjüngern*], but only understood; the owl of Minerva begins her flight only with the onset of dusk” (HW 7:28). To the extent that philosophy reflects on a solidified shape of life, it is able to make sense of the lessons gleaned through historical experience. More specifically, Hegel is suggesting that what it means to be free is something we can learn at a certain moment in our own development – and no earlier. In other words, it is only once freedom has become actual that we can know what freedom would even be, because only then has our conception of it proven to stand the test of time, instead of entangling itself in self-contradiction, as previous conceptions have done.

Given Hegel’s insistence on philosophy’s indebtedness to history, it is illuminating to situate his work within his own specific context. Below I will trace three of his projects in light of his life and times with the hope of bearing out this thesis of his more concretely. The first section concerns Hegel’s involvement and investment in contemporary political questions, specifically those surrounding the status and structure of the state, as well as its

relationship to the emerging institution of “civil society.” The second section describes his efforts to found a system of his own and to initiate his readership into a philosophical frame of mind, an effort that culminates in the writing of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The third section covers his exposition and elaboration of the system in lectures delivered during his Berlin years. In each of these ventures we can discern Hegel’s synthetic quality of mind, which makes him such a distinctive figure in the tradition. In trying to think through his historical situation, Hegel was bringing together diverse elements that were at play in his personal life and in the life of his community. This is perhaps his most prominent trait, his talent for combining disparate influences in a way that is wholly his own, much more than the sum of its parts. For example, Hegel was highly attuned to the tension between particularity and universality that was playing itself out in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His hometown of Stuttgart in Württemberg, where he was born in 1770 – which also happened to be the year of the constitutional settlement between the prince of Württemberg and the Württemberg estates² – was itself a site of such struggle between traditional social structures and the customary allegiances they forged on the one side, and universalist ideals and institutions on the other. Hegel’s life corresponded to a period of transition between the Holy Roman Empire, of which the Duchy of Württemberg was a part, and the modernization brought about by the Napoleonic Wars. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hegel did not align himself with either set of values at the *complete* exclusion of the other – though he saw himself as a thoroughly modern figure. Instead, he attempted to show that the tension is resolvable in a form a social life whose particular customs, concrete practices, and differentiated roles mirror a universal and universally legitimate order.

Hegel also sought to overcome a further tension, namely, that between Kantian and Spinozistic philosophy, though this is admittedly an aspiration he shared with many of his contemporaries. German intellectuals were deeply shaken by the pantheism controversy that emerged in 1785, when Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi reported a visit five years earlier to the Enlightenment figure Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, only to learn that the latter considered himself as Spinozist, a philosophical position that had fallen into vocal disfavor in Germany at the time. According to Jacobi and others, Spinoza represented a standpoint from which all events, including human deeds, occurred with strict necessity, thus precluding not only the possibility of a purposive God, but also of free activity. Now Lessing was, to Jacobi’s great surprise, professing that “[t]here is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza.”³ This conversation sparked a public correspondence (between Jacobi and another Enlightenment figure, Moses Mendelssohn) that determined the philosophical climate for decades to come.⁴ Though Hegel was only fifteen years old at the time that the infamous encounter became publicly known, he was no less

challenged by its stakes. Hegel felt provoked to demonstrate the compatibility between Spinoza's monistic metaphysics and Kant's commitment to practical autonomy.

Hegel was also skilled at culling from the insights of those who influenced him in a more personal manner. While he was a student at the Tübingen *Stift* (1788–93), Hegel befriended two fellow seminarians, Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, both of whom affected the course of his early career. Hölderlin helped Hegel when he felt trapped in his first place of employment as a private house tutor in Bern by arranging for his move to Frankfurt, which provided Hegel with a more intellectually stimulating environment. In Frankfurt, Hegel and Hölderlin began discussing Fichte's relation to Kant, which was likewise a controversial subject at the time, and these conversations changed the direction of Hegel's own efforts to continue the Kantian line of thought. Schelling left his impact in a similar way. He was responsible for getting Hegel out of Frankfurt into the even more stimulating city of Jena, still something of a cultural center at the time,⁵ and for shaping Hegel's reflections on the future of idealism. Because Hegel and Schelling began collaborating on a journal, the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* (Critical Journal of Philosophy), which was widely assumed to be a vehicle for disseminating Schellingian ideas, Hegel had to work hard to demonstrate that the system he later developed was not simply a recapitulation of Schelling's.

One might say that Hegel's gift for synthesis proved to be both a burden and a blessing, for it presented him with a rich reservoir of resources from which to draw, as well as an obstacle to his ambitions of becoming recognized as an original thinker in his own right. But that would be misleading. In part, Hegel's originality consisted precisely in his sensitivity to the currents of his day and to the difficulties that confronted a generation witness to unprecedented social change. His originality, however, was due also to his simultaneous detachment, manifest in his sarcastic, ironic, and sometimes acerbic tone. As one of his opponents bitterly complained, Hegel exhibited a "droll, reconciling worldly wisdom," especially "when the talk concerns the unpleasant events and arrangements of recent and more recent times."⁶

Political writings

Hegel's most enduring legacy is arguably his social and political philosophy, expressed in its most mature form in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). It is clear that Hegel envisioned this philosophy of right as a part of a larger philosophical system. In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817), for example, he designated it "Objective Spirit" and attempted to demonstrate that its tenets follow from the antecedent conclusions he had drawn. But it is also evident that his interest in social and political questions was not purely systematic.

From the very commencement of his career, Hegel demonstrated an active engagement with them, an engagement that never wholly waned.

In fact Hegel's first published text was a political pamphlet, referred to as the *Cart-Schrift* – a little known fact because Hegel chose to publish it anonymously, and because it has been lost. This text dates back to his time in Bern. Shortly before he finished his theological studies in Tübingen, Hegel was offered a position as a private tutor in the home of a wealthy Swiss family, the von Steigers, which he assumed in October 1793. Though this kind of position did not satisfy Hegel's growing academic aspirations, the three years he spent in Bern (1793–96) proved to be unexpectedly formative for him. For one, he had access to two exceptionally well-stocked libraries: the Bern library down the street, as well as the von Steiger's private collection, which included literature from the French and English Enlightenment.⁷ During this time Hegel first came upon and became absorbed by the writings of British political economists such as James Steuart and Adam Smith, who were proposing theoretical accounts of the emerging economic market. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel would eventually identify this market, which he called "civil society," as the only truly modern institution, though one that inevitably transformed the other two, the family and the state. What impressed Hegel most about the market was the new conception of freedom as individual self-determination, as the ability to pursue one's particular ends, that this institution inspired and promised.

As he was studying these texts, Hegel could not avoid confronting the fact that his current context fell far short of this new value. Bern at that time was an oligarchy ruled by a few aristocratic families, the von Steigers among them. It is perhaps this discrepancy between his studies and his experience that inspired Hegel to translate and append a pamphlet, authored by the French-speaking Swiss lawyer and politician Jean-Jacques Cart in 1793, which criticized the Bernese aristocracy for trying to compensate for the absence of political rights with tax relief. The pamphlet also praised the American Revolution for rejecting the very idea of taxation by the colonial powers, even though the tax itself was minimal. It is not clear whether Hegel had already formed the intention to publish his edition of this pamphlet while still living in Bern, but it is clear that he could not have published it in Bern, since even the original had been banned from the city.⁸ In any case, the pamphlet was finally published in 1798, at which point Hegel had already moved to Frankfurt.

The second text that demonstrates Hegel's engagement with the political issues of his day is one that he never published. Known as the *Verfassungsschrift*, it is a draft Hegel started to compose toward the end of his stay in Frankfurt, where he was again working as a private tutor, though under slightly better conditions. During the three years he spent in Frankfurt (1797–1800), Hegel radically reconceived his academic aspirations, and decided to commit himself to systematic philosophy – something he admitted in a letter to Schelling

in November 1800 (HL 64 [BH 1:29]). He had previously hoped to become a *Popularphilosoph*, something of a public intellectual who lends philosophical positions a practical application. This was the sense in which he had wanted to “complete” the Kantian project. Now that he had the opportunity to participate in lively debates about first principles,⁹ Hegel started to aim much higher, namely, to develop a system of his own.

He nevertheless remained interested in the state of Germany and in the direction of its development. While Hegel lived in Frankfurt, and even more so when he moved to Jena in 1801, it became increasingly evident that Germany was on the brink of significant transformations, ushered in by the Napoleonic Wars. At that time Germany still possessed a feudal structure, splintered into local communities that protected the traditional privileges of their members, all under the umbrella of the Holy Roman Empire. In the wake of military pressures by the French, a debate was emerging about the possibility of instituting a constitution in Germany, which would supplant traditional privileges granted on the basis of membership in “estates” with rights of citizenship. Hegel’s *Verfassungsschrift* is meant to be a contribution to that debate, though it never saw the light of day. From its inflammatory opening (“Germany is no longer a state”), Hegel investigates what it takes to count as a state, whether it suffices to be able to ward off external aggressors, and whether the Holy Roman Empire could meet these conditions – the answer to the last question being No.

His third political text is one that he did publish, and that under his own name. Known as the *Landständeschrift*, it dates back to his time in Heidelberg (1816–18), when Hegel had finally secured a salaried academic position, which he had been desperately seeking for nearly two decades. There was considerable commotion in Heidelberg when Hegel arrived in 1816. In addition to ongoing debates about constitutionalism as well as about the possibility of codifying German law, Heidelberg was a locus for student organizations called *Burschenschaften*, a hotbed of radical politics at the time. Many of his students, as well as his own brother-in-law, were involved in such organizations. His entanglement with their members continued into his Berlin years.

Hegel’s *Landständeschrift*, which he composed during his first year in Heidelberg, however, confined itself to an issue specific to his place of origin. The king of Württemberg had attempted to institute a new constitution, only to encounter considerable resistance from his subjects, who wanted to keep the old constitution of 1770 in place. The Holy Roman Empire had in the meantime vanished with Napoleon’s military victory in 1806. Since the current kingdom of Württemberg was no longer the same as the former *Land* of Württemberg, and no longer even covered the same territory, a question arose about the continued authority of the “good old law.” The *Landständeschrift* attacked the reactionary resistance to the forces of modernization, arguing that

the “good old law” could not be retained, because it could only be authoritative in a premodern social context, one that was already long gone. According to Hegel, these two “constitutions” represented two mutually exclusive alternatives for two very different social projects. This means that the former could not be amended to suit new conditions; it had to be abandoned for the sake of another. Hegel’s text was eventually published as an inexpensive pamphlet and distributed all over Württemberg, causing tensions with some of his old friends from the region.¹⁰

Hegel did not shy away from similar controversies, even at the very end of his life. His fourth notably political text was published the year of his death, 1831. It consists of a commentary on the “English Reform Bill” (also referred to as the *Reformbill-Schrift*), published as a series of articles in the *Allgemeine preussische Staatszeitung* (Prussian State Gazette), the official state newspaper.¹¹ This time Hegel had picked an issue far from home. It proved, however, to be a way for Hegel to address similar issues concurrently emerging in Prussia, which was undergoing a reform of its own “municipal ordinances” concerning the suffrage of its non-property-owning members, encompassing both the working class as well as state employees such as university professors.¹² The English Reform Bill was thus not irrelevant to Prussia, because it raised the question of whether Prussian policies should model themselves after the British, and so whether England embodies a modern ideal worthy of emulation.

The English Reform Bill was an attempt to improve certain aspects of the British Constitution that were undermining political representation by allowing for the purchasing of Parliamentary voting rights, supposedly in order to represent areas which were unpopulated, or in which the representative himself did not live. In this way it raised philosophical questions about the nature of a constitution and the value of political representation, especially at the level of individual voting rights. Hegel’s response to this set of questions was rather complex, but unequivocally critical. He admits that reform was needed, because the Constitution as it stood consisted of a patchwork of incoherent provisions, unsystematically assembled. But he was not convinced that the proposed reforms could be effected without a revolution that would overhaul the basic structure of British society, which was already in the grip of the market.

Here we see Hegel broadcast his growing reservations about the place of individual self-determination, specifically about the kind of freedom associated with a relatively autonomous economic sphere. During his Bern days he was intrigued, even excited by the social and political transformations that such a sphere was bound to introduce. Now at the end of his life, he had become increasingly anxious that these transformations remain contained within civil society and that they do not atomize all political life, fracturing it into an assemblage of discrete individuals without any shared ends. So Hegel’s position

concerning the English Reform Bill, and indirectly concerning the reforms taking place in Prussia, was one of skepticism. What he suggested was that the project of modernization, if it was to be carried through without undermining itself, had to be carried out at the institutional level and could not be left up to the discretion of individual voters and their arbitrary wills.

Phenomenology of Spirit

When Schelling first invited Hegel to Jena in 1801, it was not only to help his friend out of a limited professional situation, but also to enlist him as an ally in his own cause. During the time Hegel spent in Jena, he was thus known as Schelling's disciple – a reputation he confirmed through early publications such as the *Differenzschrift* (*The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*), which argued unequivocally in favor of the Schellingian alternative in post-Kantian idealism. But during his Jena years, Hegel was hard at work developing his own system. Aside from a few articles for the *Kritisches Journal*, the one he coedited with Schelling, Hegel wrote three different versions of his system (Jena System drafts I-III), none of which he published.¹³

The text he ended up completing, his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, was not yet an expression of this system, rather an initiating into it. Its official function was to elevate its readership to the systematic vantage point. At the same time, it seemed to serve a similar function for its own author, who was not writing from such a vantage point, but still trying to climb to its heights. Once he had formulated the contours of his system a few years later, articulated in his *Encyclopedia* (published in three editions between 1817 and 1830), he grew increasingly ambivalent about the status of the *Phenomenology*. Nevertheless, it constitutes Hegel's first – and perhaps most compelling – attempt at a philosophical project not to be mistaken for that of any other, including those who had directly influenced him.

The conditions under which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* are worth keeping in mind. First of all, there was his professional situation, unsatisfactory from his point of view. Although he had moved up from being a mere tutor to wealthy children, his current position as an unpaid lecturer (*Privatdozent*) made him all the more desperate for academic recognition. He knew that one hurdle was his lack of a degree, so he quickly scrambled to pull together a *Habilitation* necessary for a professorship in Germany. But this text (called *De Orbitis Planetarum*) was a mere formality and did not suffice to demonstrate his philosophical caliber. So he was aware that a further hurdle he needed to overcome would be to publish a self-standing work that would bring him to the public's attention as a distinct voice in the idealist tradition.

Secondly, there was the precarious political context in which this work was conceived. On July 12, 1806, Napoleon effectively dissolved the Holy Roman

Empire by forming the Confederation of the Rhine, and he proceeded to invade its former territory in the coming months. On October 14, Napoleon's army confronted the Prussian troops just outside of Jena and defeated them in one afternoon, shelling the city of Jena in the process. These were precisely the days during which Hegel was completing his *Phenomenology*. In fact Hegel himself even promulgated the legend that he was finishing revisions just as Napoleon invaded Jena, something he enjoyed mentioning in letters to friends.¹⁴ He also claimed to be carrying its final pages as he fled the city.¹⁵ What can be confirmed, however, is that Hegel spent the war away from the city, housed with the family of a student. When he returned, he discovered that his apartment had been looted by the French and that papers were strewn about in utter disarray.¹⁶

The work that took shape during this tumultuous year stands in inextricable relation to these events. The *Phenomenology*, for one, recounts the history leading up to the French Revolution in a way that shows it and its corresponding conception of freedom to be an improvement upon the failures of the past. This means that this text could not have been written during any epoch other than the one witness to the Revolution and its aftermath. Hegel had been enthusiastic about the Revolution ever since his days as a student in Tübingen, an enthusiasm he shared with his classmates Hölderlin and Schelling. And on the eve of the Battle of Jena, his admiration not only for its ideals, but also for its pivotal figure, had not diminished. When Napoleon paid Jena a visit on October 13, the day before his battle against it, Hegel was able to behold his likeness. "I saw the Emperor – this world-soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance," he wrote to a friend. "It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it" (HL 114 [BH 1:74]).

That said, it is relevant that the *Phenomenology* was not written during Hegel's student days. By 1806 it had become undeniable that the Revolution suffered a highly destructive aftermath, both in its late stages and in its ensuing wars. This more advanced historical perspective accounts for Hegel's ambivalence in the text. Although Hegel was pleased to see the Holy Roman Empire perish, he was also aware that the new project of transforming Europe in accordance with Revolutionary ideals was more difficult than Napoleon seemed to have imagined. The chapter of the *Phenomenology* devoted to the Revolution, titled "Absolute Freedom and Terror," suggests that an effort to implement absolute freedom without any concern for the particular cultural contexts of implementation is bound to lead to terror and devastation. These might constitute a necessary stage in the realization of freedom, but it is a stage that is no less one-sided than a staunch attachment to tradition, and so one that equally needs to be surpassed.

Hegel left Jena in 1806, just before the publication of the *Phenomenology* in 1807. He had exhausted the last of his financial resources (stemming mainly from the inheritance he had received upon his father's death) and could no longer afford to work for free. Since he had not succeeded in attaining a professorship, he finally gave in and accepted two non-academic positions – first as the editor of a newspaper in Bamberg (1807–8), then as the rector of a *gymnasium* in Nuremberg (1808–16). Although he had hung many of his hopes upon the *Phenomenology*, its publication did not earn him the right kind of recognition. Those who reviewed it favorably seemed to have misunderstood it, and the majority dismissed it as a derivative work, a mere repetition of Schellingian ideas. This was a surprising reaction indeed, for Hegel could not have been clearer about his break from his friend, calling Schelling's philosophy, memorably, “the night in which...all cows are black” (PhG §16 [HW 3:22]). This was, however, not lost on Schelling. Hegel tried to smooth things over by explaining that his barb was directed only at shallow followers of Schelling's position, not at Schelling himself. But Schelling was not reassured by this, expressing regret that Hegel had abandoned what he believed to be their shared agenda (HL 80 [BH 1:107]).

It was not until a few years later that Hegel returned to the work, this time with a very different task at hand. As not just an administrator, but also a teacher at the Nuremberg *Gymnasium*, Hegel was to introduce students to philosophy and decided to use his *Phenomenology* for this end. It had, after all, been conceived as an introductory text, an initiation into the philosophical standpoint. But in trying out such an approach, Hegel encountered various pedagogical difficulties that provoked him to rethink the function of the *Phenomenology*. First of all, he confined his teaching to the first three sections of the text (those in the chapter called “Consciousness”), presumably because the rest of it was too difficult for students of that age.¹⁷ Secondly, he was now using the *Phenomenology* as an introduction into a discipline called “philosophical psychology,” rather than into the “system.” This proved to be a significant shift. In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, published shortly after he left Nuremberg for Heidelberg, parts of the original *Phenomenology* reappeared in abbreviated form (under the title “Consciousness”), embedded within the chapter on “Subjective Spirit,” having been demoted from its initial status as the preamble to Hegel's system as such. In 1831, Hegel was asked to prepare a second edition of the *Phenomenology*, but he soon gave up the project, noting: “Peculiar early work. Not to be reworked [*Eigentümliche frühe Arbeit. Nicht Umarbeiten*]” (GW 9:448).

There was another turn of events that shaped his later perspective on the *Phenomenology*. During Hegel's Nuremberg years, Napoleon's reign was slowly coming to a close. His attempt to invade Russia proved to be a fatal mission, as well as one that alienated previous allies such as Prussia, which defected to

the Russian side. Napoleon began losing more and more of his allies, and when he confronted the allied armies of Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Sweden outside of Leipzig in October 1813, he was grossly outnumbered and easily defeated. By April 6, 1814, he was compelled to abdicate his throne. In order to make sense of this fall from grace, Hegel turned to the *Phenomenology* and began to think of Napoleon along the lines of a tragic hero. As he wrote in a letter, "It is a frightful spectacle to see a great genius destroy himself. There is nothing more tragic" (HL 307 [BH 2:233]). At the same time, Hegel now insisted that his chapter on "Absolute Freedom and Terror" had already anticipated this tragedy and that this turn of events even corroborated his standing conviction that the project of the Revolution could only be completed in systematic philosophy, in a retrospective comprehension of its unfolding.¹⁸

Berlin lectures

Hegel had only just entered the academic establishment two years earlier with his professorship in Heidelberg, when in 1818 he was invited to assume the position left vacant by Fichte at the University of Berlin (renamed Humboldt University after World War II). Despite his wife Marie's persistent hesitations,¹⁹ Berlin had made him an offer he could not resist. Not only did it promise him respectable compensation and academic recognition, but it also held out the possibility of putting him at the center of social change. The University had been founded only eight years earlier and so had the chance of becoming a thoroughly modern institution, unlike universities like those in Jena and Heidelberg, which had to reckon with their medieval past. It had been a long journey, but Hegel seemed to have reached his final destination.

Hegel's philosophical project had already taken a more determinate form while in Heidelberg with the publication of his *Encyclopedia*, which laid out the contours of his system as a whole. What he proceeded to do while in Berlin was to fill in this framework by elaborating certain regions of it, regions that the *Encyclopedia* itself had left underexplored. His lectures at the time centered on topics such as the philosophy of history, the history of philosophy, as well as the philosophies of art and of nature. Although his views in these domains are among those for which he is best known, it is important to keep in mind that Hegel never published treatises on such subjects. What we know about his views on art and history, for example, is gleaned exclusively from the lecture notes taken by his students between 1818 and 1831. Hegel was not thrilled to discover that these notes were being widely circulated, and their popularity at the time also led to plagiarism controversies.²⁰ But at that point Hegel had already risen to philosophical fame and could hardly avoid the attention his lectures were receiving. The lecture halls were routinely packed. And even those quirks that had previously made him rather unpopular with the students, such

as his labored public speech, suddenly became objects of admiration and emulation – marks of his genius.

Although his move to Berlin introduced significant changes to his social status, Hegel also encountered unforeseen difficulties. The initial offer he received had promised him membership in the Prussian Academy of Sciences, which came with prestige and a stipend that was meant to supplement his salary. But due to certain animosities directed at him by faculty in other disciplines, Hegel was never granted membership – not even when he became rector of the university in 1829. The main obstacle to his membership came from the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who threatened to leave, or at least to eliminate the whole philosophy component of the Academy, whenever Hegel's name was mentioned for consideration. Hegel found another antagonist in the law professor Friedrich Carl von Savigny, who worked against some of Hegel's other academic aspirations, such as admitting his friend Eduard Gans to the law faculty, officially for religious reasons.²¹

These animosities had numerous sources. They clearly possessed a personal tenor, expressed in the harsh words launched against one another.²² In the case of Schleiermacher, there was the further difference that Schleiermacher held philosophy as such in disdain and espoused a conception of faith founded in feeling, which was diametrically opposed to Hegel's philosophy of religion. In the case of Savigny, the difference was rather of a political nature. Savigny had argued against the codification of German law, claiming that law is grounded in the identity of a people and that this identity could never become the object of reflective evaluation. This view was also diametrically opposed to Hegel's own. It is worth noting that it was likewise Savigny's anti-Semitism that hardened Hegel against him. In any case, the presence of such opponents at his home institution made Hegel's academic life quite difficult and led him to seek out friendship with people either outside the academy altogether, or at least at its fringes.

His lectures themselves only exacerbated his feeling of alienation at the University of Berlin. Although his classes drew large crowds, they also delved into territory usually covered by other disciplines, such as history, physics, religion, art history, and others. Hegel was claiming that philosophy of the kind he practiced had something to offer these disciplines, because it could instruct them about the objects they were claiming to investigate, by addressing questions such as "What is nature?" "What is history?" and "What is art?" – questions not usually addressed by those disciplines internally. But his colleagues were not especially receptive to such instruction and felt that Hegel's lectures were overstepping their bounds, and stepping on their toes.²³

Finally, the political situation into which Hegel landed when he arrived in Berlin was rife with obstacles of its own. After Napoleon's defeat, Prussia witnessed a conservative backlash initiated in part by the Vienna Congress of

1815. These reactionary changes had a direct impact on the University of Berlin and other universities in Prussia. In 1819, the foreign minister of the Austrian Empire, Klemens von Metternich, met with the king and other German rulers in Karlsbad, drafting what became known as the "Karlsbad Decrees," which required (among other things) that any professors or students deemed subversive by an appointed committee be immediately dismissed and barred from future academic employment. These decrees also established a committee responsible for the censorship of all papers, books, and journals published in Germany. In this way they threatened the effective functioning of universities by instilling an atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion.

The Karlsbad Decrees had direct consequences for Hegel, even if he never lost his position on their account. From the moment he entered the university, he was perpetually haunted by the prospect of being labeled a "demagogue," mainly because of the people with whom he associated, and who were in some cases even being arrested.²⁴ For example, the first assistant Hegel attempted to employ when he arrived in Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, wrote a piece supposedly applying a Hegelian perspective to the murder of the conservative playwright August von Kotzebue, committed by Karl Ludwig Sand, a radical member of a *Burschenschaft*. In it Carové argued that Sand's action was neither simply a crime nor simply a beautiful deed, that both perspectives were too one-sided.²⁵ In other words, he was employing Hegelian ideas in order to make a contentious point on an already controversial issue. This did not endear Carové to the authorities, and Hegel's request for his employment was consequently denied.

At the same time, Hegel was able to rely on some political support, specifically from Karl Sigmund Franz Freiherr von Stein zum Altenstein, who had been appointed the minister of culture the year before Hegel's arrival and who continued to back Hegel to the extent to which his position allowed. Hegel's colleagues resented his amity with Altenstein and accused him of enjoying immunity against the Karlsbad Decrees. This accusation became all the more pronounced after the publication of his *Philosophy of Right* in 1821. Its preface in particular was read as a direct response to the Decrees, because it had (unlike the remainder of the work) been written shortly thereafter. What was especially suspect was Hegel's notorious dictum that "the rational is actual, and the actual is rational" (PR 20 [HW 7:24]), which was taken to be an overt submission to the ruling authorities and explicit reassurance that he would not challenge their commands, whatever these may be. Although this is a gross misreading, it spread far and wide. Even Hegel's early biographer, Rudolf Haym, claimed that the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* exposed Hegel as the "Prussian state philosopher" that he was.²⁶

Hegel's final years in Berlin were filled with turmoil in more than one respect. Hegel's understanding of modernization was abruptly challenged when, in

1830, France underwent another revolution, known as the “July Revolution,” which dethroned Charles X and replaced him with his cousin, Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orléans, the “bourgeois King.” Those opposed to the Restoration greeted this turn of events with joy, since it seemed to be a replaying of the Revolution of 1789, and they expected Hegel to feel the same way. Surprisingly, Hegel reacted negatively to the news and made it clear that he did not take it to be a step in the right direction, even if the ideals motivating these more recent revolutionaries were ostensibly the same as those that had animated the French Revolution. But his reasons for believing it to be a misstep were somewhat unclear, and Hegel never found the opportunity to clarify them. Nevertheless his immediate reaction was taken as a sign that his stance toward social change had shifted, especially toward change of the explicitly liberal variety, in which the people took it upon themselves to alter the social order, rather than doing so via established institutions. Although this may be an expression of Hegel’s more conservative streak, it is not in principle inconsistent with his lifelong commitment to rational progress rather than to action determined by the arbitrary will of individuals.

During this politically tumultuous time, Hegel’s health was also rapidly deteriorating. He began complaining of chest pains and eventually decided to retreat to spas in order to recover. In September 1829 Hegel entered a spa in Karlsbad, of all places, where he ran into Schelling, of all people. Upon his arrival he heard rumors of Schelling’s presence there and decided to seek him out. Hegel was overjoyed to see his old friend and to have this opportunity to clear the air between them. He had, after all, never replied to Schelling’s cold letter following the publication of the *Phenomenology*. But Schelling was less enthusiastic about this chance encounter. As he wrote to his wife, “Imagine, yesterday as I was sitting in the bath, I heard a somewhat unpleasant, half-forgotten voice asking for me” (BH 3:607n).²⁷ It is likely that Schelling not only felt betrayed by his former friend, but even resented the latter’s relatively recent rise to fame. What neither of them knew at the time was that the tables would turn once again. About ten years after Hegel’s death, Schelling was offered his position at the University of Berlin, with the explicit instruction to “stamp out the dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism in Berlin.”²⁸

When Hegel died in 1831, his legacy at what had become his home institution was anything but unambiguous, reflecting in many ways the ambiguity he himself had felt by the end of his life. Both the “right” and the “left” Hegelians, who rapidly contested over this legacy, were picking up strands in Hegel’s own position, which had only grown increasingly complex over the years. Again, I return to Hegel’s sensitivity to the challenges of his day, and to his simultaneous distance from them, as relevant factors in determining the shape that his thinking took. Although he is generally regarded as the paradigmatic abstract thinker, single-mindedly systematic in his orientation, Hegel

was much more interested in and provoked by his historical situation than this characterization allows. One could even say that it is not the abstract nature of his reflections, but their concreteness, that makes his position so difficult to pin down. Hegel is rumored to have admitted on his deathbed that no one had ever understood him, except for one other person, and that even he had not understood him. But that is just a rumor.²⁹

Notes

1. See for example Robert B. Pippin, "Idealism and Modernity," in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 45–77.
2. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1–2. This is the most thorough and reliable Hegel biography in the English language. Other noteworthy biographies include Horst Althaus, *Hegel: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Michael Tarsh (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000); Rudolf Haym, *Hegel und Seine Zeit: Vorlesungen über Entstehung und Entwicklung, Wesen und Werth der hegel'schen Philosophie* (Berlin: Gaertner, 1857); and Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1844).
3. F. H. Jacobi to Moses Mendelssohn, Pempelfort, November 4, 1783, *Briefwechsel. 1782–1784*, ed. Peter Bachmaier et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987), 187.
4. For more on the "pantheism controversy," see Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 75–99.
5. Jena had housed not only Fichte and Schelling, but also served as the birthplace of Romanticism, though by the time Hegel arrived, many of these pivotal figures had already moved away.
6. This remark is attributed to Friedrich Carl von Savigny, as quoted in Pinkard, *Hegel*, 453.
7. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 52–53. Apparently the private collection had been assembled by Captain von Steiger's father, who had been an enthusiast of the French and English Enlightenments.
8. Walter Jaeschke, *Hegel-Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Schule* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 80.
9. During this time, Hölderlin wrote a short piece titled *Judgment and Being*, in which he criticized the plausibility that Fichtean self-consciousness could serve as the first principle. As Pinkard suggests, it is very likely that Hölderlin discussed his ideas with Hegel and that these conversations left a strong impression on him. See Pinkard, *Hegel*, 133–36.
10. The two friends who were most offended were H. E. G. Paulus and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, both of whom were residing in Württemberg at the time.
11. The first part was published anonymously, and the fourth and last part was never published because the king found it too inflammatory.
12. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 641–42.
13. For more about these early versions of a system, see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Jenaer Systemkonzeptionen," in *Hegel*, ed. Otto Pöggeler (Freiburg: Alber, 1977), 43–58.
14. In a letter to Niethammer, Hegel referred to the *Phenomenology* as the book "which [he] completed the night before the battle of Jena" (HL 307 [BH 2:233]).
15. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 229–30.

16. Ibid., 228.
17. Ibid., 323.
18. For more about the writing of the *Phenomenology*, see Jaeschke, *Hegel-Handbuch*, 175–81.
19. Hegel had in the meantime married a woman named Marie, who came from a Nuremberg family and did not want to live so far away from home.
20. For example, Christian Kapp, one of Hegel's former students, published a book called *The Concrete Universal in History* that he had completely culled from Hegel's lectures. For more about this case, see Pinkard, *Hegel*, 615–16.
21. Gans was Jewish, and Savigny cites this as a reason against his capacity to serve as an educator at an official state institution. A few years later Gans converted to Christianity, which allowed him to join the law faculty.
22. An apt example is the following passage, meant to be an allusion to Schleiermacher's theology: "if religion grounds itself in a person only on the basis of feeling, then such a feeling would have no other determination than that of a feeling of his dependence, and so a dog would be the best Christian, for it carries this feeling most intensely within itself and lives principally in this feeling. A dog even has feelings of salvation when its hunger is satisfied by a bone" (HW 11:58; quoted in Pinkard, *Hegel*, 501).
23. For Hegel's relation to the natural sciences and to theology, see Pinkard, *Hegel*, 526–27 and 576–77, respectively.
24. In particular, Hegel's second choice for an assistant, Leopold von Henning, had been arrested on the basis of letters his stepmother had sent him. Hegel decided to join a few of von Henning's friends to visit him in prison via boat in the middle of the night. See Pinkard, *Hegel*, 449–50.
25. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 444.
26. Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit*, 367.
27. Quoted in Pinkard, *Hegel*, 623.
28. Pinkard, *Hegel*, 662.
29. Many thanks to Rolf Horstmann for his invaluable input and feedback.

27

Hegel's Philosophical Achievement

Terry Pinkard

Hegel's philosophical achievement is not only hard to state economically. Hegel is among the few modern philosophers about whom there is a dispute as to whether he achieved anything at all. Hegel has been, to be sure, one of the most influential of all modern philosophers. However, it is by now a well-known and even rather tired claim that the heroic founders of contemporary analytic philosophy – Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore – not only explicitly rejected Hegelianism but accused it of more or less complete charlatantry, and that this view stuck among their intellectual descendants. (The only other major figure who occupies such a contested place in the canon is probably Martin Heidegger.)

Oddly, therefore, whether Hegel achieved anything at all – other than being a poster child for everything that can go wrong – is continuously up for grabs. This odd status was almost perfectly captured in the title of the 1915 English translation of Benedetto Croce's book: *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel?* Croce himself seemed to think it was Hegel's revolutionary incorporation of a form of historicism into philosophy that marked his achievement. However, many who were influenced by Marx and Engels took Hegel to have developed a new "method" for doing philosophy (dialectic), which was then transformed into a "materialist dialectic" by Marx and Engels and which then invited further development of itself. Alexandre Kojève took Hegel to have discovered the basic psychological drive that propelled human history up to its "end" in modern times (namely, the desire for recognition and the willingness to fight for it). Others took it to be an abstract commitment to holism in general, and still others have taken it to be a set of independently stateable arguments about action theory, the theory of agency, sociality, critiques of Kant, self-realizational views in ethics, and so forth. It should go without saying that this list is not exhaustive.

Marching adequately through all those thickets would be a multi-volume project, and that cannot happen here. My own proposal, in a nutshell, is to try

to see Hegel's philosophical achievement in the terms in which he usually cast it, namely, as a systematic post-Kantian philosophy that tied up all the loose ends of Kant's overall view. Now, although there are few grounds for doubting that Hegel himself saw his work as essentially systematic, nonetheless the fact that he did so in no way implies that this actually constituted his achievement. (For example, Engels fully recognized Hegel's self-assessment and denied that it constituted Hegel's fundamental achievement.) To show that Hegel's own self-assessment is correct, one must give some reason for thinking that Hegel's system attempts to style itself as a successor to the Kantian system and that he succeeds in formulating a plausible alternative.

Hegel does himself say that "one of the deepest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason is that the *unity* which constitutes the *essence of the concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic unity of apperception*, the unity of the '*I think*,' or of self-consciousness" (HW 6:254). Here is one proposal for how to take that: Hegel attempted to bring together fundamental Kantian and Aristotelian conceptions and in doing so thereby had to ask whether and how the Kantian critique of the very possibility of traditional metaphysics might change the shape of philosophy itself. And if the principle of self-consciousness is really so crucial, where does it lead us?

With what do we begin? The *Phenomenology's* answer

One of the issues to which Hegel gave systematic attention was that of how to introduce people to philosophy, or, perhaps better put, how to bring people into philosophy. The problem is not new. It has been around since Plato's myth of the cave, and it has stayed around with people such as the young Wittgenstein arguing that philosophical argument itself is a ladder we throw away once we have scaled the philosophical heights.

This had become a particular kind of problem in Hegel's own day. The structure of modern life in general and the university in particular was up for grabs. For many in Europe at the time, universities seemed like merely out-moded medieval relics where stuffy tenured faculty taught useless orthodoxy to mostly inebriated students. Abolishing all of the universities and replacing them with various research institutes and job-oriented teaching institutes seemed to many to be a preferable alternative. That philosophy was something to be pursued for its own sake or for the sake of anything else was not at all a given in this context. Moreover, whatever it was that philosophy claimed for its own domain, it was being challenged by the growth in the natural sciences. That there was something special about philosophy was not at all self-evident.

On Hegel's view, philosophy only carries out rigorously – he would say *wissenschaftlich*, "scientifically" in the expansive nineteenth-century use of

that word – what everybody does all the time, namely, to reflect on what it is to be a self-conscious being. However, even that claim could not be taken at face value since there were many things that people did, and it could not be immediately clear that philosophy was the most rigorous way of pursuing this aim. As Hegel himself claimed, religion, art, and statecraft made the same claims, and any bare assertion that philosophy was the best way to pursue that goal would have to be question-begging, not to mention the different and highly contested proposals that endlessly circulate within philosophy itself over where one should start a philosophical argument.

Hegel's own proposal was to go back to ground zero of intelligibility to see if there was some way of putting the issue so as not to beg all the questions raised against any particular form of philosophy that started anywhere. Pushing oneself to where one begged no issues had to result, so Hegel also thought, in a verbal juggle so as not to sweep any issues under the rug. It meant that the beginning had to be non-question-begging and had to contain within itself the medium of forward development that itself did not beg any questions.

This attempt took two major forms in Hegel's lifetime. The first appeared in his innovative 1807 book, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There Hegel began with what he took to be the state of affairs that, roughly, people in the early 1800s could agree upon: the issue of whether there was any non-inferential (immediate) knowledge and what it would look like if there were any. To this end, Hegel began his book with an examination of "sense-certainty" (a term he took over from the influential writer in his time, F. H. Jacobi).

If we knew anything immediately, without any further reflection, it would, so it seemed, be those objects with which we are immediately acquainted. These would be individual objects given to us by the senses. However, since any description of these objects would provoke the kind of question-begging Hegel was seeking to avoid, he claimed that any such putative sense-certainty had to be some kind of indexical reference to single objects that undercut any attempt to reflectively parse them into some other kind of awareness or knowledge. Thus, what we could be said to know without having to know anything else would be the objects referred to by "this," "here," "now" (and, so it turns out, "I"). Such forms of reference would be transparent to the objects to which they refer. They would not, for example, be references to other things by means of referring to them.

According to Hegel, it turns out that when some kind of reflective claim is made that such knowledge is itself unconditioned, or "immediate" – that we can simply refer directly to things without having to be able to do anything else – a number of difficulties in the position come into view. The reference of all such indexical terms varies with the speaker. Their reference is thus indeterminate unless the speaker (the "I" in Hegel's usage) is specified. Once "I" fix my place in the spatiotemporal conditions, the reference to what is "here"

before me seems to work. However, "I" itself functions like an indexical, so I have to know myself, at least in the sense of being able to use the indexical "I" to refer to myself. This supposes, however, that I already have a concept of myself (which is expressed in the use of "I") in order to make this reference. It seems, therefore, that such self-reference requires something more than the use of indexicals. It requires some kind of immediate presence of oneself to oneself, a self-consciousness, a kind of distinguishing of oneself from oneself while denying the distinction.

The internal failure of "sense-certainty" to sustain itself as an unconditioned (or "absolute") piece of knowledge thus provokes a different account of what was actually being meant in that usage of indexicals. What was being meant, so it seems, is not just an immediate reference to what is here, right now, but to *things* that are here, right now, which have their appearance to us by virtue of the various properties they have. Moreover, the thing is the constant in the act of reference whereas its properties may be changing and altering all the time. It seems we directly refer not just to ourselves or to properties but to what underlies those properties. Yet that view already brings in a kind of reflective underpinning that distinguishes what appears from its appearance. In our reference to such things, we do not directly perceive the "thing" but only its disclosure of itself in its properties, and it is through that disclosure that we directly (so it seems at first) refer to them at all.

However, once that particular reflective move is introduced in the context of claiming an unconditioned status for such perceptual judgments, it becomes clear that such reflection is subject to even further reflective worry. For any such "thing" to which we are referring, the reference to it is not transparent. We may, for example, refer to water, but it is imaginable that in some other context, we may be referring to something that manifests itself as water but is actually something different (perhaps something made of XYZ).¹ In fact, for all we know, perhaps what we refer to as a "green thing" is in reality a "red" thing, and perhaps, if transparency of reference is denied, when we call an act of gratitude a virtue, we are actually referring to a vice. Perhaps even the whole world is actually inverted on us, and everything that appears up is really down, left is really right, green is really red, sweet is really sour, just is really unjust, and so on.

What the attempt to secure an unconditioned knowledge reveals about itself is therefore, so Hegel argued, really a more reflective self-conscious stance on the world. That we are referring to water and not XYZ requires us to stipulate some further conditions, and thus the condition of such reflective moves is the self-conscious subject itself, which, as emerged in the initial discussion of sense-certainty, seems to require of itself that it have a kind of immediate presence to itself. Yet this seems puzzling, since requiring a separate reflective act to "accompany" such acts of judging would either require an act of which we

are not self-conscious (and thus must know immediately) or involve us in an infinite regress that would be stopped only by claiming that we simply must have an immediate self-presence (as we could call it) that requires nothing else for its own success other than itself (that is, stipulates that we just do refer to ourselves in this way in natural languages).

What would this immediate self-presence be? It seems to be constitutive of all our acts of judging themselves.² To be doing something such as judging is to know without any accompanying reflective act what it is that one is doing. As one reads this sentence, for example, one knows one is reading and not gardening, swimming, playing pool, or mountain climbing, and one knows this without having to have any separate accompanying mental act – no separate reflection to the effect, “I am not gardening,” “I am not playing pool,” and so on. To know what one is doing is to be claiming a certain authority over one’s acts as to what they are as acts. Self-consciousness thus is constituted by a self-presence that in knowing itself is distinguishing itself from itself while knowing that there is no real distinction present (where the knower and the known are the same).³ It is the act of assuming authority of things like belief, not by inspecting one’s internal mental states but by something more like assuming a commitment.⁴

If this is so, then what had seemed like a straightforward account of our consciousness of objects as distinct from us emerges as far more problematic. The truth of such consciousness – what it has turned out to be – is that we are dealing with a world that appears to us as an appearance, and reflection on that fact of appearance as the appearance of something “behind” appearance (as, for example, forces that cause things to fall when dropped, as the “real” colors of things, and so on) rapidly leads to the conclusion that our reference to the world in itself is not (or may not be) transparent to “consciousness” taken as the direct consciousness of objects. The truth of consciousness is, as Hegel puts it, self-consciousness.

As self-conscious entities, we are also living creatures, self-conscious organisms caught in the web of life. Like all other animals, we have the needs of our species functioning within this self-presence. We feel hunger for food, drowsiness as the need for sleep or rest, even sexual need as the animal’s need to procreate. Now, the way the world shows up to all living creatures who can take note of the world is a function of the nature of the creature. (This is an Aristotelian idea.) Lettuce shows up to rabbits as food because of the nature of rabbits, and rabbits show up to foxes as food because of the nature of foxes. Within a species, certain others show up as possible sexual mates.

Like all other creatures, a self-conscious life has the world show up to it in a way enabled by its nature. However, for such a self-conscious life, a variety of things that are not fully natural thereby also show up: divinities, constitutions, statuses, and so forth.⁵ To be a self-conscious life – a “subject,” in the language

of German philosophy – is to know that one is this form of life just by being the life that falls under the concept, and it falls under that concept by bringing itself under that concept.⁶ (That one is such a life and brings oneself under the concept of such a life are the same thing.) By its nature, a self-conscious life thus exercises an authority over its actions (and over its epistemic states and other such normatively inflected aspects of its life). Because of its self-consciousness and its own authority, appearance shows up as appearance and thus (possibly) as not the world as it is in itself.

Self-conscious creatures show up to each other, however, in what looks like a transparent fashion. Each thinks of the other as a self-conscious other, as a second-person to its first-personal reference. It is in each having the second-person as the object of their thought that each shows up as the second-person. It is in my first-person grasping of “you” while you think second-personally of “me” that “you” grasp “me” second-personally, and it is in thinking that complex thought that we grasp ourselves as plural: “The I that is a We, and a We that is an I” (HW 3:145).⁷ We grasp each other as occupying a place in what Wilfrid Sellars calls the “space of reasons.” That space is also a space of authority, of taking on the burden of justifying ourselves to each other and even to ourselves.

Absent any other considerations, the possibility for a fundamental conflict is thereby established. If for whatever contingent reason, one of the self-conscious creatures takes himself to be unconditionally authoritative over some set of claims and the other disputes this authority, and when for whatever contingent reason, that first agent takes this to matter so much to him that he is willing to stake his life on it (and thus willing to kill for it), there is and eventually must be a struggle for recognition. If both agents die in the struggle, this problem is not solved. If one kills the other, the problem is not solved (since there is nobody to give the recognition). If both out of exhaustion call off the struggle, the problem is not solved but merely postponed. The only solution, absent any other considerations, seems to be for one of them, out of the fear of death, to succumb to the authority of the other. One becomes the master and the other subservient to the master.⁸

The irrational appeal to force arises out of the impossibility, at this stage of abstraction, of settling the argument about authority. If all authority is recognized authority, then an infinite regress threatens to be set into motion, since one agent will have authority only if recognized by another agent, who in turn must be recognized by another agent, *ad infinitum*. If there are only two of them in the struggle, neither can claim authority, since it seems either that the regress cannot even get started (since there is not authority to start it), or it just circles back and forth between two agents, neither of whom can acquire the authority to recognize the other one. If there were any mediating institutions – such that an appeal to reason itself might be workable – the problem

would be solved. At this level of abstraction – in which one is discussing the concept of self-consciousness itself, not the institutionalized shape it always in fact assumes – there are no such mediating institutions.

In this context, so Hegel says, “self-consciousness is desire itself” (HW 3:139). That is, it is the feeling of a lack and the need to close the gap opened up by such a lack – the gap being that between the authority claimed by a self-conscious being and the possibility of such authority being only illusory. The authority claimed by the master (based on force and the fear it provokes) is the outcome of there being no other way to close that gap, at least when the problem is presented so abstractly. Yet this solution undermines itself because of its own inherent logical inadequacy. The master’s claim to unconditional authority over the subservient agent (call him a “slave”) is itself only conditional on the slave’s continued recognition. Yet, by the terms of the recognition, the slave cannot have the authority to bestow such recognition. The logical senselessness of the relation of master and slave – where the master simply has to claim authority on the basis of the continual threat of force – creates a peculiar psychology bound up with such relations based on irrational domination that itself creates various pathologies that ultimately doom this institution either to self-destruction or to an existence forever tottering on being overthrown. (The possibility of a slave revolt can never be far from the master’s mind and has to remain his deepest fear.)

By virtue of being a matter of authority, self-consciousness and thus the peculiar nature of human self-presence is the space of reasons, a normative order. The logical result of this kind of tension – that of mastery and servitude – at the heart of any self-conscious life would be to acknowledge that we in fact bring each other under the concepts of “I,” “you,” or “we” (and “he,” “she,” or “it”) by virtue of belonging to the same space of reasons. If agents had world enough and time, they could solve the problem that provokes the irrationality of domination by masters without having to go through any of those stages. However, self-conscious lives are, after all, lives, and that means that they are finite creatures called upon to answer a problem infinite in itself: namely, if the space of reasons is boundless – at least in the sense that Kant claimed when he claimed that reason has to serve as its own tribunal (Axi–xii) – then the issue of where the proper self-drawn bounds of reasons are to be put becomes an issue for finite agents to answer for themselves. However, such agents never do have world enough and time, and they are always subject to the vagaries of the kind of animal life they are: they dream of glory, aggression is never too far from the surface, some are masochistic, some are egoists, and so on. Any real answer to the proper bounds of reason seems to be bound by all of these contingencies.

Philosophy’s search for the appropriate bounds of reason – itself infinite – is itself constrained by the finite bounds of historically and socially located

individuals and collectivities. However, the problems that drove early Greek philosophy about the tension between our own finitude and the pressing demand for what looks like a fully objective account of reason's demands are more than just philosophical demands. They are the demands placed on self-conscious life itself as it struggles to make sense of what it has made of itself in assuming various historical shapes of authority. Pressed in that way, the path of philosophical reflection seems to lead to deeper and deeper skepticism, and ultimately that kind of skepticism can border on a kind of nihilism. The path of such doubt may well look more like a path of despair (HW 3:72–73).⁹

As such, Hegel came to believe that any attempt to come to terms with this kind of self-consummating (and therefore self-undermining) skepticism had itself to go back to ground zero in terms of how the path of philosophical reflection could emerge in the first place. Thus, in the long section he ended up adding to the 1807 *Phenomenology*, he began with a consideration of the kind of mindedness that he called the "true" spirit, which he clearly identified with the classical Greek polis (and more specifically with the way of life both of the Athens of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the Athens of Pericles). In such a world, the stations that self-consciousness agents occupy seem to have had a clarity to them. The world is conceived as an organic whole in which each piece has its function, and the structure of the polis is such that each member has his or her own function to play in it. When all is in order, the whole of both nature and human-made law spontaneously combine to produce something like a political work of art. However, such a harmonious whole is subject to being undermined by the contradiction that is ready to erupt at any time when any of those irreplaceable functions come into irresolvable conflict with another such irreplaceable function – in which case they contradict each other – and the members themselves thereby come to be compelled to distance themselves from their respective and inescapable functions. Each is forced to distance herself and think about a possibly better arrangement of the whole. Since, on Hegel's reconstruction, each member is both required to fulfill his or her function(s), and there is no reflective space outside of those functional demands, the demand to step back and take a stance outside of that way of life is at odds with the other demands of the polis. Faced with a contradiction it could not overcome, ancient Greece became more and more senseless in its own eyes. As it became more senseless, it ceased to be a tragic way of life, compelling itself to become instead a philosophical way of life. Philosophy came on the scene as the political work of art was digging its own grave.

The breakdown of ancient Greek life served as a kind of prototype for the way in which forms of life or entire civilizations can founder and dissolve under the pressures of contradictions within it – contradictions that can go deep enough to make it impossible to continue being the people they were, as they had understood themselves. This provided the guiding thread through

the history of such normative orders as they establish themselves on the basis of their failed predecessors. The history of Europe since the time of the Greek city-states thus became viewed as a history of various breakdowns in which those living during and immediately after the aftermath have to make their way in the rubble of a collapsed way of life, taking up the parts that can be salvaged and which still work, and in doing so, discarding all that has decayed and withered, and making the most sense of the resulting whole with those parts they have left. To characterize this dissolution and new development, Hegel drew on the German word *Aufhebung*, which carried the double meaning of “cancel” and “preserve.”¹⁰

Hegel tried to show how the basic philosophical issues of mind and world – understood as how we declare and justify authority over various (among others) epistemic, practical, and aesthetic claims, and over ourselves and each other – had taken very different historical shapes. In that way of seeing historical development, there was one “thing” (which was not a “thing” at all), that was *Geist* itself manifesting itself in different ways, and the *Geist* that was in those different ways manifesting itself was not anything separate from its manifestations (HW 10:§383).¹¹ (As is well known, *Geist* can be rendered as either “mind” or “spirit” in English. I leave it here in the original so as not to decide the issue of interpretation by a fiat of translation.)

Geist, as we might put it, manifests itself analogously to the way an action manifests the intention in it. Various different bodily movements, for example, form an action – say, going to the refrigerator to see if the wine is chilled – by manifesting the intention that makes those movements into a unity. So, Hegel’s thesis goes, *Geist* never manifests itself except in individual shapes, just as action does not exist in the abstract. Self-consciousness – as the knowledge of what we are doing is the way in which we orient ourselves within our involvements as the world shows up to us in a certain way – thereby takes its individual shape in terms of the social and historical concepts available to it. Practices such as art, religion, and philosophy are themselves manifestations of “a” norm that is taking different individualized shapes in time. Philosophy, for example, is what philosophers do, even though the sum of what philosophers do does not and cannot exhaust all the possibilities of philosophy.

History can thus be understood as series of manifestations of, in Hegel’s language, a “universal” (or what we might provisionally parse as “the normative”) in various individual shapes. A way of life or a whole civilization could be understood as a way in which minded, *geistige* spontaneity (which appears in the concepts at work in the lives of agents) went deeply into receptivity in terms of the way in which its absolute commitments (those which constituted its way of life) took individual shape and which thus shaped those creatures so that their *geistig* nature resulted in different ways the world showed up to them.

History as a whole is thus a series of different manifestations of *Geist*, and Hegel's question in the *Phenomenology* was whether there was any further sense to make of this series of shapes of self-consciousness. As late as 1803, he still seemed to take the view that each of these basic ways in which human-mindedness took shape were more or less self-contained, and the history of those orders displayed no further or more general normative order to itself. By 1806, he had decisively changed his mind. The kind of breakdowns and dissolutions that characterized world history could be seen, he concluded, to have something like a logic to them as successors to a failed past articulated some way of making sense of themselves in light of their awareness of those very failures and successes of the past. Those articulations appeared against the background of being compelled to take the world as they found it and to make something of it. Rather than seeing history as a succession of such shapes of self-consciousness, he came to see it as marking a kind of progress in which *Geist* comes to a fuller awareness of what it is doing.

That progress came to a head in modern European life, which seemed to be undoing itself and repairing itself with increasing frequency. Modern life faced an ongoing series of disorders, ranging from the scientific revolution, the Reformation, the wars of religion, and the political upheavals that followed in the wake of such challenges not merely to traditional authority but to all areas of self-conscious life. Progressively, these early-modern and modern Europeans found themselves to be alienated from their own lives. They found themselves carrying on as they had done but no longer knowing exactly what it was they were doing. In addition, they collectively began to find that as the old ways of carrying on were dissolving, they were being replaced by new ways of carrying on that were equally alienating and equally poised for dissolution.

The result of all of this, brought to a head by Kantian philosophy and the French Revolution, was a new and absolute grasp of what it was we now had to take ourselves as having done throughout history. The normative order in which mindedness lived turned out to have been a historical order that was preparing itself, without anybody having had such a thing as a goal, for a kind of self-realization of the way in which freedom was essential to being a minded creature. As Hegel rather cursorily (and obscurely) summed the matter up: at the conclusion to the argument in the *Phenomenology* that had brought us to that point, we have two "infinite judgments," the infinite judgment that "*the being of the I is a thing*" and the infinite judgment that "*the thing is I*" (HW 3:577). Or, to put it in non-Hegelian terms, we are natural creatures whose nature is to bring themselves under the concept of *Geist* (or any of the other stand-ins for *Geist*, such as rational self-consciousness or agency). The conclusion that unites these two "infinite judgments" is, in Hegel's celebrated formulation, grasping the true not merely as substance (as natural life) but even more as subject (as self-conscious life).

If the *Phenomenology* is the introduction, what does philosophy look like?

The result of the *Phenomenology* was thus to argue that we had reached a point in European history where something like a recovery – but really more of an *Aufhebung*, a canceling and preserving – of the Greek ideal was achievable and was now on the top of the agenda for modern life. To be sure, there was no reattaining the Greek polis itself, attractive as it might look. Athenian direct democracy belonged to a small political unit that had no place for modern individuality, was based on slavery, and which could ultimately not defend itself against more ruthless rivals (such as Rome). Nonetheless, so Hegel argued, in the aftermath of Kant's philosophy and the disruption in France, the Greek idea of making the world intelligible had become something real for us, not just an ideal to be pursued. The *Phenomenology*, which revealed the logic of self-consciousness as having a kind of unplanned but progressive historical development to itself, had prepared the way for the realization of this idea. The *Phenomenology* had turned out to be not only the introduction to philosophy but also the introduction to the new post-revolutionary world in the course of coming to fruition.

Hegel tried to work out the implications of this view for the rest of his career and, although he changed his mind on a number of philosophical topics, he kept the overall architectonic of his thought fairly intact. In line with many of the German thinkers of his own time, he thought that philosophy, in the broadest sense, was now *de facto* the central faculty of the new “teaching and research” university taking shape in Berlin after 1809. (This reorganization of the goals and structure of the university was to affect almost every other university in the world well into our own day. In the United States, the philosophical faculty was to expand into something called the “College of Arts and Sciences.”) As such a central faculty, philosophy per se had to be organized around a curriculum that was oriented to specialized fields in philosophy, and Hegel used his own system to provide a rationale for such a curriculum: logic, metaphysics, philosophy of nature (with its own subfields), philosophy of mind (i.e., “subjective spirit,” which also includes moral psychology), philosophy of action (as part of philosophy of “subjective spirit” and “objective spirit”), ethics, political theory, philosophy of art, philosophy of religion, and the history of philosophy. He also saw his own system as tying all these fields together.

Logic and metaphysics

The core of all of this was the field of logic and metaphysics, which Hegel took as “one” field, not two (HW 8:81).¹² It was, to use a formulation recently

put into usage by A. W. Moore, a theory of “making sense of things” in the broadest possible sense together with a theory of “making sense of making sense.”¹³ Even more so than the *Phenomenology*, such a logic-metaphysics was to start out from the ground zero of making sense of things to show that within the simplest grasp of the intelligibility of the world, there is a tension at work that demands some kind of resolution if it is not to undo itself. The simplest level of intelligibility was of thinking of “being” as opposed to “nothing” (that something is rather than nothing at all). If anything, there was no better established assertion than that “being” was different from “nothing,” and that this could very plausibly be counted as an absolute truth. Yet if we settle at that restriction to such a thin air of abstraction, it is impossible for us to state that difference, yet simply identifying them without residue would mean we were thinking in completely unintelligible terms (and thus perhaps not really thinking at all). Stating the difference involves preserving both terms while somehow taming the contradiction that seemed to be present, and, so Hegel argued, the concept of “coming-to-be” performed that function (HW 5:113).¹⁴

This furnished not a principle or a method of proceeding but a kind of prototype of how one would proceed. Many philosophical problems emerge as problems having to do with different kinds of infinite regresses. The most well-known one is perhaps that of the traditional problem of the theory of knowledge: If to know something is to know something else, then it seems there is an infinite regress, an unsatisfactory circle or something we simply have to know without knowing anything else. The idea that there cannot be anything more distinct from being than nothing itself looks like it is such an “immediate” concept, yet if there is no way to state the difference (when restricted to that set of terms), and if one needs to state a difference for there to be a difference, one is in a logical bind. So Hegel thought that when we take all of the traditional problems of metaphysics, we come to see that they all turn on something like those kinds of infinite regress.

All in all, there are three such types of regresses in metaphysics that give us two unavoidable ways of talking about things. We can point them out (“That one over there”), we can describe them (“the green one”), classify them (“It’s a bird”), generalize about them (“The average length of a marriage in the USA is eight years”), count them (“There are exactly twenty”), and make judgments about how some quantitative feature (such as size) affects the description of them (“That creek used to be a big river”). These and the metaphysical puzzles to which each of them gives rise fall under what Hegel calls the logic of “being.” In each case, roughly put, determining one thing requires us to differentiate it from another thing, which in turn requires us to differentiate that second thing from another, *ad infinitum*. Such regresses are stopped either by “immediacy” (claiming that there is something that does not require something else,

as in appeals to the “given” in epistemology), or by understanding the principle of the series that generates the infinite regress.¹⁵ (The regress is what he calls the “bad infinite,” while grasping the principle that generates such a regress is the “affirmative infinite.”)

Such a logic ultimately provokes a kind of reflective judgment about the identity and unity of the things which are being pointed out, described, classified, counted, and measured, and the kind of regresses that are generated by taking such judgments about them in an absolute sense. In the sphere of making such reflective judgments, we typically explain things by reference to something that is not immediately available in experience. For example, we say things like, “The tie looked green in the store, but it looks blue in the sunlight,” or “The frost caused the flowers to fall off the bush,” or “Given those conditions, it was always possible it would happen,” or “Given those conditions, it had to happen.” In each of these cases, problems arise around the oscillation between the ground doing the explaining (the real color of the tie, the frost causing the flowers to fall) and that which it explains. Both must be independent of each other, in which case the relation between ground and consequent often seems not to be tight enough, and one oscillates between the two looking for what it is that links them; or, if they are not independent of each other, then there is no real explanation, as Molière lampooned with his idea of a dormative principle causing sleep. The infinite regress seems to take the form of viciously circular reasoning or disappointingly non-explanatory reasoning. Hegel classified these as part of the logic of “essence.”

Such classes of assertions are still yet to be distinguished from those that claim things like “Your conclusion does not follow from your premises,” or “What you said makes no sense within the standards of contemporary physics.” These form part of what Hegel calls the “logic of the concept,” and they involve the proprieties of inference and the various ways in which larger explanatory claims are differentiated from each other (such as mechanistic versus teleological explanations) and the kinds of systems for which they are appropriate. That which accounts for all the moves that are made prior to that – that which is the account of the accounts of being, essence, and concept – is the “absolute Idea,” the principle of thought grasping what it is doing when it is trying to make sense of things and to determine when sense has actually been made.¹⁶ It is where “making sense of making sense” comes to fruition. In producing the book that contained both those tasks – making sense of things and making sense of making sense – Hegel took himself to have provided what the *Phenomenology* promised: A logic that was a metaphysics and a metaphysics that was a logic. The first two books have to do with making sense of things. The last book has to do with making sense of making sense.

The Hegelian curriculum

The rest of the philosophical curriculum was to be filled out by seeing how that approach of “making sense of things” that focuses on the way certain accounts break down and undermine themselves could be put to use in the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of mind (very broadly construed). Nature could be seen as having different types of explanatory unities in it (such as mechanical, chemical, and biological). In turn, mind could be comprehended by looking at the various types of problems that emerge in making sense of the issues that emerge in, for example, moral psychology, political theory, and the like. In all those cases, the philosophical attempt to give physical-causal explanations of our behavior, to offer explanations that require attention to intention, and give explanations of what institutions and practices in our individual and collective lives best actualize freedom are all matters that require attention and updating in light of empirical detail. They were not to be taken as “applications” of the logic-metaphysics he developed in his *Science of Logic*, although that logic-metaphysics set the background in terms of which the arguments about nature and mind were to be carried out. In fact, the Hegelian conception of the unity of the “universal” and the “individual” itself required that one could not simply apply the results of the *Logic* to nature and mind and simultaneously expect to reap any interesting further results.

Nonetheless, there was a kind of generalized approach that carried over from the arguments of the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* and further to the philosophy of nature and philosophy of mind, and that was to investigate how certain types of minded activity break down when they are pressed to make sense of some issue that involves something like an infinite regress. To use Hegel's own terminology: The “understanding” stops those regresses by asserting some single thing to be intelligible in and for itself (such as a purported immediate grasp of internal mental states) and which therefore stops the regress (for example, by claiming that we know the content of those internal mental states without having to know anything else and that such content can serve as a premise for further epistemic claims). “Reason,” however, sees that any such purported immediacy (whether it be immediate knowledge of internal mental states or direct reference to physical objects) in fact begs all the questions, since human cleverness can equally well generate a set of other, equally plausible ways of stopping that regress. (Kant's antinomies are an example.) The only way out of such metaphysical puzzles is to understand what it is that gets the regress and its various solutions going in the first place. Ultimately, that means the Hegelian method is in fact no real “method” at all since it has no rules it can state except after the fact, and even then it acknowledges that what it has generated so far is mostly provisional.¹⁷ There are no Hegelian rules that can be applied to all the cases.

Putting that way of looking at practices (such as that of assertion, moral judgment, or living in terms of basic, absolute commitments) as embodying claims that can break down under the pressure of claiming an unconditional status for themselves gave Hegel the breathing space to work out a novel and systematic approach to things. In his social and political philosophy, for example, it provided the background to argue that the key areas to be investigated were those of rights, obligations, and goods (which he grouped under the headings, “abstract right,” “morality,” and “ethical life”). The one-sided assertion of key basic rights (life, liberty-as-non-interference) broke down in needing to establish the difference between revenge and punishment in the enforcement of such rights. The practices of morality (which he claimed did not exist in the ancient world until, in effect, Socrates invented it¹⁸) resolve that otherwise intractable issue, and “morality’s” resolution of that issue shows how conceptually dependent it is on the very modern assertion of rights in the first place. The issues about the relation of moral reasons to moral motivation – whether moral reasons should be conceived as “internal” to motivations one already has or as “external” to them – raise issues about how it is that morality is to keep a grip on the individuals who have to bind themselves to it. Ultimately, those kinds of problems (which also involve consequentialist versus non-consequentialist interpretations of moral requirements) require something more like institutionally and practically embodied goods, which in the modern world are those of family, civil society (as orienting itself around free economic markets), and the constitutional representative political order (which Hegel thought should be identified with the modern state). Rather than seeing how certain ethical and political claims were supposed to follow from some master-principle (as Kant may plausibly be taken to have argued) or seeing how those claims can be made to fit into our considered “intuitions” about ethical life, Hegel was concerned to see how we make sense of those things from a more holistic stance which involved investigating how the philosophical puzzles about them arise in the first place by virtue of the way those claims are undermining their own assertion of absoluteness.

The capstone of these investigations is his lecture series on the philosophy of history, and the philosophies of “absolute spirit” (art, religion, and the history of philosophy), each of which was treated historically after the manner of the *Phenomenology*. History itself surprisingly revealed the way in which that kind of dialectical argument functioned in the context of something that otherwise looked chaotic: the way in which ways of life (such as ancient Greek and Roman) broke down as they ceased to be able to make any real sense of themselves both provoked their successors to articulate themselves in different ways and had culminated in the metaphysical-ethical conclusions drawn out of the practices of modern European life. From the idea that one person (the pharaoh, the emperor, the chief) is by nature or the gods authorized to rule over others,

the Greeks and Romans had moved on to the idea that the only thing that made any sense was that nature or divinity has authorized some to rule over others (virtuous aristocrats over commoners, etc.), but the breakdown of that way of making sense of things had led to the revolutionary modern European idea that nobody by nature is authorized to rule absolutely over anyone else and therefore that all modern institutions of command and obedience had to be justified rationally and not by appeal simply to tradition, faith, or sacred text. Likewise, in art as a sensuous mode of making sense of ourselves, there had been a move from art as imitating nature (because we had taken ourselves to be imitating nature) to the idea that art had to set its own standards, such that the art world itself had gradually come to the realization that, in its own sphere, it was incapable of giving the kind of comprehensive account that it aspired to provide. Shocking to some, Hegel concluded that therefore "in all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past," in that art alone is incapable of satisfying our need to make sense of things and to make sense of making sense (LA 1:10–11 [HW 13:24–25]).¹⁹ The norms of *Geist* were not fully comprehensible in aesthetic terms, and any purely aesthetic politics therefore had to be retrogressive, not progressive. This did not imply that art itself had ended but only that any attempt to fashion modern life in a self-sufficiently purely aesthetic form had to fail.²⁰

Religion too failed in much the same way.²¹ In its Christian form, it only made sense in terms of an interpretation of what was meant by John's claim that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Hegel took that to imply, in light of his understanding of what European modernity had come to mean for its members, that the only thing of divine (that is, absolute) status for us had to be reason itself, now taken in a neo-Aristotelian sense as reinterpreted in light of Kant's three *Critiques*.²² The world has to be taken as a rational whole, as intelligible to thought, and this commitment to rational intelligibility is the "religion" to which modern philosophers have committed themselves, even if they refuse to acknowledge it. Religion proper, however, as the practices of devotion in rite and ritual, had, in becoming Christian, also been compelled to become theological, and theology, as putting reason to work in thinking about the divine, found itself compelled to become philosophy. Philosophy, in turn, now consisted in working itself out in terms of its own history and the topics that follow from its new status. These topics – logic-metaphysics, nature, mind, history, art, religion, and philosophy itself – were their own ways of understanding both how absolute their claims were and, as dependent on the viability of the practices of modern life, how utterly fragile the claims of reason had become.

No other philosopher since Hegel has achieved such a comprehensive view of things and has been so focused on how philosophical thought bears on

modern times. Given the fragmentation and specialization so prevalent in contemporary philosophy, it is unlikely that in the near future, anyone will.

Notes

1. The obvious allusion here is to Hilary Putnam's famous "twin earth" example. See Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" in *Mind, Language and Reality*, vol. 2 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215–71.
2. See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), where this argument is more explicitly laid out.
3. For example, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes, "Now, this category, that is, the simple unity of self-consciousness and being, has the *distinction* in itself, for its essence is precisely this, that it is immediately selfsame in *otherness*, that is, immediately selfsame in the absolute distinction. Thus, the distinction *exists*, but it *exists* as a completely transparent distinction which is at the same time therefore no distinction at all" (HW 3:181).
4. See Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's "Phenomenology": The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
5. Hegel adapts this idea from Fichte: "But I also grasp those things through need, desire, and enjoyment. Something comes to be food and drink for me not through concepts but through hunger, thirst, and satisfaction" (VM 77 [GA I/6:262]).
6. See Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*; Sebastian Rödl, *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Pinkard, *Hegel's "Phenomenology"*; and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
7. See the discussion of the relation between first-person and second-person in Rödl, *Self-Consciousness*. I have adapted part of my discussion of the second-person from some suggestions by Rödl. Rödl's Kantianism, however, leads him to conclude that this would not lead to anything like a "master-slave" dialectic.
8. Hegel speaks of this other who succumbs as a *Knecht*, which could mean a "vassal," a "servant," and even a "slave." Hegel also thought that something like this idealized struggle occurred deeply in the prehistoric human past.
9. "This path can accordingly be regarded as the path of *doubt*, or, more properly, as the path of despair" (HW 3:72).
10. He says: "The German '*aufheben*' ('to sublata' in English) has a twofold meaning in the language: it equally means 'to keep,' 'to "preserve,'" and 'to cause to cease,' 'to put an end to.' ... These two definitions of 'to sublata' can be cited as two dictionary meanings of the word. But it must strike one as remarkable that a language has come to use one and the same word for two opposite meanings. For speculative thought it is gratifying to find words that have in themselves a speculative meaning" (SL 81–82 [HW 5:114]). Although the idea of "raising up" is also there in *Aufhebung* (and is often attributed to Hegel's use of it), Hegel himself does not discuss it, consistently referring instead to the "two" meanings of *Aufhebung* and not the third.
11. "The universality is also its determinate sphere of being. Having a being of its own, the universal is self-particularizing, whilst it still remains self-identical. Hence the

special mode of mental being is 'manifestation.' The spirit is not some one mode or meaning which finds utterance or externality only in a form distinct from itself: it does not manifest or reveal *something*, but its very mode and meaning is this revelation. And thus in its mere possibility mind is at the same moment an infinite, 'absolute,' actuality" (EPM §383). In the *Zusatz*, he is recorded as saying (using the language of "revealing" as a synonym for "manifesting"): "In the Other, therefore, mind [*Geist*] manifests only itself, its own nature; but this consists in self-manifestation. The manifestation of itself to itself is therefore itself the content of mind and not, as it were, only a form externally added to the content; consequently mind, by its manifestation, does not manifest a content different from its form, but manifests its form which expresses the entire content of mind, namely, its self-manifestation" (EPM §383Z).

12. "Thus *logic* coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* that used to be taken to express the *essentialities* of the *things*" (EL §24).
13. A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Robert Pippin has put this distinction to work in several recent pieces on the *Logic*, which also inform my discussion here. See Robert B. Pippin, "Logik und Metaphysik: Hegels Reich der Schatten" (Robert Curtius lecture, University of Bonn, June 2013); and Robert B. Pippin, "Negation in Hegels *Logik*," in *200 Jahre "Wissenschaft der Logik*," ed. Claudia Wirsing (Hamburg: Meiner, forthcoming).
14. "This can also be expressed thus: becoming is the vanishing of being into nothing, and of nothing into being, and the vanishing of being and nothing in general; but at the same time it rests on their being distinct. It therefore contradicts itself in itself, because what it unites within itself is self-opposed; but such a union destroys itself" (SL 81 [HW 5:113]).
15. Hegel took the problem of such infinite regresses from Kant's Transcendental Dialectic. Such regresses prompt the idea that when one seeks the unconditioned (the point in the regress where the regress stops), one ends up with answers at odds with each other, since there is no aim to the series. Kant thought that this showed the impossibility of metaphysics as it had traditionally been done and the impossibility of saying that reason's efforts could reach as far as things in themselves (since, whatever else they were, they were not self-contradictory). As Hegel put it, "the infinite series contains, namely, the bad infinite, because what the series is supposed to express remains an 'ought,' and it expresses what it does with a 'beyond' that never goes away. The series is afflicted with it and is different from what is supposed to be expressed" (HW 5:289). He seems to share the idea with Wittgenstein: "The reasoning that leads to an infinite regress is to be given up not 'because in this way we can never reach the goal,' but because here there is no goal; so it makes no sense to say 'we can never reach it'" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright [Oxford: Blackwell, 1967], §693).
16. Translators of Hegel have by and large opted for the artifice of distinguishing the *Idee* (idea, with its Kantian-Schellingian overtones) from a *Vorstellung* (idea) by rendering the former in capital letters.
17. One would hope that the idea of Hegelian method as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, first introduced by H. M. Chalybäus in 1848 as the "key" to Hegel's system, would have died out by now, but it seems to have assumed a life of its own. See Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus, *Historische entwicklung der speculativen philosophie von Kant bis Hegel* (Dresden: Arnoldi, 1848).

18. "Socrates is famous as a moral teacher. To a greater degree, he is the discoverer of morality" (HW 12:329).
19. By this, Hegel did not mean that there would not be any new art, nor did he mean that great art could now not be produced, but that the aspiration of art to give a complete and self-sufficient account of what matters to us had to fail in all particular instances.
20. Thus Hegel says: "the *'after'* of art consists in the fact that there dwells in the spirit the need to satisfy itself solely in its own inner self as the true form for truth to take. Art in its beginnings still leaves over something mysterious, a secret foreboding and a longing, because its creations have not completely set forth their full content for imaginative vision. But if the perfect content has been perfectly revealed in artistic shapes, then the more far-seeing spirit rejects this objective manifestation and turns back into its inner self. This is the case in our own time. We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit" (LA 1:103 [HW 13:142]).
21. Religion's failure does not imply, or at least so Hegel thought, religion's replacement by philosophy any more than he thought art's failure implied its replacement by philosophy. Each does something that philosophy cannot do, but neither can succeed in providing a comprehensive account of the world in modern times. That Hegel thought this was not an implication of his views, of course, does not mean that it is not an implication of his views. That so many of Hegel's self-professed followers thought that it implied exactly that about religion (but not about art) made that particular issue all the more divisive with regard to the reception of Hegel's thought in his own day and in our own.
22. Consider Hegel's statement in the *Encyclopedia* about "spirit's elevation to God": "Kant has in general seized upon the most correct version, when he treats belief in God as proceeding from *practical reason*. For that starting-point contains the content or material which constitutes the content of the concept of God. But the genuine concrete material is neither being... nor mere *purposeful activity*... but *spirit*, whose absolute determination is that of effective reason, i.e., the self-determining and self-realizing concept itself, which is freedom" (HW 10:§552).

28

Plato, Descartes, Hegel: Three Philosophers of Event

Slavoj Žižek

I don't much like hearing that we have *gone beyond* Hegel, the way one hears we have *gone beyond* Descartes. We go beyond everything and always end up in the same place.

– Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire II: Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*¹

This *aperçu* by Lacan can serve as our guiding principle: beware of all-too-easy attempts at “overcoming” metaphysics! There are three (and only three) key philosophers in the history of (Western) metaphysics: Plato, Descartes, Hegel. The proof of their privileged status is their extraordinary position in the series of philosophers: each of the three not only designates a clear break with the past, but also casts his long shadow on the thinkers who follow him – they can all be conceived as a series of negations/oppositions of/to his position. It was already Foucault who noted that the entire history of Western philosophy can be defined as the history of rejections of Platonism: in a homologous way, the entire modern philosophy can be conceived as the history of rejections of Cartesianism, from subtle corrections (Malebranche, Spinoza) to outright dismissals. With Hegel, things are, if anything, even more obvious: what united all that comes after Hegel is the opposition to the specter of Hegel's “panlogicism.”

The notion of Event seems especially incompatible with Plato, for whom our constantly changing reality is grounded in the eternal order of Ideas. Are, however, things as simple as that? Plato is the first in the series of philosophers who had bad luck in the twentieth century, being blamed for all our misfortunes – Alain Badiou enumerated six main (partially intertwined) forms of twentieth-century anti-Platonism:²

1. the *vitalist* anti-Platonism (Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze): the assertion of the real of life-becoming against the intellectualist sterility of Platonic forms – as Nietzsche already put it, “Plato” is the name for a disease...

2. the *empiricist-analytic* anti-Platonism: Plato believed in the independent existence of Ideas; but, as Aristotle already knew, Ideas do not exist independently of sensuous things whose forms they are. The main counter-Platonic thesis of analytic empiricists is that all truths are either analytic or empirical.
3. the *Marxist* anti-Platonism (for which Lenin is not without blame): the dismissal of Plato as the first idealist, opposed to pre-Socratic materialists as well as to the more “progressive” and empirically oriented Aristotle. In this view (which conveniently forgets that, in contrast to Aristotle’s notion of the slave as a “talking tool,” there is no place for slaves in Plato’s *Republic*), Plato was the main ideologist of the class of slave owners...
4. the *existentialist* anti-Platonism: Plato denies the uniqueness of singular existence and subordinates the singular to the universal. This anti-Platonism has a Christian version (Kierkegaard: Socrates versus Christ) and an atheist one (Sartre: “existence precedes essence”).
5. the *Heideggerian* anti-Platonism: Plato as the founding figure of “Western metaphysics,” the key moment in the historical process of the “forgetting of Being,” the starting point of the process which culminates in today’s technological nihilism (“from Plato to NATO...”³).
6. the “*democratic*” anti-Platonism of political philosophy, from Popper to Arendt: Plato as the originator of “closed society,” as the first thinker who elaborated in detail the project of totalitarianism. (For Arendt, at a more refined level, the original sin of Plato is to subordinate politics to Truth, not seeing that politics is a domain of *phronesis*, of judgments and decision made in unique unpredictable situations.)

“Plato” is thus the negative point of reference which unites otherwise irreconcilable enemies: Marxists and anti-Communist liberals, existentialists and analytic empiricists, Heideggerians and vitalists... And does exactly the same not hold for Descartes? Here are the main versions of anti-Cartesianism:

1. the *Heideggerian* notion of Cartesian subjectivity as the radical step in metaphysical nihilism which finds its fulfillment in modern technology.
2. the *ecological* rejection of Cartesian dualism as opening up the way to ruthless exploitation of nature – here is Al Gore’s version: the Judeo-Christian tradition, in establishing humanity’s “dominion” over the earth, also charged humanity with environmental stewardship; Descartes remembered “dominion,” but breezed past the idea of stewardship, thereby yielding to the “great temptation of the West” and placing the idealized world of rational thought on a higher plane than nature.⁴
3. the *cognitivist* rejection of Descartes’s privileging of rational mind over emotions (see Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes’s Error*), as well as his notion of

the Self as a single autonomous agent which controls psychic life in a transparent way (see Daniel Dennett's critique of the "Cartesian theater").

4. the *feminist* claim that the Cartesian *cogito*, while appearing gender-neutral, effectively privileges the male subject (only the masculine mind deals with clear and distinct thought, while the feminine mind is under the swell of confused sensual impressions and affects).
5. the proponents of the "*linguistic turn*" deplore the "monological" character of the Cartesian subject to whom intersubjectivity comes afterwards, as a secondary feature; in this way, Descartes cannot see how human subjectivity is always embedded in an intersubjective linguistic context.
6. *vitalists* point out that, in the Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, there is no place for the life in its full sense, a life which cannot be reduced to the interaction of mechanic nuts and bolts; this is why Descartes claims that, since animals do not have souls, they don't really suffer – their cries have the status of mechanic squeaks of a malfunctioning machine.

This brings us to Hegel, the ultimate *bête noire* of the last two centuries of philosophy:

1. proponents of the "*philosophy of life* [*Lebensphilosophie*]" claim that the life of the Hegelian dialectical process is not the actual organic life, but an artificial shadowy realm of arbitrary intellectual gymnastics: when Hegel says that a notion passes into its opposite, he should have said that a living thinking being passes from one to another thought.
2. *existentialists* from Kierkegaard onwards deplore Hegel's subordination of the individual, singular existence to the universality of a notion: in this way, concrete and unique individuals are reduced to mere dispensable paraphernalia of the movement of the abstract Notion.
3. *materialists* predictably reject Hegel's idea that external material nature is just a moment in the self-deployment of the Spirit: in an unexplained way, the Idea posits nature as its free self-externalization.
4. *historicists* reject Hegel's metaphysical teleology: instead of opening up to the plurality and contingency of the historical process, Hegel reduces actual history to the external face of the notional progress – for him, a single and all-encompassing Reason rules in history.
5. *analytic philosophers* and *empiricists* make fun of Hegel as the hyperbole of the speculative madness, playing conceptual games which can in no way be experimentally tested: Hegel moves in a self-relating loop.
6. *Marxists* advocate the (in)famous reversal of the Hegelian dialectical process from its head to its feet: ideas and notions are just the ideological superstructure of the material process of production which overdetermines entire social life.

7. for traditional *liberals*, Hegel's "divinization" of the State as the "material existence of God" makes him (together with Plato) one of the main forerunners of the "closed society" – there is a straight line from Hegelian totality to political totalitarianism.
8. for some *religious moralists*, the Hegelian dialectical "coincidence of the opposites" as well as his historicism lead to a nihilistic vision of society and history in which there are no transcendent and stable moral values and in which a murderer is perceived as equal to his victim.
9. for (most of) the *deconstructionists*, the Hegelian "sublation [*Aufhebung*]" is the very model of how metaphysics, while acknowledging difference, dispersal, otherness, again subsumes it into the One of the self-mediating Idea – it is against *Aufhebung* that deconstructionists assert an irreducible excess or remainder which cannot ever be reintegrated into the One.
10. for the *Deleuzian* thought of productive difference, Hegel cannot think difference outside the frame of negativity – however, negativity is the very operator of subsuming difference under the One; the Deleuzian formula is thus that Hegel should not even be criticized but outrightly forgotten.

Each of the three philosophers stands not only for an Event – the shattering encounter of an Idea; the emergence of a purely evental *cogito*, a crack in the great chain of being; the Absolute itself as an evental self-deployment, as the result of its own activity. It also stands for a moment of negativity, cut – the normal flow of things is interrupted, another dimension breaks in. And it also stands for the moment of madness: the madness of being captivated by an Idea (like falling in love, like Socrates under the spell of his *daimon*), the madness at the heart of *cogito* (the "night of the world"), and, of course, the ultimate "madness" of the Hegelian System, this Bacchanalian dance of concepts. So one can say that philosophies which follow Plato, Descartes, or Hegel, are all attempts to contain/control this excess of madness, to renormalize it, to inscribe it into the normal flow of things.

If we stick to the textbook version of Plato's idealism as asserting the immutable eternal order of Ideas, he effectively cannot but appear to deny event as something that belongs to our unstable material reality and doesn't concern Ideas – but there is another reading possible: to conceive "Idea" as the event of the appearing of the suprasensible. Recall well-known descriptions of Socrates caught in a hysterical seizure when struck by an Idea, standing frozen for hours, oblivious to reality around him – is this not an evental encounter *par excellence*? In *Phaedrus*, Plato himself compares love to madness, to being possessed – and is this not how it is when we find ourselves passionately in love? Is love not a kind of permanent state of exception? All proper balances of our daily life are disturbed, everything we do is colored by the underlying thought of "that." The situation is "beyond Good and Evil": we feel a weird

indifference toward our moral obligations with regard to our parents, children, friends – even if we continue to meet them, we do it in a mechanical way, in a condition of “as if”; everything pales with regard to our passionate attachment. In this sense, falling in love is like the blinding light that struck Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus: a kind of religious suspension of the Ethical, to use Kierkegaard’s terms. An Absolute intervenes which derails the balanced run of our daily affairs: it is not so much that the standard hierarchy of values is inversed – much more radically, another dimension enters the scene, a different level of being. Badiou has deployed the parallel between today’s search for a sexual (or marital) partner through the appropriate dating agencies and the ancient procedure of arranged marriages: in both cases, the risk of “falling in love” is suspended, there is no contingent “fall” proper, the risk of the real called the “love encounter” is minimized by prior arrangements which take into account all the material and psychological interests of the concerned parties.⁵ Robert Epstein pushes this idea to its logical conclusion, providing its missing counterpart: once you choose your appropriate partner, how can you arrange things so that you will both effectively love each other? Based on the study of arranged marriages, Epstein developed “procedures of affection-building” – one can “build love deliberately and choose whom to do it with.”⁶ Such a procedure relies on self-commodification: through internet dating or marriage agencies, each prospective partner presents themselves as a commodity, listing his or her qualities and providing photos. If we marry today, it is more and more in order to re-normalize the violence of falling in love – in Basque, the term for falling in love is *maitemindu*, which, literally translated, means “to be injured by love.”

And, of course, the same holds for an authentic political engagement. In his *Conflict of the Faculties* written in the mid-1790s, Immanuel Kant addresses a simple but difficult question: is there a true progress in history? (He meant ethical progress in freedom, not just material development.) Kant conceded that actual history is confused and allows for no clear proof: think how the twentieth century brought unprecedented democracy and welfare, but also holocaust and gulag... But he nonetheless concluded that, although progress cannot be proven, we can discern signs which indicate that progress is possible. Kant interpreted the French Revolution as such a sign which pointed toward the possibility of freedom: the hitherto unthinkable happened, a whole people fearlessly asserted their freedom and equality. For Kant, even more important than the – often bloody – reality of what went on in the streets of Paris was the enthusiasm that the events in France gave rise to in the eyes of sympathetic observers all around Europe (but also in Haiti!):

The revolution of a gifted people which [we] have seen unfolding in our day may succeed or miscarry; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the

point that a right-thinking human being, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such cost – this revolution, I say, nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful *participation* that borders closely on enthusiasm the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race. (CF 85)

THIS dualism is the “materialist truth” of the dualism of Ideas and material things, and it is against this background that one should envisage the true dimension of Plato’s philosophical revolution, so radical that it was misinterpreted by Plato himself: the assertion of the gap between the spatiotemporal order of reality in its eternal movement of generation and corruption, and the “eternal” order of Ideas, that is, the notion that empirical reality can “participate” in an eternal Idea, that an eternal Idea can shine through it, appear in it. Where Plato got it wrong is in his ontologization of Ideas (strictly homologous to Descartes’s ontologization of *cogito*): as if Ideas form another, even more substantial and stable order of “true” reality. What Plato was not ready (or, rather, able) to accept was the thoroughly virtual, “immaterial” (or, rather, “insubstantial”) status of Ideas: like sense-events in Deleuze’s ontology, Ideas have no causality of their own, they are virtual entities generated by material spatiotemporal processes. Let us take an attractor in mathematics: all positive lines or points in its sphere of attraction only approach it in an endless fashion, never reaching its form – the existence of this form is purely virtual; it is nothing more than the shape toward which lines and points tend. However, precisely as such, the virtual is the Real of this field: the immovable focal point around which all elements circulate – one should give here to the term “form” its full Platonic weight, since we are dealing with an “eternal” Idea in which reality imperfectly “participates.” One should thus fully accept that spatiotemporal material reality is “all there is,” that there is no other “more true” reality: the ontological status of Ideas is that of PURE APPEARING. The ontological problem of Ideas is the same as the fundamental problem of Hegel’s: how is meta-physics possible, how can temporal reality PARTICIPATE in the eternal Order, how can this order APPEAR, transpire, in it. It is not “how can we reach true reality beyond appearances,” but “how can APPEARANCE emerge in reality.” The conclusion Plato avoids is implied in his exercise: *the suprasensible Idea* does not dwell BEYOND appearances, in a separate ontological sphere of fully constituted Being; it is *appearance as appearance*.

So why a return to Plato? Why do we need a *repetition* of Plato’s founding gesture? In his *Logiques des mondes*, Badiou provides a succinct definition of “democratic materialism” and its opposite, “materialist dialectics”: the axiom which condenses the first one is “*There is nothing but bodies and languages...*”

to which materialist dialectics adds “...with the exception of truths.”⁷ One should bear in mind the Platonic, properly meta-physical, thrust of this distinction: *prima facie*, it cannot but appear as a proto-idealist gesture to assert that material reality is not all that there is, that there is also another level of incorporeal truths. Badiou performs here the paradoxical philosophical gesture of defending, AS A MATERIALIST, the autonomy of the “immaterial” order of Truth. As a materialist, and in order to be thoroughly materialist, Badiou focuses on the IDEALIST topos *par excellence*: how can a human animal forsake its animality and put its life in the service of a transcendent Truth? How can the “transubstantiation” from the pleasure-oriented life of an *individual* to the life of a *subject* dedicated to a Cause occur? In other words, how is a free act possible? How can one break (out of) the network of the causal connections of positive reality and conceive an act that begins by and in itself? Again, Badiou repeats within the materialist frame the elementary gesture of idealist anti-reductionism: human Reason cannot be reduced to the result of evolutionary adaptation; art is not just a heightened procedure of providing sensual pleasures, but a medium of Truth; and so on.

This, then, is our basic *philosophico-political choice (decision)* today: either repeat in a materialist vein Plato’s assertion of the meta-physical dimension of “eternal Ideas,” or continue to dwell in the postmodern universe of “democratic-materialist” historicist relativism, caught in the vicious cycle of the eternal struggle with “premodern” fundamentalisms. How is this gesture possible, thinkable even? Let us begin with the surprising fact that Badiou does not identify as the “principal contradiction,” the predominant antagonism, of today’s ideological situation the struggle between idealism and materialism, but the struggle between two forms of materialism (democratic and dialectical).

This same struggle assumes a new dimension with Descartes: *cogito* as his starting point may appear as the very model of asserting the primacy of thinking subjectivity; however, the first thing that should draw our attention is the echo that Descartes’s thought found from the very beginning among women – “*cogito* has no sex” was the reaction of an early feminine reader. The one who first deployed this feminist potential of Cartesianism was François Poullain de la Barre, a follower of Descartes who, after becoming a priest, converted to Protestantism. When the Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the Edict of Nantes, he was exiled in Geneva, where he applied Cartesian principles to the question of women and denounced injustice against women and the inequality of the female condition, championing the social equality between women and men. In 1673, he published anonymously “A Physical and Moral Discourse on the Equality of Both Sexes, Which Shows That It Is Important to Rid Oneself of Prejudices,” showing that the inequality and the treatment that women undergo does not have a natural base, but proceeds from cultural

prejudice. He recommends that women receive a true education and also says that all the careers should be open to them, including scientific ones.⁸

What one should always bear in mind when talking about *cogito*, about the reduction of a human point to the abyssal point of thinking without any external object, is that we are not dealing here with silly and extreme logical games (“imagine that you alone exist...”), but with the description of a very precise existential experience of the radical self-withdrawal, of suspending the existence of all reality around me to a vanishing illusion, which is well-known in psychoanalysis (as psychotic withdrawal) as well as in religious mysticism (under the name of so-called “night of the world”). After Descartes, this idea was deployed in the basic insight of Schelling, according to which, prior to its assertion as the medium of the rational Word, the subject is the “infinite lack of being [*unendliche Mangel an Sein*],” the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself (SW II/2:49). This idea also forms the core of Hegel’s notion of madness: when Hegel determines madness to be a withdrawal from the actual world, the closing of the soul into itself, its “contraction,” the cutting-off of its links with external reality, he all too quickly conceives of this withdrawal as a “regression” to the level of the “animal soul” still embedded in its natural environs and determined by the rhythm of nature (night and day, etc.). Does this withdrawal, on the contrary, not designate the severing of the links with the *Umwelt*, the end of the subject’s immersion into its immediate natural environs, and is it, as such, not the founding gesture of humanization? Was this withdrawal-into-self not accomplished by Descartes in his universal doubt and reduction to *cogito*, which also involves a passage through the moment of radical madness? Are we thus not back at the well-known and often-quoted passage from *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, where Hegel characterizes the experience of pure Self, of the contraction-into-self of the subject, as the “night of the world,” the eclipse of (constituted) reality? –

The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity – an unending wealth of many presentations, images, of which none happens to occur to him – or which are not present. This night, the inner of nature, that exists here – pure self – in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, here shoots a bloody head – there another white shape, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye – into a night, that becomes awful... (JR 204)⁹

And the symbolic order, the universe of the Word, logos, can only emerge from the experience of this abyss. As Hegel puts it, this inwardness of the pure self “must enter also into existence, object becoming, opposite this innerness to be external; return to being. This is language as name-giving power.... Through the name the object as individual being is born out of the I” (JR 206).¹⁰ – What we

must be careful not to miss here, is how Hegel's break with the Enlightenment tradition can be discerned in the reversal of the very metaphor for the subject: the subject is no longer the Light of Reason opposed to the non-transparent, impenetrable Stuff (of Nature, Tradition,...); his very kernel, the gesture which opens up the space for the Light of Logos, is absolute negativity, the "night of the world," the point of utter madness in which fantasmatic apparitions of "partial objects" err around. Consequently, there is no subjectivity without this gesture of withdrawal; which is why Hegel is fully justified in inverting the standard question of how the fall-regression into madness is possible: the true question is rather how the subject is able to climb out of madness and to reach "normalcy." That is to say, the withdrawal-into-self, the cutting-off of the links to the environs, is followed by the construction of a symbolic universe which the subject projects onto reality as a kind of substitute-formation, destined to recompense us for the loss of the immediate, pre-symbolic real. However, as Freud himself asserted in his analysis of Daniel Paul Schreber's paranoia, the manufacturing of a substitute-formation that recompenses the subject for the loss of reality, is the most succinct definition of the paranoid construction as an attempt to cure the subject of the disintegration of his universe.¹¹ In short, the ontological necessity of madness resides in the fact that it is not possible to pass directly from the purely animal soul, immersed in its natural environs, to subjectivity dwelling in its symbolic virtual environs – the "vanishing mediator" between the two is the "mad" gesture of radical withdrawal from reality, which opens up the space for its symbolic (re)constitution. This brings us back to Schelling: following Kant, Schelling deployed the notion of the primordial decision-differentiation (*Ent-Scheidung*), the unconscious atemporal deed by means of which the subject chooses his eternal character which, afterwards, within his conscious-temporal life, he experiences as the inexorable necessity, as "the way he always was":

This deed occurs once and then immediately sinks back into the unfathomable depths; and nature acquires permanence precisely thereby. Likewise that will, posited once at the beginning and then led to the outside, must immediately sink into unconsciousness. Only in this way is a beginning possible, a beginning that does not stop being a beginning, a truly eternal beginning. For here as well, it is true that the beginning cannot know itself. That deed once done, it is done for all eternity. The decision that in some manner is truly to begin must not be brought back to consciousness; it must not be called back, because this would amount to being taken back. If, in making a decision, somebody retains the right to reexamine his choice, he will never make a beginning at all. (AW₁₃ 181–82 [WA 184])¹²

With this abyssal act of freedom, the subject breaks up the rotary movement of drives, this abyss of the Unnamable – in short, this deed is the very founding gesture of naming. Therein resides Schelling's unheard-of philosophical

revolution: he does not simply oppose the dark domain of the rotary movement of pre-ontological drives, this unnamable Real which cannot ever be totally symbolized, to the domain of Logos, of articulated Word which cannot ever totally “force” it (like Badiou, Schelling insists on how there is always a remainder of the unnamable Real – the “indivisible remainder” – which eludes symbolization); at its most radical, the unnamable Unconscious is not external to Logos, it is not its obscure background, but, rather, *the very act of Naming, the very founding gesture of Logos*. The greatest contingency, the ultimate act of abyssal madness, is the very act of imposing a rational Necessity onto the pre-rational chaos of the Real. The true point of “madness” is thus not the pure excess of the Night of the World, but the madness of the passage to the Symbolic itself, of imposing a symbolic order onto the chaos of the Real. (Recall Freud who, in his analysis of the paranoiac judge Schreber, points out how the paranoiac “system” is not madness, but a desperate attempt to *escape* madness – the disintegration of the symbolic universe – through an ersatz universe of meaning.¹³) If madness is constitutive, then *every* system of meaning is minimally paranoiac, “mad.” Recall Brecht’s slogan “What is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of a new bank?”¹⁴ – therein resides the lesson of David Lynch’s *Straight Story*: what is the ridiculously pathetic perversity of figures like Bobby Peru in *Wild at Heart* or Frank in *Blue Velvet* compared to deciding to traverse the US central plane in a tractor to visit a dying relative? Measured with this act, Frank’s and Bobby’s outbreaks of rage are the impotent theatrics of old and sedate conservatives... In the same way, we should say: what is the mere madness caused by the loss of reason compared to the madness of reason itself?

This step is the properly “Hegelian” one – which is why Hegel, the philosopher who made the most radical attempt to think the abyss of madness at the core of subjectivity, is also the philosopher who brought to its “mad” climax the philosophical System as the totality of meaning. This is why, for very good reasons, “Hegel” stands in the eyes of the common sense for the moment at which philosophy gets mad, explodes into a crazy pretense at “absolute knowledge.”

However, Hegel’s point is here a much more refined one: not that everything is madness, but that “normality,” the reign of reason, is a self-sublation of madness, in the same way that the rule of law is the self-sublation of crime. Recall G. K. Chesterton’s religious thriller *The Man Who Was Thursday*, in which a mysterious chief of a super-secret Scotland Yard department is convinced that “a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization”:

He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business

to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense.... The work of the philosophical policeman... is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime.¹⁵

Would not thinkers as different as Popper, Adorno, and Levinas also subscribe to a slightly changed version of this idea, where actual political crime is called "totalitarianism" and the philosophical crime is condensed in the notion of "totality"? A straight road leads from the philosophical notion of totality to political totalitarianism, and the task of "philosophical police" is to discover from a book of Plato's dialogues or a treatise on social contract by Rousseau that a political crime will be committed. The ordinary political policeman goes to secret organizations to arrest revolutionaries; the philosophical policeman goes to philosophical symposia to detect proponents of totality. The ordinary anti-terrorist policeman tries to detect those preparing to blow up buildings and bridges; the philosophical policeman tries to detect those about to deconstruct the religious and moral foundation of our societies...

This provocative analysis demonstrates the limitation of Chesterton, his not being Hegelian enough: what he doesn't get is that *universal(ized) crime is no longer a crime – it sublates (negates/overcomes) itself as crime and turns from transgression into a new order*. He is right to claim that, compared to the "entirely lawless" philosopher, burglars, bigamists, murderers even, are essentially moral: a thief is a "conditionally good man," he doesn't deny property as such, he just wants more of it for himself and is then quite ready to respect it. However, the conclusion to be drawn from this is that crime as such is "essentially moral," that it wants just a particular illegal reordering of the global moral order which should remain. And, in a truly Hegelian spirit, one should bring this proposition (of the "essential morality" of the crime) to its immanent reversal: not only is crime "essentially moral" (in Hegelese: an inherent moment of the deployment of the inner antagonisms and "contradictions" of the very notion of moral order, not something that disturbs moral order from outside, as an accidental intrusion); but *morality itself is essentially criminal* – again, not only in the sense that the universal moral order necessarily "negates itself" in particular crimes, but, more radically, in the sense that *the way morality (in the case of theft, property) asserts itself is already in itself a crime* – "property IS theft," as they used to say in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ That is to say, one should pass from theft as a particular criminal violation of the universal form of property

to this form itself as a criminal violation: what Chesterton fails to perceive is that the “universalized crime” that he projects into “lawless modern philosophy” and its political equivalent, the “anarchist” movement that aims at destroying the totality of civilized life, *already exists in the guise of the existing rule of law*, so that the antagonism between Law and crime reveals itself to be inherent to crime, the antagonism between universal and particular crime.

It is in this sense that Chesterton asserted the truly subversive, revolutionary even, character of orthodoxy – in his famous “Defense of Detective Stories,” he remarked how the detective story “keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions. ... The romance of the police force ... is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies.”¹⁷ Therein resides the elementary matrix of the Hegelian dialectical process here: the external opposition (between Law and its criminal transgression) is transformed into the opposition, internal to the transgression itself, between particular transgressions and the absolute transgression which appears as its opposite, as the universal Law. This point was clearly made by none other than Richard Wagner, who, in his draft of the play *Jesus of Nazareth*, written somewhere between late 1848 and early 1849, attributes to Jesus a series of alternate supplementations of the Commandments:

The commandment saith: Thou shalt not commit adultery! But I say unto you: Ye shall not marry without love. A marriage without love is broken as soon as entered into, and whoso hath wooed without love, already hath broken the wedding. If ye follow my commandment, how can ye ever break it, since it bids you do what your own heart and soul desire? – But where ye marry without love, ye bind yourselves at variance with God’s law, and in your wedding ye sin against God; and this sin avengeth itself by your striving next against the law of man, in that ye break the marriage-vow.¹⁸

The true adultery is not to copulate outside marriage, but to copulate in marriage without love: simple adultery just violates the Law from outside, while marriage without love destroys it from within, turning the letter of the Law against its spirit. So, to paraphrase Brecht yet again: what is a simple adultery compared to (the adultery that is a loveless) marriage! It is not by chance that Wagner’s underlying formula “marriage is adultery” recalls Proudhon’s “property is theft” – in the stormy 1848 events, Wagner was not only a Feuerbachian celebrating sexual love, but also a Proudhonian revolutionary demanding the abolition of private property; so no wonder that, later on the same page, Wagner attributes to Jesus a Proudhonian supplement to “Thou shalt not steal!”:

This also is a good law: Thou shalt not steal, nor covet another man’s goods. Who goeth against it, sinneth: but I preserve you from that sin, inasmuch as

I teach you: Love thy neighbour as thyself; which also meaneth: Lay not up for thyself treasures, whereby thou stealest from thy neighbour and makest him to starve: for when thou hast thy goods safeguarded by the law of men, thou provokest thy neighbour to sin against the law.¹⁹

This is how the Christian “supplement” to the Book should be conceived: as a properly Hegelian “negation of negation,” which resides in the decisive shift from the *distortion of a notion* to a *distortion constitutive of this notion*, that is, to this notion as a distortion-in-itself. Recall again Proudhon’s old dialectical motto “property is theft”: the “negation of negation” is here the shift from theft as a distortion (“negation,” violation) of property to the dimension of theft inscribed into the very notion of property (nobody has the right to fully own means of production, their nature is inherently collective, so every claim “this is mine” is illegitimate). As we have just seen, the same goes for crime and Law, for the passage from crime as the distortion (“negation”) of the law to crime as sustaining law itself, that is, to the idea of the Law itself as universalized crime. One should note that, in this notion of the “negation of negation,” the encompassing unity of the two opposed terms is the “lowest,” “transgressive,” one: it is not crime which is a moment of law’s self-mediation (or theft which is a moment of property’s self-mediation); the opposition of crime and law is inherent to crime, law is a subspecies of crime, crime’s self-relating negation (in the same way that property is theft’s self-relating negation). And does ultimately the same not go for nature itself? Here, “negation of negation” is the shift from the idea that we are violating some natural balanced order to the idea that imposing on the Real such a notion of balanced order is in itself the greatest violation – which is why the premise, the first axiom even, of every radical ecology is “there is no Nature.” Chesterton wrote: “Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.”²⁰ We should endorse this statement, but in the opposite sense, not in the sense intended by Chesterton: we should accept that nature *is* “unnatural,” a freaky show of contingent disturbances with no inner rhyme.

It is only against this background that we can grasp what Hegel intended with his notion of “absolute knowing” – the formula here is: take away the illusion and you lose the truth itself – a truth needs time to make a journey through illusions to form itself. One should put Hegel back into the series of Plato-Descartes-Hegel which corresponds to the triad of Objective-Subjective-Absolute: Plato’s Ideas are objective, Truth embodied; the Cartesian subject stands for the unconditional certainty of my subjective self-awareness... and Hegel, what does he add? If “subjective” is what is relative to our subjective limitation, and if “objective” is the way things really are, what does “absolute” add to it? Hegel’s answer: the “absolute” does add some deeper, more substantial, dimension – all it does is to include (subjective) illusion into (objective) truth itself. The “absolute” standpoint makes us see how

reality includes fiction (or fantasy), how the right choice only emerges after the wrong one:

absolute knowing is the point at which consciousness reflexively assumes the fact that the share of illusion or fantasy is constitutive of the progress of truth. The truth is not located outside fantasy, since fantasy is the key element of its deployment. This insight compels us to conceive of absolute knowing as the point of traversing the fantasy... absolute knowing is to be seen as the point at which fantasy acquires its place in philosophy.... If fantasy first appeared as a *negativum*, i.e., as the point of failure of a specific philosophical wager, it is now conceived as a positive moment of the deployment of truth.²¹

Hegel thus enjoins us to turn around the entire history of philosophy, which constitutes a series of efforts to clearly differentiate *doxa* versus true knowledge: for Hegel, *doxa* is a constitutive part of knowledge, and this is what makes truth temporal and eventual. This eventual character of truth involves a logical paradox deployed by Jean-Pierre Dupuy in his admirable text on Hitchcock's *Vertigo*:

An object possesses a property x until the time t; after t, it is not only that the object no longer has the property x; it is that it is not true that it possessed x at any time. The truth-value of the proposition "the object O has the property x at the moment t" therefore depends on the moment when this proposition is enunciated.²²

One should note here the precise formulation: it is not that the truth-value of the proposition "the object O has the property x" depends on the time to which this proposition refers – *even when this time is specified, the truth-value depends on the time when the proposition itself is announced*. Or, to quote the title of Dupuy's text, "when I die, nothing of our love will ever have existed." Think about marriage and divorce: the most intelligent argument for the right to divorce (proposed, among others, by none other than the young Marx) does not refer to common vulgarities in the style of "like all things, love attachments are also not eternal, they change in the course of time," and so on; it rather concedes that indissolvability is in the very notion of marriage. The conclusion is that divorce always has a retroactive scope: it does not only mean that marriage is now annulled, but something much more radical – a marriage should be annulled because *it never was a true marriage*. And the same holds for Soviet Communism: it is clearly insufficient to say that, in the years of Brezhnev "stagnation," it "exhausted its potentials, no longer fitting new times"; what its miserable end demonstrates is that it was a historical deadlock *from its very beginning*.

This paradox provides a clue for the twists and turns of the Hegelian dialectical process. Let us take Hegel's critique of the Jacobin revolutionary Terror as an exercise in abstract negativity of the absolute freedom which

cannot stabilize itself in a concrete social order of freedom, and thus has to end in the fury of self-destruction. However, one should bear in mind that, insofar as we are dealing here with a historical choice (between the “French” way of remaining within Catholicism and thus being obliged to engage in the self-destructive revolutionary Terror, and the “German” way of Reformation), this choice involves exactly the same elementary dialectical paradox as the one, also from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, between the two readings of “the *being of Spirit is a bone*,” which Hegel illustrates by the phallic metaphor (phallus as the organ of insemination or phallus as the organ of urination) (PhG §343 [HW 3:260]): Hegel’s point is *not* that, in contrast to the vulgar empiricist mind which sees only urination, the proper speculative attitude has to choose insemination. The paradox is that the direct choice of insemination is the infallible way to miss it: it is not possible to choose directly the “true meaning”; one *has* to begin by making the “wrong” choice (of urination). The true speculative meaning emerges only through the repeated reading, as the after-effect (or by-product) of the first, “wrong,” reading. And the same goes for social life in which the direct choice of the “concrete universality” of a particular ethical life-world can only end in a regression to premodern organic society that denies the infinite right of subjectivity as the fundamental feature of modernity. Since the subject-citizen of a modern state can no longer accept his immersion in some particular social role that confers on him a determinate place within the organic social Whole, the only way to the rational totality of the modern State leads through revolutionary Terror: one should ruthlessly tear up the constraints of the premodern organic “concrete universality,” and fully assert the infinite right of subjectivity in its abstract negativity. In other words, the point of Hegel’s analysis of the revolutionary Terror is not the rather obvious insight into how the revolutionary project involved the unilateral direct assertion of abstract Universal Reason, and was as such doomed to perish in self-destructive fury, since it was unable to organize the transposition of its revolutionary energy into a concrete stable and differentiated social order; Hegel’s point is rather the enigma of why, in spite of the fact that revolutionary Terror was a historical deadlock, we have to pass through it in order to arrive at the modern rational State.

This is why Hegelian dialectics is not a vulgar evolutionism claiming that a phenomenon was justified in its own time, but deserves to disappear when its time passes: the “eternity” of dialectics means that the de-legitimization is always retroactive, what disappears “in itself” always deserved to disappear. Recall also the paradox of the process of apologizing: if I hurt someone with a rude remark, the proper thing for me to do is to offer him a sincere apology, and the proper thing for him to do is to say something like, “Thanks, I appreciate it, but I wasn’t offended, I knew you didn’t mean it, so you really owe

me no apology!" The point is, of course, that, although the final result is that no apology is needed, one has to go through the entire process of offering it: "you owe me no apology" can only be said after I DO offer an apology, so that, although, formally, "nothing happens," the offer of apology is proclaimed unnecessary, there is a gain at the end of the process (perhaps, even, the friendship is saved). This paradox is sustained by the distinction between the "constative" and the "performative" dimensions, between "subject of the enunciated" and "subject of the enunciation": at the level of the enunciated content, the whole operation is meaningless (why do it – offer an apology, go through terror – when it is superfluous?); however, what this commonsense insight forgets is that it is only the "wrong" superfluous gesture which creates the subjective conditions which made it possible for the subject to really see *why* this gesture is superfluous. It only becomes possible to say that my apology is not necessary after I offer it; it only becomes possible to see how Terror is superfluous and destructive after one goes through it. The dialectical process is thus more refined than it may appear; the standard notion is that, in it, one can only arrive at the final truth through the path of errors, so that these errors are not simply discarded, but "sublated" in the final truth, preserved in it as its moments. What this standard notion misses is how the errors are "sublated" (negated-preserved-elevated) *precisely as superfluous*.

How is this circle of changing the past possible without recourse to travel back in time? The solution was already proposed by Henri Bergson: of course one cannot change the past reality/actuality, but what one can change is the virtual dimension of the past – when something radically New emerges, this New retroactively creates its own possibility, its own causes/conditions.²³ A potentiality can be inserted into (or withdrawn from) past reality. Falling in love changes the past: it is as if I *always-already* loved you, our love was destined, "answer of the real." My present love causes the past which gave birth to it – and in *Vertigo*, it is the opposite that occurs: the past is changed so that it loses *objet a*. What Scottie first experiences in *Vertigo* is the loss of Madeleine, his fatal love; when he recreates Madeleine in Judy and then discovers that the Madeleine he knew already was Judy pretending to be Madeleine, what he discovers is not simply that Judy is a fake (he knew that she is not the true Madeleine, since he recreated a copy of Madeleine out of her), but that, *because she is NOT a fake – she IS Madeleine – Madeleine herself was already a fake – objet a* disintegrates, the very loss is lost, we get a "negation of negation." Scottie's discovery *changes the past*, deprives the lost object of *objet a*. The same temporal paradox characterizes all events proper, inclusive of the political ones – Rosa Luxembourg was well aware of it when, in her polemic against Eduard Bernstein, she provides two arguments against the revisionist fear that the proletariat will take power prematurely, before the circumstances are ripe:

In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realized in one happy act... The socialist transformation supposes a long and stubborn struggle, in the course of which, it is quite probable the proletariat will be repulsed more than once so that for the first time, from the viewpoint of the final outcome of the struggle, it will have necessarily come to power too early.

In the second place, it will be impossible to avoid the “premature” conquest of State power by the proletariat precisely because these “premature” attacks of the proletariat constitute a factor and indeed a very important factor, creating the political conditions of the final victory. In the course of the political crisis accompanying its seizure of power, in the course of the long and stubborn struggles, the proletariat will acquire the degree of political maturity permitting it to obtain in time a definitive victory of the revolution. Thus these “premature” attacks of the proletariat against the State power are in themselves important historic factors helping to provoke and determine the *point* of the definite victory. Considered from this viewpoint, the idea of a “premature” conquest of political power by the labouring class appears to be a polemic absurdity derived from a mechanical conception of the development of society, and positing for the victory of the class struggle a point fixed *outside* and *independent of* the class struggle.

Since the proletariat is not in the position to seize power in any other way than “prematurely,” since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power once or several times “too early” before it can maintain itself in power for good, the objection to the “premature” conquest of power is at bottom nothing more than a *general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to possess itself of State power*.²⁴

There is no meta-language: no outside-position from which the agent can calculate how many “premature” attempts are needed to get at the right moment – why? Because this is a case of truth which arises out of misrecognition (*la vérité surgit de la méprise*, as Lacan put it) where the “premature” attempts transform the very space/measure of temporality: the subject “jumps ahead” and takes a risk in making a move before its conditions are fully met.²⁵ The subject’s engagement in the symbolic order coils the linear flow of time in both directions: it involves precipitation as well as retroactivity (things retroactively become what they are, the identity of a thing only emerges when the thing is in delay with regard to itself) – in short, every act is by definition too early and, simultaneously, too late. One has to know to wait, not to lose one’s nerves: if one acts too fast, the act turns into a *passage a l’acte*, a violent forward-escape to avoid the deadlock. If one misses the moment and acts too late, the act loses its

quality of the act, of a radical intervention as a consequence of which “nothing remains the way it was,” and becomes just a local change within the order of being, part of the normal flow of things. The problem is, of course, that an act always occurs simultaneously too fast (the conditions are never fully ripe, one has to succumb to the urgency to intervene, there is never enough time to wait, enough time for strategic calculations, the act has to anticipate its certainty and risk the wager that it will retroactively establish its own conditions) and too late (the very urgency of the act signals that we come too late, that we always should have already acted; every act is a reaction to circumstances which arose because we were too late to act). In short, *there is no right moment to act* – if we wait for the right moment, the act is reduced to an occurrence in the order of being.

It is because of this temporal complication that, in Hegel, everything becomes evental: a thing is the result of the process (event) of its own becoming, and this processuality de-substantializes it. Spirit itself is thus radically de-substantialized: it is not a positive counter-force to nature, a different substance which gradually breaks and shines through the inert natural stuff; it is *nothing but* this process of freeing-itself-from. Hegel directly disowns the notion of Spirit as some kind of positive Agent which underlies the process:

Spirit is usually spoken of as subject, as doing something, and apart from what it does, as this motion, this process, as still particularized, its activity being more or less contingent; it is of the very nature of spirit to be this absolute liveliness, this process, to proceed forth from naturality, immediacy, to sublimate, to quit its naturality, and to come to itself, and *to free itself*, it being itself only as it comes to itself as such a product of itself; *its actuality being merely that it has made itself into what it is.* (PSS 1:7, emphasis added)

The materialist reversal of Hegel in Ludwig Feuerbach and the young Marx rejects this self-referential circularity, dismissing it as a case of idealist mystification, and returns to the Aristotelian ontology of substantial entities endowed with essential qualities: for Marx, man is a *Gattungswesen* (being-of-genus) which asserts its life by way of realizing its “essential forces.” Robert Pippin exemplifies in what sense the Hegelian Spirit is “its own result” by the finale of Proust’s *Recherche*: how does Marcel finally “become what he is”? By way of breaking with the Platonic illusion that his Self can be “secured by anything, any value or reality that transcends the wholly temporal human world”:

It was...by failing to become “what a writer is,” to realize his inner “writerly essence” – as if that role must be some transcendently important or even a definite, substantial role – that Marcel realizes that such a becoming is

important by *not* being secured by the transcendent, *by* being wholly temporal and finite, always and everywhere in suspense, and yet nonetheless capable of some illumination. ...If Marcel has become who he is, and this somehow continuous with and a product of the experience of his own past, it is unlikely that we will be able to understand that by appeal to a substantial or underlying self, now discovered, or even by appeal to successor substantial selves, each one linked to the future and past by some sort of self-regard.²⁶

It is thus only by way of fully accepting this abyssal circularity in which the search itself creates what it is looking for, that the Spirit “finds itself.” This is why the verb “failing” used by Pippin is to be given all its weight: the failure to achieve the (immediate) goal is absolutely crucial to, constitutive of, this process – or, again, as Lacan put it: *la verite surgit de la meprise*.²⁷ If, then, “it is *only* as the result of itself that it has being as spirit” (PSS 1:7), this means that the standard talk about the Hegelian Spirit which alienates itself to itself and then recognizes itself in its otherness and thus reappropriates its content, is deeply misleading: the Self to which spirit returns is produced in the very movement of this return, or, that to which the process of return is returning to is produced by the very process of returning.

This, also, is the reason why Hegel is the ultimate Christian philosopher. As it was made clear by Kierkegaard, Christianity is the first and only religion of the Event: the only access to the Absolute (God) is through our acceptance of the unique event of Incarnation as a singular historical occurrence. This is why Kierkegaard says that it is Christ versus Socrates: Socrates stands for remembrance, for rediscovering the substantial higher reality of Ideas which are always-already in us, while Christ announces the “good news” of a radical break. The event proper is “Christ has risen,” the Christian belief is a belief in this miracle – however, we should not take resurrection as something that happens AFTER Christ’s death, but as the obverse of the death itself – Christ is alive as the Holy Ghost, as the love that bounds the community of believers.²⁸ In short, “Christ has risen” means Christ has fallen: in other religions, man falls from God (into sinful terrestrial life or whatsoever); only in Christianity does God himself fall – how, from where? The only possibility is: from himself, into his own creation.²⁹

To put it in mystical terms, the Christian Event is the exact opposite of any “return to innocence”: it is the Original Sin itself, the abyssal disturbance of the primeval Peace, the primordial “pathological” choice of the unconditional attachment to some singular object (like falling in love with a singular person which, thereafter, matters to us more than everything else). In Buddhist terms, a Christian event is the exact structural obverse of the Enlightenment, of attaining nirvana: the very gesture by means of which the Void is disturbed

and Difference (and, with it, false appearance and suffering) emerges in the world. Here is Tertullian at his misogynist worst, addressing women:

Do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man [Adam]. On account of your desert – that is, death – even the Son of God had to die.³⁰

But is the last line not profoundly ambiguous? This ambiguity is similar to the one we encountered in the fall of 2006 when Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali, Australia's most senior Muslim cleric, caused a scandal – after a group of Muslim men had been jailed for gang rape, he said: “If you take uncovered meat and place it outside on the street ... and the cats come and eat it. ... whose fault is it – the cats or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem.”³¹ The explosively scandalous nature of this comparison between a woman who is not veiled and raw, uncovered meat distracted attention from another, much more surprising premise underlying al-Hilali's argument: if women are held responsible for the sexual conduct of men, does this not imply that men are totally helpless when faced with what they perceive as a sexual provocation, that they are simply unable to resist it, that they are totally enslaved to their sexual hunger, precisely like a cat when it sees raw meat? In other words, does it not imply that brutal rapist men act as if they are still in Paradise, beyond good and evil? Similarly, is Eve, much more than, not the only true partner of God in the affair of the Fall? The act (the catastrophic decision) is hers: she opens up the path toward the recognition of the difference between good and evil (which is the consequence of the Fall) and toward the shame of being naked – in short, the path toward the properly human universe. All one should do here to grasp the true situation is to bear in mind Hegel's (rather obvious) point: the innocence of the “paradise” is another name for animal life, so that what the Bible calls “Fall” is nothing but the passage from animal life to properly human existence. It is thus the Fall itself which creates the dimension from which it is the Fall – or, as Saint Augustine put it long ago: “[God] judged it better to bring good out of evil than to allow nothing evil to exist.”³²

One has to be careful here not to succumb to the perverse reading of the priority of the Fall; the most radical case of such a reading was provided by Nicolas Malebranche, the great Cartesian Catholic, excommunicated after his death and his books destroyed on account of his very excessive orthodoxy – Lacan probably had figures like Malebranche in his mind when he claimed that theologians are the only true atheists.³³ In the best Pascalean tradition,

Malebranche laid the cards on the table and “revealed the secret” (the perverse core) of Christianity; his Christology is based on an original proto-Hegelian answer to the question “Why did God create the world?” – so that He could bask in the glory of being celebrated by His creation. God wanted recognition, and He knew that, for recognition, I need another subject to recognize me; so He created the world out of pure selfish vanity. Consequently, it was not that Christ came down to Earth in order to deliver people from sin, from the legacy of Adam’s Fall; on the contrary, *Adam had to fall in order to enable Christ to come down to earth and dispense salvation*. Here Malebranche applies to God Himself the “psychological” insight which tells us that the saintly figure who sacrifices himself for the benefit of others, to deliver them from their misery, secretly *wants* the others to suffer misery *so that he will be able to help them* – like the proverbial husband who works all day for his poor crippled wife, yet would probably abandon her if she were to regain her health and turn into a successful career woman. It is much more satisfying to sacrifice oneself for the poor victim than to enable the other to lose the status of a victim and perhaps become even more successful than ourselves...Malebranche develops this parallel to its conclusion, to the horror of the Jesuits who organized his excommunication: in the same way that the saintly person uses the suffering of others to bring about his own narcissistic satisfaction in helping those in distress, God also ultimately *loves only himself*, and merely uses man to promulgate his own glory...From this reversal, Malebranche draws a consequence worthy of Lacan’s reversal of Dostoyevsky (“*If God doesn’t exist, then nothing is permitted*”): it is not true that, if Christ had not come to earth to deliver humanity, everyone would have been lost – quite the contrary, *nobody* would have been lost, that is, *every* human being had to fall so that Christ could come and deliver *some* of them...Malebranche’s conclusion is here shattering: since the death of Christ is a key step in realizing the goal of creation, at no time was God (the Father) happier than when he was observing His son suffering and dying on the Cross.

The only way to truly avoid this perversion, not just to obfuscate it, is to fully accept the Fall as the starting point which creates the conditions of Salvation: there is nothing previous to the Fall from which we fall; the Fall itself creates that from which it is a Fall – or, in theological terms, God is not the Beginning. If this sounds as yet another typical Hegelian dialectical tangle, then we should disentangle it by way of drawing the line of separation between the true Hegelian dialectical process and its caricature. In this caricature, we have God (or an inner Essence) externalizing itself in the domain of contingent appearances, and then gradually reappropriating its alienated content, recognizing itself in its Otherness – “we must first lose God in order to find him,” we must fall in order to be saved...Such a position opens up the space for the justification of Evil: if, as agents of historical Reason, we know that Evil is just

a necessary detour on the path toward the final triumph of the Good, then, of course, we are justified in engaging in Evil as the means to achieve the Good. In a true Hegelian spirit, however, we should insist that such a justification is always and *a priori* retroactive: there is no Reason in History whose divine plan can justify Evil; the Good that may come out of Evil is its contingent by-product. We can say that the ultimate result of Nazi Germany and its defeat was the rise of much higher ethical standards of human rights and international justice; however, to claim that this result in any sense “justifies” Nazism is an obscenity. It is only in this way that we can truly avoid the perverse logic of religious fundamentalism. Among the Christian theologians, it is – as usual – G. K. Chesterton who was not afraid to draw the consequences from this paradox, locating precisely at this point the break between the Ancient world and Christianity:

The Greeks, the great guides and pioneers of pagan antiquity, started out with the idea of something splendidly obvious and direct; the idea that if man walked straight ahead on the high road of reason and nature, he could come to no harm. ... And the case of the Greeks themselves is alone enough to illustrate the strange but certain fatality that attends upon this fallacy. No sooner did the Greeks themselves begin to follow their own noses and their own notion of being natural, than the queerest thing in history seems to have happened to them. ... The wisest men in the world set out to be natural; and the most unnatural thing in the world was the very first thing they did. The immediate effect of saluting the sun and the sunny sanity of nature was a perversion spreading like a pestilence. The greatest and even the purest philosophers could not apparently avoid this low sort of lunacy. Why? ... When Man goes straight he goes crooked. When he follows his nose he manages somehow to put his nose out of joint, or even to cut off his nose to spite his face; and that in accordance with something much deeper in human nature than nature-worshippers could ever understand. It was the discovery of that deeper thing, humanly speaking, that constituted the conversion to Christianity. There is a bias in man like the bias in the bowl; and Christianity was the discovery of how to correct the bias and therefore hit the mark. There are many who will smile at the saying; but it is profoundly true to say that the glad good news brought by the Gospel was the news of original sin.³⁴

The Greeks thus lost their moral compass precisely because they believed in spontaneous and basic uprightness of a human being, and thus neglected the “bias” toward Evil in the very core of a human being: true Good does not rise when we follow our nature, but when we fight it.³⁵ This logic is at work in Wagner’s *Parsifal*, whose final message is a profoundly Hegelian one:

“The wound can be healed only by the spear that smote it [*Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur, der sie schlug*].”³⁶ Hegel says the same thing, although with the accent shifted in the opposite direction: the Spirit is itself the wound it tries to heal, that is, the wound is self-inflicted. That is to say, what is “Spirit” at its most elementary? The “wound” of nature: subject is the immense – absolute – power of negativity, of introducing a gap/cut into the given-immediate substantial unity, the power of differentiating, of “abstracting,” of tearing apart and treating as self-standing what in reality is part of an organic unity. This is why the notion of the “self-alienation” of Spirit (of Spirit losing itself in its otherness, in its objectivization, in its result) is more paradoxical than it may appear. It should be read together with Hegel’s assertion of the thoroughly non-substantial character of Spirit: there is no *res cogitans*, no thing which (as its property) also thinks; spirit is nothing but the process of overcoming natural immediacy, of the cultivation of this immediacy, of withdrawing-into-itself or “taking off” from it, of – why not? – alienating itself from it. The paradox is thus that there is no Self that precedes the Spirit’s “self-alienation”: the very process of alienation creates/generates the “Self” from which Spirit is alienated and to which it then returns. (Hegel here turns around the standard notion that a failed version of X presupposes this X as their norm [measure]: X is created, its space is outlined, only through repetitive failures to reach it.) Spirit’s self-alienation is the same as, fully coincides with, its alienation from its Other (nature), because it constitutes itself through its “return-to-itself” from its immersion into natural Otherness. In other words, Spirit’s return-to-itself creates the very dimension to which it returns. (This holds for all “return to origins”: when, from the nineteenth century onwards, new Nation-States were popping up in Central and Eastern Europe, their return to “old ethnic roots” generated these roots.) What this means is that the “negation of negation,” the “return-to-oneseelf” from alienation, does not occur where it seems to: in the “negation of negation,” Spirit’s negativity is not relativized, subsumed under an encompassing positivity; it is, on the contrary, the “simple negation” which remains attached to the presupposed positivity it negated, the presupposed Otherness from which it alienates itself, and the “negation of negation” is nothing but the negation of the substantial character of this Otherness itself, the full acceptance of the abyss of Spirit’s self-relating which retroactively posits all its presuppositions. In other words, once we are in negativity, we never quit it and regain the lost innocence of Origins; it is, on the contrary, only in “negation of negation” that the Origins are truly lost, that their very loss is lost, that they are deprived of the substantial status of that which was lost. The Spirit heals its wound not by directly healing it, but by getting rid of the very full and sane Body into which the wound was cut. This paradox should make us aware of how one can (mis)perform a good deed. There is a nicely vulgar joke about Christ: the night before he was arrested and crucified, his followers started to worry – Christ was

still a virgin, wouldn't it be nice to have him experience a little bit of pleasure before he dies? So they asked Mary Magdalene to go to the tent where Christ was resting and seduce him; Mary said she will do it gladly and went in, but five minutes after, she ran out screaming, terrified and furious. The followers asked her what went wrong, and she explained: "I slowly undressed, spread my legs and showed to Christ my pussy; he looked at it and said, 'What a terrible wound! It should be healed!' and gently put his palm on it..." So beware of people too intent on healing other people's wounds – what if one enjoys one's wound? At its sharpest, this coincidence of the opposites appears apropos self-consciousness, the subject as thinking:

Abstractly, being evil means singularizing myself in a way that cuts me off from the universal (which is the rational, the laws, the determinations of spirit). But along with this separation there arises being-for-self and for the first time the universally spiritual, laws – what ought to be. So it is not the case that [rational] consideration has an external relationship to evil: it is itself what is evil. (LPR 3:206 [VPR 138])

The serpent says that by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve will become like God; and after the two do it, God comments: "Behold, Adam has become like one of us" (Genesis 3:22). Hegel's comment is: "So the serpent did not lie, for God confirms what it said." Then he goes on to reject the claim that what God says is meant with irony: "Cognition is the principle of spirituality, and this...is also the principle by which the injury of the separation is healed. It is in this principle of cognition that the principle of divinity [or spirituality] is also posited" (LPR 3:207 [VPR 139]). Subjective freedom is not just the possibility to choose evil or good, "it is the consideration or the cognition that *makes* people evil, so that consideration and cognition [themselves] are what is evil, and that [therefore] such cognition is what ought not to exist [because it] is the *source* of evil" (LPR 3:205 [VPR 137]). This is how one should understand Hegel's dictum from his *Phenomenology* that Evil is the gaze itself which perceives Evil everywhere around it: the gaze which sees Evil excludes itself from the social Whole it criticizes, and this exclusion is the formal characteristics of Evil. And Hegel's point is that the Good emerges as a possibility and duty only through this primordial/constitutive choice of Evil: we experience the Good when, after choosing Evil, we become aware of the utter inadequacy of our situation. – At a more formal level of his logic of reflection, Hegel uses the unique term *absoluter Gegenstoss* (counter-push, counter-thrust, or, why not, simply counterpunch); a withdrawal-from creates what it withdraws from:

Reflection thus *finds* an immediate *before it* which it transcends and from which it is the turning back. But this turning back is only the presupposing

of what was antecedently found. This antecedent *comes to be* only by being *left behind*. ... [T]he movement of reflection is to be taken as an *absolute internal counter-repelling* [*absoluter Gegenstoß*]. For the presupposition of the turning back into itself – that from which essence *arises*, essence *being* only as this coming back – is only in the turning back itself. (SL 348 [HW 6:27])

“This antecedent” – what is found – “*comes to be* only by being *left behind*,” and its inversion (it is “only in the turning back itself” that what we return to emerges, like nations who constitute themselves by way of “returning to their roots,” producing what Eric Hobsbawm called “invented traditions”³⁷), are the two sides of what Hegel calls “absolute reflection” (SL 348 [HW 6:28]): a reflection which is no longer external to its object, presupposing it as given, but a reflection which, as it were, closes the loop and posits its presupposition. Some Indian cultural theorists complain that the fact that they are compelled to use the English language is a form of cultural colonialism, censoring their true identity: “We have to speak in an imposed foreign language to express our innermost identity, and does this not put us in a position of radical alienation – even our resistance to colonization has to be formulated in the language of the colonizer?” The answer to this is: yes, but this imposition of English – a foreign language – created the very X which is “oppressed” by it, because what is oppressed is not the actual precolonial India but the authentic dream of a new universalist democratic India... (Malcolm X was following the same insight when he adopted X as his family name: he was not fighting on behalf of the return to some primordial African roots, but precisely on behalf of an X, an unknown new identity opened up by the very process of slavery which made the African roots forever lost.) This case shows how, of course, the point is not that there is nothing prior to negation – of course there was something before (in the case of India, a vast and complex tradition), but it was a heterogeneous mess which has nothing to do with the later national revival. (Maybe Foucault has a point here: the discovery of what went on before is the topic of genealogy which, precisely, has nothing to do with the historicist topic of origins.)

To put it in Derridean terms, the condition of possibility is here radically and simultaneously the condition of impossibility: the very obstacle to the full assertion of our identity opens up the space for it. Another exemplary case: the Hungarian ruling class “had long ‘possessed’ (i.e., patronized and cultivated) a distinctive music, the so-called *magyar nóta* (‘Hungarian tune’), which in educated Hungarian circles was regarded as a stylistic emblem of the national identity,”³⁸ and predictably, in the nineteenth century, with the great national revival, this style exploded in operas and symphonies. When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, modernist composers like Bartók and Kodály started to collect authentic popular music and discovered that it “was of an altogether

different style and character from the *magyar nóta*,"³⁹ and, even worse, that it consisted of the inextricable mixture of "all the peoples who inhabited 'greater Hungary' – Romanians, Slovaks, Bulgars, Croats, and Serbs – and even ethnically remoter peoples like the Turks...or the Arabs of North Africa."⁴⁰ For this, Bartók was, predictably, reviled by nationalists and felt impelled to leave Hungary.

This, then, is the dialectical process: an inconsistent mess (first phase, the starting point) which is negated and, through negation, the Origin is projected/*posited* backwards, so that a tension is created between the present and the lost Origin (second step). In the third step, the Origin is perceived as inaccessible, relativized – we are in external reflection, that is, our reflection is external to the posited Origin which is experienced as a transcendent presupposition. In the fourth step of absolute reflection, our external reflexive movement is transposed back into the Origin itself, as its own self-withdrawal/decentering/antagonism. We thus reach the triad of positing, external, and absolute reflection.⁴¹

The ultimate case is here, of course, that of the subject itself: the priority of the Fall means that we should drop all the standard "Hegelian" talk about the subject's alienation, externalization in its own product in which it no longer recognizes itself, and then its reappropriation of this alienated content as its own product. There is no subject which is the agent of the process and suffers a loss; the subject is the outcome of a loss. This is what Lacan indicates by his notion of a "barred," crossed-out, subject (\$): the subject is not just thwarted, blocked, impeded, stigmatized by a constitutive impossibility; the subject is the result of its own failure, of the failure of its symbolic representation – a subject endeavors to express itself in a signifier, it fails, and the subject is this failure. This is what Lacan means by his deceptively simple claim that, ultimately, a subject is what is not an object – every hysteric knows this well, since the hysterical question is: What kind of object am I for the Other? How does the Other desire me? In other words, the primordial lost object of desire is *the subject itself*.

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 2: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton 1991), 71.
2. Alain Badiou, *La République de Platon: dialogue en un prologue, seize chapitres et un épilogue* (Paris: Fayard, 2012).
3. David Gress, *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and Its Opponents* (New York: Free Press, 1998).
4. "Plato, Aristotle, and the 2000 Election," *Slate*, August 4, 2000, www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/chatbox/2000/08/plato_aristotle_and_the_2000_election.html.

5. See Alain Badiou, *Eloge de l'amour* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 15.
6. "Love by Choice," *Hindustan Times*, Jan. 3, 2010, p. 11.
7. Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006), 9.
8. One should nonetheless add that, a couple of years later, he refuted systematically his own argument and advocated the excellence of men.
9. Translation quoted from Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 7–8. In the *Encyclopedia* also, Hegel mentions the "night-like abyss within which a world of infinitely numerous images and presentations is preserved without being in consciousness" (PSS 3:153). Hegel's historical source here is Jakob Böhme.
10. Translation quoted from Verene, *Hegel's Recollection*, 8.
11. Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958), 12:1–84.
12. For a more detailed reading of this notion, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder* (London: Verso, 1996), 13–91.
13. Freud, "Notes upon a Case of Paranoia," 1–84.
14. Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, in *Collected Plays*, vol. 2, ed. Ralph Manheim and John Willett (New York: Vintage, 1977), scene 9, pp. 222–23.
15. G. K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 44–45.
16. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?* ed. and trans. Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 13–14.
17. G. K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Detective Stories," in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 6.
18. Richard Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 303.
19. *Ibid.*, 303–4.
20. G. K. Chesterton, "Christmas and the Aesthetes," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 1: *Heretics, Orthodoxy, and the Blatchford Controversies* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 88.
21. Jela Krecic, "Philosophy, Fantasy, Film" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ljubljana, 2008).
22. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Quand je mourrai, rien de notre amour n'aura jamais existé," unpublished manuscript presented at the colloquium "*Vertigo*" et la philosophie, École Normale Supérieure, Paris, October 14, 2005.
23. For a more detailed elaboration of this line of thought of Bergson, see Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 420–61.
24. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, ch. 8, www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch08.htm.
25. This is what, perhaps, makes problematic the practice of short sessions introduced by Lacan. The idea is clear: Lacan noticed that, in the standard fifty-minute session, the patient is just going on with his/her blah-blah, and that it is only in the last minutes, when the shadow of the end, of being cut off by the analyst, is close that s/he gets into a panic and produces some valuable material; so the idea came to him: why not simply skip the long period of lost time and limit the session to the last minutes when, under time pressure, something really happens? The problem here is: can we really get only the productive final part without the preceding forty-five minutes of lost time during which nonetheless functions as the time of gestation of the content exploding in last five minutes?

26. Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 332–34.
27. Jacques Lacan, “La vérité surgit de la méprise,” in *Séminaire I: Les écrits techniques de Freud, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 287–99.
28. In the 2012 blockbuster *Wrath of Titans*, there is nonetheless an interesting line when one of the gods claims that humans are immortal, because after their death they continue to live (in their immortal soul or in tradition), while only gods are truly mortal: when they die, they really disappear, and nothing remains. Heidegger’s dyad of mortals and immortals should thus be turned around: human immortals versus mortal gods (Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles H. Seibert [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993], 84–107).
29. Christianity thus enjoins us to reverse the terms of “king’s two bodies”: God himself has two bodies, but in crucifixion, it is not the terrestrial body which dies, while the sublime body remains as the Holy Spirit; what dies on the cross is the very sublime body of Christ.
30. Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, section I.I, part 2, www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-06.htm#P265_52058.
31. “Vile Rape Remarks Can’t Be Forgiven,” *Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 27, 2006, www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/vile-rape-remarks-cant-be-forgiven/story-e6frezz0-1111112422817.
32. Augustine of Hippo, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith Hope and Charity*, trans. Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1999), §27.
33. Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XX: Encore*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 45.
34. G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: Continuum, 2001), 27–29.
35. Schelling made the same point when he emphasized how, in the Ancient Roman empire, the rise of Christianity was preceded by the rise of decadence and corruption (see *Philosophie der Mythologie* [SW II/2] and *Philosophie der Offenbarung* [SW II/3]).
36. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act 2.
37. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.
38. Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 367.
39. *Ibid.*, 375.
40. *Ibid.*, 378.
41. For a more detailed description of Hegel’s triad of reflection, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 201–31.

29

Hegel's *Geist* – Immodestly Metaphysical!

J. M. Fritzman and Kristin Parvizian

Compearance is of a more originary order than that of the bond. It does not set itself up, it does not establish itself, it does not emerge among already given subjects (objects). It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) – a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: “you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I” (“*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*”). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* (“*toi partage moi*”).

– Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*¹

In “The Extended Mind Rehabilitates the Metaphysical Hegel,” J. M. Fritzman and Kristin Parvizian demonstrate that the thesis of the extended mind provides the resources to articulate and defend the metaphysical reading of Hegel's philosophy.² This chapter substantially extends that argument by showing that the reading of Hegel's *Geist* as immodestly metaphysical is philosophically credible.

Beat Hegel, Square Hegel, and Hegel

The Westerner who is attracted by Zen and who would understand it deeply must have one indispensable qualification: he must understand his own culture so thoroughly that he is no longer swayed by its premises unconsciously. He must really have come to terms with the Lord God Jehovah and with his Hebrew-Christian conscience so that he can take it or leave it without fear or rebellion. He must be free of the itch to justify himself. Lacking this, his Zen will be either “beat” or “square,” either a revolt from the culture and social order or a new form of stuffiness and respectability. For Zen is above all the liberation of the mind from conventional thought,

and this is something utterly different from rebellion against convention, on the one hand, or adopting foreign conventions, on the other.

– Alan W. Watts, “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen”³

In his 1958 article, “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen,” Alan W. Watts fusses that Beat Zen and Square Zen are not fully Zen. He employs “beat” to refer to “a younger generation’s nonparticipation in ‘the American Way of Life,’ a revolt which does not seek to change the existing order but simply turns away from it to find the significance of life in subjective experience rather than objective achievement.”⁴ Beat Zen, in Watts’s experience, “is always a shade too self-conscious, too subjective, and too strident to have the flavor of Zen.”⁵

Beat Zen flouts conventionality, while Square Zen endorses a foreign variety. “Square Zen is the Zen of established tradition in Japan with its clearly defined hierarchy, its rigid discipline, and its specific tests of *satori*. More particularly, it is the kind of Zen adopted by Westerners studying in Japan, who will before long be bringing it back home.” Further, Square Zen is “square because it is a quest for the *right* spiritual experience, for a *satori* which will receive the stamp (*inka*) of approved and established authority. There will even be certificates to hang on the wall.”⁶

Watts has an alternative to Beat Zen and Square Zen: Zen. Zen is not beat or square. Rather, Zen is that of “the old Chinese Zen masters,” who “were steeped in Taoism.” Watts writes:

They saw nature in its total interrelatedness, and saw that every creature and every experience is in accord with the Tao of nature just as it is. This enabled them to accept themselves as they were, moment by moment, without the least need to justify anything. They didn’t do it to defend themselves or to find an excuse for getting away with murder. They didn’t brag about it and set themselves apart as rather special. On the contrary, their Zen was *wu-shih*, which means approximately “nothing special” or “no fuss.” But Zen is “fuss” when it is mixed up with Bohemian affectations, and “fuss” when it is imagined that the only proper way to find it is to run off to a monastery in Japan or to do special exercises in the lotus posture for five hours a day. And I will admit that the very hullabaloo about Zen, even in such an article as this, is also fuss – but a little less so.⁷

Beat Zen makes a fuss snubbing respectability, and Square Zen makes a fuss seeking it. Zen is indifferent to respectability and so makes no fuss about it at all. Moreover, Zen does not make a fuss about fuss, or even about avoiding it. “Fuss is all right too,” Watts informs his readers, and so “if you are hung up on Zen, there’s no need to try to pretend that you are not.”⁸ Watts concludes his article with a Zen poem:

In the landscape of Spring there is neither better nor worse;
The flowering branches grow naturally, some long, some short.⁹

If in Zen, like spring's landscape, there is neither better nor worse, then – to practice immanent critique for a moment – it is hard to see why Watts fusses at all, even a little, about Beat Zen or Square Zen. If Zen is the landscape, presumably with Beat Zen and Square Zen branches of differing lengths – to tarry for another moment – would Watts then propose the landscape as the alternative to long and short branches?

Watts intends Zen to be an alternative to the fuss of Beat Zen and Square Zen, but he is perceived as advocating Square Zen. “Even though Watts carefully attempts to disassociate himself from either Beat or Square versions of Zen, he becomes associated with the latter,” Jane Naomi Iwamura reports, adding that “many years later, he would also depart from his own definitions and admit to the squareness of his 1950s façade.”¹⁰ As a result, Watts's actual alternative to Beat Zen and Square Zen is not Zen: it is Square Zen, masquerading as Zen. There is no third option, only the original two. What presents itself as the third, transcending and mediating the two, is itself one of the two. Indifference to respectability – when preached, without violating its norms – is itself a mode of respectability. Making a little less fuss is still making a fuss, after all. Watts acknowledges this. Making a little less fuss is also an effective way of making a fuss, while pretending to be making none, or almost none. He does not mention this.

Attentive readers will already have anticipated that the fuss about “Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen” strikingly resembles the fuss about “the metaphysical Hegel, the non-metaphysical Hegel, and Hegel.” The reading of Hegel's philosophy as metaphysical holds that there is a cosmic spirit or mind that has a rational structure and is fully comprehensible – as will be discussed more fully below – while the non-metaphysical interpretation maintains that Hegel is providing a normative account of the social institutions through which persons hold each other responsible. Scholars mean to explicate Hegel's philosophy, avoiding the presumed one-sided alternatives of metaphysical and non-metaphysical, only to discover that their interpretations nevertheless collapse into one or the other of the dichotomies that they sought to avoid. There are two ways to respond to this. The first is to attempt to articulate, more carefully than ever, an interpretation that presents a Hegel who is not one-sided. This is doomed. The second is to recognize that the sublation of the metaphysical Hegel and the non-metaphysical Hegel is not Hegel *tout court*. Rather, the sublation of the metaphysical Hegel and the non-metaphysical Hegel is the metaphysical Hegel.¹¹ That is worth making a fuss about.

We are hung up about Hegel. Our certificates hang on the wall.

First approximations

To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

– Joseph Brackett, Jr., “Simple Gifts”¹²

Geist appears extensively in Hegel’s texts, especially in the 1807 *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and the 1830 *Philosophie des Geistes*. According to Michael N. Forster’s reading of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel’s text actually presents three histories.¹³ The chapters “Consciousness” through “Reason” narrate history from the point of view of various worldviews, what Hegel refers to as “shapes of consciousness.” Next, the “Spirit” chapter tells the history of the social contexts of those worldviews. Finally, the chapters on “Reason” and “Absolute Knowing” examine the history of religions and philosophies of those worldviews. The account presented in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* is diachronic, discussing first the historical development of worldviews, next their social contexts, and finally their religions and philosophies. By contrast, the account of the *Philosophie des Geistes* is comparatively more synchronic, as it addresses not only the individual person’s historical emergence but also its development from infancy to maturity. In the latter text, Hegel distinguishes between three levels of *Geist*: subjective (the individual person), objective (social institutions), and absolute (art, religion, and philosophy).

James Black Baillie translates *Phänomenologie des Geistes* as *Phenomenology of Mind*, and Arnold V. Miller subsequently translates it as *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁴ William Wallace translates *Philosophie des Geistes* as *Philosophy of Mind*, and Robert R. Williams later translates it as *Philosophy of Spirit*.¹⁵ “Spirit” has become the preferred translation of *Geist*. Unlike “mind,” which might suggest that *Geist* is God or an entity that transcends or encompasses the minds of individual persons, “spirit” is thought not to have such connotations. Such phrases as “spirit of the times,” “spirit of the age,” and “school spirit” do not suggest anything more than the persons or practices that are typical of the times, age, or school. In preferring “spirit” to “mind,” however, a connection to current philosophy of mind is more difficult to establish or discern. As a consequence, analytic philosophers had to reinvent the concept of the extended mind, discussed below, rather than recognizing it in Hegel’s *Geist*.

As a first approximation, readers of Hegel’s texts may substitute “human culture,” “social institutions,” or “worldviews” when they encounter *Geist*, “spirit,” or “mind.” They will not fully comprehend Hegel’s philosophy, but neither will they be led too far astray. As a second approximation, *Geist* is the narrative that people tell themselves about who they are and their place in the natural and social worlds. More precisely, Hegel tells this story which, he hopes and believes, readers will and should affirm. This is a narrative of reconciliation,

according to which the natural and social worlds are not ultimately alien to persons living in the modern world.¹⁶ Rather, when viewed properly, persons can be at home in nature and society. *Geist* develops historically, according to Hegel. From one perspective, this is the progressive realization of freedom. From another, it is an increasingly accurate self-understanding. It is accurate, not to any pattern or model that already exists, but instead to how humanity develops historically.

Hegel's metaphysical *Geist*, according to Taylor

[W]ith all this attention focussed on Hegel, his actual synthesis is quite dead. That is, no one actually believes his central ontological thesis, that the universe is posited by a Spirit whose essence is rational necessity. Many men [*sic*]¹⁷ believe today that the world was created by God. Some hold as well to some 'de-mythologized' interpretation of this view. All the different types of materialist and naturalist views have their defenders. But no one holds the Hegelian ontology.

– Charles Taylor, *Hegel*¹⁸

Reading that the ontology one holds is held by no one is annoying, to say the least. It is doubly annoying to see an ontology rejected simply because it does not comport with typical current views. What should be asked instead is whether that ontology could challenge those typical views. This is, after all, supposed to be how the philosophical project works. The principle point of philosophy is to invite people to radically examine their beliefs, to not so much change as exchange their minds.

Not to worry. It is okay if no one believes. Hegel teaches in his *Logic* that, although Being passes over into Nothing, Nothing passes back to Being. This shilly-shallying moves to Becoming, which becomes Determinate Being, and then it is upward and onward from there to the Absolute Idea. To express this point in another register, no one becomes none, which in turn passes over into one. Next, as Mladen Dolar reminds those who can remember, one divides into two.¹⁹ Then, the two ones, the ones that constitute the two, divide. That makes four. Readers will discern the geometric progression.

This section explicates Charles Taylor's metaphysical reading of Hegel's *Geist*. Although Taylor believes that this reading is accurate as a reading of Hegel's texts, he claims that it is incredible and untenable. In subsequent sections, we demonstrate its credibility.

Schelling and the early romantics attempt to unify two philosophies. The first – that of Spinoza – understands nature and mind as the expressions of a monistic substance that lacks subjectivity and agency. The expressions of substance are necessary, according to Spinoza, and could not be other than they

are. Kant and Fichte articulate subjectivity in terms of morality and freedom. However, they believe that subjectivity is opposed to nature, that nature is indifferent to subjectivity's claims, and that subjectivity struggles to impose a rational structure on nature. Schelling and the Romantics believe that nature and subjectivity are both expressions of what they refer to as the Absolute, or "God," in religious terminology. The Absolute is not limited or constrained by anything that is external to it. There is nothing that is external to the Absolute, and so it is not limited or constrained by anything. This Absolute transcends, or underlies, the distinction between subject and object. It cannot be discursively comprehended, but it can be nondiscursively experienced through art and religion.

According to Taylor, Hegel's *Geist* is a further development of Schelling's Absolute. Whereas Schelling maintains that subjectivity and nature are separate expressions of an incompressible absolute, Hegel claims that subjectivity emerges from nature. Nature is *Geist* in its nascent state. *Geist* is a cosmic spirit or mind that is embodied in the universe. *Geist* is most fully experienced – and, for Hegel, wholly comprehended – in philosophy, not religion or art. This is so because *Geist* has a rational structure. What must be immediately added, though, is that philosophy's comprehension of *Geist* is also its own self-comprehension. As embodied, *Geist* comprehends itself as humans comprehend the world and themselves. *Geist* thinks through humans. It is embodied in social institutions, primarily: the family, civil society, and the state. Humans are the principle vehicles by which *Geist*, through its historical and logical development, comes to know itself.

Those who interpret Hegel's philosophy as non-metaphysical do not contest Taylor's reading. Indeed, they agree with his verdict that the metaphysical reading is incredible as philosophy. "When the very possibility of an idea ceases to seem believable," Gail A. Hornstein writes in another context, "it becomes very difficult to talk about."²⁰ In this chapter, we recover the reading of *Geist* as immodestly metaphysical. It is unnecessary in this chapter to quote Hegel's texts. What is at stake is not what Hegel writes but rather whether that is believable. It is! The immodestly metaphysical reading is extraordinary but also quite credible, so we shall argue, provided that readers are prepared to extend their minds, so to speak. Having done so, it may then appear ordinary – or almost so.

Don't spit on the non-metaphysical Hegel

[Hegel] is in effect treating *spirit itself as a kind of norm*; a collective institution whereby we (remaining the natural organisms we ontologically are) hold each other to a responsiveness and directedness to reason, and thereby realize spirit as freedom.

– Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*²¹

Academics occasionally engage in spirited debates. There was the one a few years ago between Frederick C. Beiser and Terry Pinkard, about Hegel's metaphysics in its historical context.²² What fun! But for sheer over-the-top polemics, no one can beat Carla Lonzi's "Let's Spit on Hegel."²³ With a title like that, there is hardly need of an article to go with it. The disadvantage of polemics, aside from motivating people to hurl cobblestones, is that their authors are taken seriously only by those who already agree with their arguments. And even those in sympathy with the arguments, embarrassed by so much heat with so little light, do not want to be associated with such polemics. Moreover, the defensive vehemence with which a polemic condemns its adversaries suggests that those adversaries have articulated an uncomfortable truth that the polemic cannot acknowledge.

Rather than the bad manners and poor hygiene of expectorations, it is better to proceed in the properly Hegelian manner: acknowledge the partial truth of the non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel and then show that the whole truth emerges through an internal critique. Although the non-metaphysical interpretation asserts that reading *Geist* as metaphysical is preposterous and not credible, it will be shown that the non-metaphysical interpretation, by itself, almost reaches the metaphysical reading. The non-metaphysical interpretation actually does arrive at the metaphysical reading, with a little help from contemporary philosophy of mind.

Robert B. Pippin's explication of Hegel's views on intentions can be used to argue for group intentionality, which in turn will help illuminate the metaphysical reading. The non-metaphysical interpretation correctly sees that *Geist* is normative. For Hegel, intentions are not interior mental events that can be accessed only by the agent, whose access to them would be transparent and immediate. Rather, intentions are expressed in an agent's actions, including speech acts, and so it is only in light of their expression that intentions are revealed.²⁴ This last point is epistemological as well as ontological. That is, it is not solely that intentions are retrospectively discovered through their expression as actions, but also that their expression retroactively constitutes them. Prior to their expression, intentions are indeterminate. Individuals may believe that they have certain intentions, but whether they actually have those intentions actually depends on their actions. While conventional wisdom enjoins "never judge people's actions until you know their motives," Hegel would instead recommend "never judge people's motives until you know their actions."

Whether a teacher intends to discriminate between students on the basis of their ethnicity or gender, for example, cannot be ascertained by asking the teacher or by the teacher's introspection. Rather, this can be decided only by observing the teacher's interactions with students. To put this point somewhat paradoxically, the intentions of an individual may not be what that individual

intends. Some teachers may be disconcerted to learn that their interactions with students differ, based on the students' ethnicities or genders. For Hegel, these teachers have now discovered that their intentions were not what the teachers had believed those intentions to be. If these teachers make a concerted effort to modify their interactions with students, others may allow that the teachers' previous actions did not express their intentions.

The proper Hegelian way of stating this consists of three moments. First, the teachers' previous interactions with the students (which expressed previous intentions) did not express the teachers' (present) intentions (as revealed by the teachers' present interactions). Second, as a consequence of this mismatch, others extend to the teachers the courtesy of regarding their present interactions as the true expression of their intentions. Finally, others kindly consider the teachers' actual intentions as not having changed – as having been the same when they prejudicially interacted with their students and later when the teachers modified their interactions – but as being adequately expressed only by the teachers' present interactions. Here, the psychological account of intentions has its moment of truth. What is crucial to note, though, is that when persons ascribe intentions to others, they take a normative stance. Based on the teachers' concerted effort to modify the quality of their interactions with their students, to overcome the teachers' previous favoritism and bias, others grant that the teachers' current interactions are the actual expression of their previous intentions.

Based on counterfactual considerations, moreover, others may impute intentions to persons. If a professor who had made preparations to attend a Sanskrit conference then stays home to care for a child who is ill, for example, others will likely attribute to the professor the intention to attend the conference (or, perhaps, the intention to attend if there are no overriding considerations). When an intention is imputed to a person, this is not a judgment about a mental event, but rather a normative ascription of responsibility. Pippin demonstrates that this is Hegel's view of intentions. He further convincingly argues that Hegel's view is superior to alternative accounts.

It might be thought that, since Hegel believes that the meaning of intentions is expressed in actions, he really denies that there are intentions. Indeed, Forster interprets Hegel as espousing physicalism, behaviorism, and eliminative materialism.²⁵ Forster allows that "close analogues to our received mentalistic concepts do have application to reality," although he does not explain this further.²⁶ Be that as it may, Hegel's view is more subtle than physicalism, behaviorism, or eliminative materialism. Individuals can have intentions which they have not yet expressed. They can, to return to the example above, intend to attend the next Sanskrit conference. They need not mention this to anyone. Since the conference is a year away, say, they may not yet have purchased airplane tickets, made hotel reservations, or incorporated information about the

conference into their course syllabi. What is crucial to note, though, is that if the intentions are never expressed, then there are no grounds – ontologically or epistemologically – for believing that individuals actually had those intentions. Indeed, if the individuals do not attend the conference, expressing no desire to attend and making no plans to do so, then the proper conclusion is that they did not intend to attend. That will also be the proper conclusion, if the individuals say that they intend to attend but take no steps to do so. The content of intentions is thus indeterminate insofar as they are not expressed, and – as noted above – that content need not be transparent to the individual.

Readers may wonder what is non-metaphysical about the non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. After all, they might say, the non-metaphysical interpretation discusses whether Hegel maintains that there are intentions and, if so, what their nature is. Surely, that is metaphysical – modestly metaphysical, perhaps, but metaphysical nonetheless. It is correct that the non-metaphysical interpretation does not entirely repudiate metaphysics and so is poorly named. Blame Klaus Hartmann! According to his reconstruction, Hegel primarily attempts not to articulate a metaphysics of what there is, but rather to describe a theory of the necessary categories of thought. For this reason, Hartmann calls his interpretation “non-metaphysical.”²⁷ Since it is obvious that describing a theory of conceptual categories is metaphysical, it is permissible to speculate that Hartmann refers to his interpretation as “non-metaphysical” in order to distance it from that of Martin Heidegger.²⁸ Be that as it may, Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Pippin follow Hartmann in rejecting the immodestly metaphysical reading that “for Hegel... reason, *die Vernunft*, is the underlying noetic structure of reality, the structure of a Divine Mind or Cosmic spirit, developing or expressing itself externally (nature) and returning to itself in a final self-consciousness (spirit), a self-consciousness manifested most fully in art, religion, and philosophy.”²⁹ In addition, Brandom, Pinkard, and Pippin are influenced by Wilfrid Sellars, and so they emphasize the normative aspects of Hegel's philosophy.³⁰ Interpreting *Geist* as either a theory of categories or a norm is metaphysical, of course, albeit a modest metaphysics. As will be seen, however, *Geist* is immodestly metaphysical.

To return to the main argument, Pippin's analysis of intentionality can be applied to group agency. Although shared agency and collective intentionality are usually discussed separately, here they will be considered together as group agency. Some philosophers believe that group agency is reducible to the agency of individuals, such that group agency would be the concatenation of the agency of individuals.³¹ However, others philosophers, such as R. G. Collingwood, Sellars, and John Searle have recognized that group agency is not so reducible.³² These philosophers accept some form of “we-intentionality.” Individuals, not groups or collectives, have intentions, but the intentions of we-intentionality involve joint or collective action. Thus, each

individual not only intends that individual's own action but also that the others in the group engage in a collective action. For example, an individual not only intends to walk with a friend, but that individual also intends that they walk together. While Pippin's discussion focuses on I-intentionality, it applies to we-intentionality too: an intention is the expression of an action, not a mental event. Intentions, to paraphrase Hilary Putnam, just ain't in the head.

This account is exemplary. Nevertheless, it still conceptualizes group agency as involving we-intentionality in the sense just discussed, where the intentions make essential reference to the actions of others but remain, nevertheless, the intentions of individuals. As will be seen in the following section, the concept of the extended mind, articulated in recent analytic philosophy of mind, provides the resources to recognize that a group, *qua* group, can act and so can have intentions.³³

Extended mind, expanded self

If Forster or Naipaul ever heard the Hindu injunction "Know thy self" (*atmanam vidhi*), it would have sounded in their ears like the Socratic command "Know thyself." The echo is deceptive; the meanings could hardly differ more. A westerner's identity lies geographically within the contours of his [*sic*] physical body, and by probing there using psychological methods of examination and introspection taught since Socrates, he [*sic*] will uncover who he [*sic*] is. In India, by contrast, an individual's identity is not circumscribed by his [*sic*] skin's boundaries but bleeds over into the community – a community composed not only of family and neighbors but also of animals and ancestral spirits and deities as well. Identity in the contemporary West, as psychologist Kenneth Kenniston writes, presupposes a "limitless respect for the individual, faith that understanding is better than illusion." Indian identity stresses that surrender to greater powers is better than individual effort and that a person becomes his [*sic*] true self as he [*sic*] enters into the living stream, naturally and un-selfconsciously, of the community life and its traditions.

– Jeffrey Paine, *Father India: Westerners under the Spell of an Ancient Culture*³⁴

The discussion of the extended mind shows that we-intentionality can be extended to a group mind, an expanded self. Pippin shows that, for Hegel, an agent's intentions are expressed in the agent's actions. In order to show that there is a group mind – an expanded self, that *Geist* is metaphysical – it is necessary only to show that a group, *qua* group, can act.

Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers argue for the thesis that the mind can extend beyond an individual's body.³⁵ Clark and Chalmers argue that processes

regarded as mental when they are internal to the brain should equally be considered mental when they are external to the brain. "If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in accepting as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is (for that time) part of the cognitive process."³⁶ Otto uses a notebook to remember addresses. Since the addresses would be regarded as part of Otto's mind if he had memorized them, Clark and Chalmers maintain that the addresses in his notebook should be considered to be part of his mind. Mark Rowlands further extends their argument, calling his version of the extended mind thesis "environmentalism." Rowlands defends the ontological claim that "cognitive processes are not located exclusively inside the skin of cognizing organisms" and the epistemological claim that "it is not possible to understand the nature of cognitive processes by focusing exclusively on what is occurring inside the skin of cognizing organisms."³⁷

In order "to show that human cognition is not just influenced by culture and society, but that it is in a very fundamental sense a cultural and social process," Edwin Hutchins "will move the boundaries of the cognitive unit of analysis out beyond the skin of the individual persons and treat the navigation team as a cognitive and computational system."³⁸ As the helicopter transport ship, the *USS Palau*, sails through San Diego's harbor, no individual sailor either knows its location or can project its trajectory. Rather, its charts, instruments, maps, and sailors together function as components of the extended mind that steers the *Palau*. "If groups can have cognitive processes that are significantly different from those of individuals within them," Hutchins writes, "then the differences in the cognitive accomplishments of any two groups might depend entirely on the social organization of distributed cognition and not at all on differences in the cognitive properties of the individuals in the two groups."³⁹

Bruno Latour further observes:

Exactly in the same way as thinking is a property of the navigation team aboard the ship, so that there is no sense for any sailor to say "I compute," the making of major discoveries, according to the new history of science, is a property of whole subcultures of science and of their artifacts, so that there is no sense for an isolated scientist to exclaim "cogito!" or "eureka!" Laboratories think, communities discover, disciplines progress, instruments see, not individual minds.⁴⁰

Lynn Hankinson Nelson similarly recognizes that it is the scientific community who knows, in the first instance, not individual scientists: "Communities know, individuals only derivatively so."⁴¹

The ship that knows where it is going and the scientific community that knows what it is doing – knows its theories, methods, and results – usefully explicate one crucial aspect of the metaphysical reading of Hegel's *Geist*. The

proposition that *Geist* is a supra-individual that knows through humans is no stranger than the idea that the scientific community is a supra-individual that knows through scientists. *Geist* develops historically and so, potentially, it encompasses all of humanity, both spatially and temporally: spatially, in that every group would become a subgroup within the larger group that is *Geist*; temporally, in that all previous groups would retrospectively be seen as having been striving to constitute the larger group that is *Geist*.

As Hutchins's account suggests, the extended mind becomes an expanded self that is capable of action, piloting the *Palau*. While the expanded self seems strange, the individual self is familiar. This is how persons "spontaneously" think of themselves. It is the motif of many films, epitomized by "The Man with No Name" character in Clint Eastwood's Westerns: an unnamed male protagonist with an uncompromising sense of justice and an uncanny proficiency with a gun, who is stoic and silent, without friends, family, or a known past. Despite this bias toward the individual – and individualism – the expanded self is not wholly alien. It is implicitly heard when Walt Whitman says:

It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.

And explicitly he later sings:

I am large, I contain multitudes.⁴²

More recently, the expanded self appears in Tavis Smiley's touring museum exhibition, *America I Am: The African American Imprint*.⁴³ "America I am" must first be interpreted as "America, I am," where I insist upon and am entitled to America's recognition. A more inclusive reading, "I am America," identifies America and I. "I am America" is Hegel's *Geist*. Almost. As discussed above, *Geist* potentially is the entire human race: "I am humanity." To be an individual, for Hegel, moreover, is to be recognized by others *as* an individual.⁴⁴ At the heart of the self are others. The notion that a person could be an island makes for ideologically correct Westerns, but illusory metaphysics.

This is not yet the whole story, but it is underway.

The *Geist* of Taylor's Hegel, redux

What were they doing? Darwin, in a lovely phrase, called it "philosophical laughing," which was his way of saying that those who depart from cultural or intellectual consensus need people to walk beside them and laugh with them to give them confidence. But there's more to it than that. One of the

peculiar features of group dynamics is that clusters of people will come to decisions that are far more extreme than any individual member would have come to on his [*sic*] own. People compete with each other and egg each other on, showboat and grandstand; and along the way they often lose sight of what they truly believed when the meeting began. Typically, this is considered a bad thing, because it means that groups formed explicitly to find middle ground often end up someplace far away. But at times this quality turns out to be tremendously productive, because, after all, losing sight of what you truly believed when the meeting began is one way of defining innovation.

– Malcolm Gladwell, “Group Think: What Does *Saturday Night Live* Have in Common with German Philosophy?”⁴⁵

Taylor's reading of *Geist* as metaphysical, while substantially correct, nevertheless must be criticized in two ways. First, Taylor objects to Hegel's claims that *Geist's* essence is rational necessity because its moments do not follow from one another with logical necessity. *Geist's* rational necessity is narrational, however, not logical. Rational necessity is the retrospective recognition that, although each moment of *Geist* is contingent when it occurs, it then becomes necessary for all subsequent moments. Everything prior to any moment is necessary for it to have occurred. If anything had been different, some other moment would have occurred.⁴⁶

Second, Taylor primarily understands *Geist* in religious terms. The extended mind thesis allows a reading of *Geist* that initially bypasses religion, although a connection to religion can be established. While it is not possible to develop fully Hegel's account here, it may be said that God becomes fully incarnate in Christ so that when Christ dies, God dies too. What is resurrected is the believing community. Taylor correctly perceives both that *Geist* is embodied and that humans are the vehicles by which *Geist* knows itself. Yet, Taylor's emphasis on religious imagery leaves the connection between *Geist* and the persons who are its vehicles mysterious, and he incorrectly suggests that *Geist* exists transcendentally. Comprehending *Geist's* relation to humanity as analogous to the scientific community's relation to individual scientists overcomes such difficulties.

Nevertheless, this analogy must immediately be supplemented to prevent a serious misunderstanding. Comprehending *Geist* in terms of the scientific community, or a naval vessel, may suggest that *Geist* is the group, within which the individual is fully absorbed. However, this would be a mistake. On such a version, *Geist* would be an organicism. On this view, *Geist* – the collective or state, in the first instance, ultimately the world – would be an organism. Here, *Geist* would be the actual organism and individuals merely its constituent parts. The relation of the individual to *Geist* would be analogous to that of a bee and

its hive, or a cell in a biological organism. Taken yet another step, *Geist* would be *Star Trek's* Borg, where individuality has been entirely subsumed in a single group mind. To complete this wretched trajectory, *Geist* would be the Brahman of Śaṅkara's unqualified nondualism (*Advaita Vedānta*), where the individual (Ātman) is wholly absorbed in Brahman – as a drop that falls into the ocean – not only losing all of its distinctiveness and individuality, but discovering that those were utterly illusory.

Hegel's *Geist* is not such a group. For Hegel, the group and the individual are mutually codetermining: *Geist* is the group *and* the individual. For those who appreciate paradoxes, *Geist* is the "and." As Malcolm Gladwell recognizes, German philosophy is like *Saturday Night Live*. In both cases, individuals worked together and antagonistically, squabbling as much as collaborating. As a group, successfully synthesizing the cult and the club, they were able to create something that none of them, alone, could have achieved – or, likely, even imagined. Gladwell writes:

We divide [groups] into cults and clubs, and dismiss the former for their insularity and the latter for their banality. The cult is the place where, cut off from your peers, you become crazy. The club is the place where, surrounded by your peers, you become boring. Yet if you can combine the best of those two – the right kind of insularity with the right kind of homogeneity – you create an environment both safe enough and stimulating enough to make great thoughts possible. You get Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and a revolution in Western philosophy. You get Darwin, Watt, Wedgwood, and Priestley, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. And sometimes, on a more modest level, you get a bunch of people goofing around and bringing a new kind of comedy to network television.⁴⁷

With German philosophy, the temptation is to focus on an individual who writes a book and to ignore the community of other thinkers who make that text possible. With *Saturday Night Live*, the lure is instead to concentrate on the group but not on the individuals. The forest is missed for the trees in the first case, the trees for the forest in the second. To observe *Geist*, both the group and the individuals must be viewed stereoscopically.

It is possible, of course, to conceptualize *Geist* as involving a group that thinks, speaks, and acts, not in a single voice but rather as an atonal polyphony. If the group is thought of this way – consisting of individuals, working both with and against each other – then *Geist* can be identified with the group. Mikhail Bakhtin's characterization of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels also holds for Hegel's *Geist*:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's

novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combined but not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*.⁴⁸

Geist is a group mind *plus* the minds of individuals, individuals who think *with* but also *against* each other.

It is a great merit of Jean-François Lyotard's underappreciated *Postmodern Condition* to perceive that the motor that propels science is the continual eruption of dissensus within consensus, disagreement within a previously existing agreement.⁴⁹ Indeed, dissensus drives not only science, but all endeavors. Dissensus is as crucial to *Geist* as consensus. Hegel anticipates Lyotard. Thesis: truth is a sociohistorically situated consensus that endures. The dialectic is closed. Antithesis: consensus is never total or unanimous. Consensus always has within it the dissensus that will result in its overthrow. Eventually, a new consensus emerges – that also contains dissensus. Consensus never endures. Skepticism triumphs. Too bad for truth. So much for Hegel. Synthesis: the antithesis itself, comprehended correctly. Hegelian consensus is not opposed to dissensus. Instead, the former includes the latter. Hegelian consensus is an ever shifting interplay, a dance, of consensus and dissensus. What endures is the dance. The dialectic closes, formally, by incorporating skepticism – and so it remains open. The synthesis returns to the thesis, now properly expressed: truth is a sociohistorically situated Hegelian consensus – a dance of consensus and dissensus – that endures. In the preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel compares truth to a bacchanalian revel: frenzied dissensus from one perspective, tranquil consensus from another. This condition is rationally endorsable. And we can be reconciled to it. Not because it overcomes the bacchanalian revel, but because it is the revel. And because it knows this about itself.

It is not for nothing that Hegel lobs *Rameau's Nephew*, Denis Diderot's polyphonic dialogue, into the middle of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, the section on "Self-Alienated Spirit."⁵⁰ A polyphony of dissenting voices, not the monophony of a ventriloquist – malcontents and dissidents, not conformists – prevails in *Geist*. When this is missed, it is the result of believing that the group of voices is drowned out in the monophonic shouting of the Absolute. There is no shouting, however, as the Absolute is *Geist's* recollection of how it reached where it is. What is misheard as shouting is the replaying of the plurality of voices. To the untrained ear, a polyphony – especially when it is atonal – may be heard as a cacophony.

While we have come to a plausible reading of *Geist* as a group mind constituted by individual consciousnesses who think and act both with and against each other, it may still sound incredible that *Geist* exists in a nascent state in nature, that it wants to know itself, and that it accomplishes this by developing historically through humanity, so that *Geist* comprehends itself as humans comprehend the world and themselves. However, contemporary arguments can be interpreted so as to approach Hegel's metaphysical claims, at least when considered collectively. David Skrbina demonstrates the credibility of the view that every aspect of matter is enminded – this is, all matter is suffused with mind. Michael Ruse suggests that the concept of progress may be ineliminable in evolutionary biology. Simon Conway Morris argues that evolution converges on a humanlike intelligence.⁵¹ Mutatis mutandis, their collective views state that nature is *Geist's* nascent state and that *Geist* comes to know itself through humanity.

Less than nothing, more than everything

The Absolute is a friend of empty spaces.

– Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*⁵²

Slavoj Žižek notes that *Geist* is less than nothing.⁵³ This is Jean-Paul Sartre's view too.⁵⁴ Just as, for Sartre, human beings have a history but no essence – where an essence is a set of properties that causes a thing to be the thing that it is and that determines how that thing must behave – so too *Geist* is a historical process, but it has no essence. *Geist* is nothing because *Geist* is only what it becomes. Its past may influence what *Geist* will become, but its past does not determine *Geist*. Moreover, what *Geist* becomes depends upon contingent events that, in retrospect, *Geist* owns as necessary to what it has become. Since these events are unexpected, *Geist* cannot know in advance what it will become. In this sense, the non-metaphysical interpretation is correct: *Geist* is not an entity as entity has been traditionally understood. *Geist* is a result, and a process, not a thing. It is dynamic, not static.

Is *Geist* a cosmic spirit? Many have said that this aspect of Hegel goes too far and must either be explained away or ignored. Not at all. Beginning with G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell's weak stomachs and culminating with the Logical Positivists' emeses, philosophers working in the analytic tradition lost their appetite for metaphysics. Many have still not recovered. They abruptly leave the table at the very mention of *Geist*, especially if they hear any suggestion that it might be a cosmic spirit. As a result, these analytic philosophers stick to a tasteless diet of overcooked vegetables and roasts, missing the rich cuisines of other cultures. They know nothing of the dishes of South Asia, Southeast

Asia, the Middle East, or Africa. Only through hearsay do these philosophers know of French cuisine – they never heard of Italian cooking – but the thought of wines and sauces nauseates them. At least they grudgingly acknowledge that the French have a cuisine; otherwise, they assert that their bland diet is the only possible one. They enjoy Greek cuisine, as long as it is not spicy, but they hate ouzo. Until quite recently, they would not dine with women or sample anything a woman had cooked. For some years, Hegelians have tried to introduce analytic philosophers to the savories Hegel offers. Unfortunately, many Hegelians have dined on the analytic fare for so long that they have lost their sense of taste.

Rather than forcing philosophers to eat what they insist they do not like, it is better to prepare dishes they do like, with some spices quietly added. Or, better still, cook dishes that philosophers say they detest, but spiced to make those dishes irresistible to anyone willing to taste them. Many people say that they do not like beets. They just have never had them prepared properly.⁵⁵ Like beets, in order to see that *Geist* is a cosmic spirit, and that this metaphysical claim is rationally endorsable, our reading must be prepared properly too.

Hegel explains, in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, that Reason becomes *Geist* when it realizes that it is all of reality. Readers may recoil on hearing this. What can it mean, they may ask, to assert that everything in the world, and the world too, is *Geist*? This can be usefully approached from a different perspective.

In addition to being out of sympathy with metaphysics, the Logical Positivists believe that observations are independent of any theory. Theories explain observations and predict new observations, but the observations are the same regardless of the theory. When Ptolemy disagrees with Newton, and Newton with Einstein, they disagree only about theories, not about observations.

Several later philosophers of science – most prominently Paul Feyerabend, Thomas Kuhn, and Norwood Russell Hanson – disagree with the Logical Positivists. Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Hanson argue that observations are dependent upon theory. Observations are embedded within theories, or theory-laden. When there is a change in theory, not only what is observed but also what can be observed alters too. On this view, Ptolemy, Newton, and Einstein disagree about which theory best explains the observations, but they also disagree about the observations. The community of contemporary philosophers of science generally accepts that observations occur only within the context of a theory and that no observation is theory-neutral. Since theories are created by the scientific community, Hegel can credibly maintain that everything is *Geist*. He further claims that nothing is ultimately mysterious or in principle unknowable, although many things are unknown. An observation must already be embedded in a theory for it to be recognized as puzzling or as an anomaly, and so it is implicitly intelligible.

Nature is *Geist* in its nascent state; it is becoming-*Geist* – to write like Gilles Deleuze for a moment. There is a sense in which *Geist* is a cosmic spirit. Recall the previous discussion of Smiley's exhibition, *America I Am*. "America I am" must first be read as "America, I am" or, more explicitly, as "I demand and deserve America's recognition." A more inclusive reading is "I am America." There is the further possibility that "I am America" will become "I am humanity." Finally, "I am humanity" may eventually expand to "I am the world" – *aham brahmāsmi*, if the identity of identity and difference can be heard in *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10. That is to say, while "I am America" identifies America and I, I still retain a moment of individuality and distinctiveness. Indeed, "I am America" suggests that I expand to become America. Similarly, although a motif of the Upaniṣads is the total absorption of I into the world, a strong interpretation may construe *aham brahmāsmi* as suggesting that I expand to become the world. In ninth- to twelfth-century monistic Kāśmiri Śaivism, moreover, I do expand to become the world – Śakti, the manifestation of Śiva's power.⁵⁶

So, Hegel could scat along when Joni Mitchell sings that "we are stardust."⁵⁷ That is true, both literally and metaphorically. *Geist* emerges from nature and nature is *Geist*'s material support. *Geist* is part of the universe. He would hoot, though, when Mitchell adds that "we've got to get ourselves back to the garden." The Garden of Eden represents an existence at the level of animals, for Hegel. There, women experienced pain in childbirth, men dominated women, the ground produced thorns and thistles, bread was eaten by the sweat of the face, and people died. However, this not-yet-human animal lacked any knowledge of good and evil – that is, any sense of morality. It also lacked the ability to remember the past and, more crucially, to imagine a future that would be better than the present. Leaving the garden was not leaving a place. It was rather recognizing that place for what it always had been – and envisioning a better place. That better place was initially nostalgized to have been what was lost. Only later was it realized that it must be human's creation. Returning to the garden is as undesirable as it is impossible. Becoming human requires bidding *adieu* to the garden. Nevertheless, there still is hope of arriving at the holy city. In a sense, it has already been reached. J. N. Findlay writes: "To live in Main Street is, if one lives in the right spirit, to inhabit the holy city."⁵⁸ It remains to add that to inhabit the holy city is, if one lives in the right spirit, to live in Main Street. What is the right spirit? It is one of reconciliation, as noted above, the recognition that the natural and social worlds are not alien, but welcoming.

Recollecting *Geist*

Of course there is no right or wrong. His current memory didn't jibe with what he told me before, but that didn't mean he was now wrong in the

psychological sense. The memory is just as important in *how* it is wrongly remembered. For us, facts are not the truth – that's why we often find the law to be frustrating and unjust.

– Rafael Yglesias, *Dr. Neruda's Cure for Evil*⁵⁹

It will be useful, in concluding, to recapitulate the steps of this sojourn. The sublation of the metaphysical and non-metaphysical Hegel is actually the metaphysical Hegel. Formerly, *Geist* was translated as “mind,” more recently as “spirit.” Although “spirit” is now fashionable – precisely because it obscures the metaphysical aspects defended in this chapter – it conceals the connections between *Geist* and current work in the philosophy of mind. As a first approximation, *Geist* is human culture, social institutions, and worldviews. As a more accurate approximation, it is the reconciling narrative of people's place in the natural and social world. Taylor reads *Geist* as a cosmic spirit that is embodied in the universe and that uses humans as the vehicles by which it comes to know itself. The non-metaphysical interpretation of *Geist* sees it as a norm. This is correct but one-sided. Pippin correctly recognizes that, for Hegel, intentions are not events in the head but rather are expressed in actions. Although this is metaphysical, it is modestly so. The truth, enunciated in this chapter, is immodest. Contemporary philosophy of mind has advanced the thesis of the extended mind, according to which the mind extends beyond an individual body to encompass the entire scientific community. The extended mind of the *USS Palau*, in turn, becomes the expanded self. This potentially enlarges to include all of humanity.

The expanded self shows that Taylor's reading of *Geist* as a cosmic spirit is credible, after all, although his understanding of *Geist* in primarily religious terms is one-sided. It would be a mistake to identify the expanded self with a group of like-minded persons; the group includes malcontents and dissidents. In a group, people think with, but also against, each other. Moreover, it is the eruption of dissensus within a previously existing consensus that drives progress, as Lyotard reminds readers who have forgotten their Hegel. Recent philosophy of science shows the credibility of the claims that *Geist* is nature in its nascent state, that it develops historically through humanity, and that it comprehends itself insofar as humans comprehend the world and themselves. *Geist* is a process, not an entity, and so there is a sense in which, since it has no essence, *Geist* is nothing. In another sense, however, *Geist* is everything. To return again to recent philosophy of science, the immodest claim that *Geist* is all of reality is eminently credible. The Garden of Eden must be abandoned. It never was anything more than a tangle of overgrown weeds. Yet, we reach the holy city – which turns out to be where we already were, viewed aright.

Where *Geist* is going is up for grabs. It is norm, spirit, an extended mind, an expanded self, a group mind, malcontents and dissidents, all of humanity, the

world, an abandoned garden, the holy city, nothing at all, and immodestly metaphysical as all get-out. *Geist* is all of that, all at once, all together.⁶⁰

Notes

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 29.
2. J. M. Fritzman and Kristin Parvizian, "The Extended Mind Rehabilitates the Metaphysical Hegel," *Metaphilosophy* 43, no. 5 (Oct. 2012): 636–58.
3. Alan W. Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen," *Chicago Review* 12, no. 2 (summer 1958): 6–7.
4. *Ibid.*, 7.
5. *Ibid.*, 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 8–9. Beat Zen defies conventions, Square Zen seeks their validation. Watts is not a Hegelian and so he only dimly glimpses that disobeying conventions itself becomes conventional, and that seeking the ratification of foreign conventions rebels against the domestic ones, thereby allowing Beat Zen and Square Zen to pass over into their opposites. Neither Beat Zen nor Square Zen is capable of overlooking, and so, transcending conventions.
7. Watts, "Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen," 11.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 46–47.
11. Similarly, the sublation of Left Hegelianism and Right Hegelianism is Left Hegelianism.
12. "Simple Gifts," lyrics by Joseph Brackett, Jr.; see John M. Anderson, "Force and Form: The Shaker Intuition of Simplicity," *Journal of Religion* 30, no. 4 (Oct. 1950): 256–60.
13. Michael N. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Forster's reading is adumbrated in Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).
14. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. James Black Baillie (London: Sonnenschein, 1910); and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
15. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), Together with the Zusätze*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller, ed. M. J. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–8*, trans. Robert R. Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
16. Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
17. In this chapter, we follow the American Philosophical Association's "Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 59, no. 3 (Feb. 1986): 471–82. When quoting sources that have sexist language, we use *sic* to note that such language appears in the original. Using *sic* in this way interrupts the reading of those quoted sources. That is our aim.
18. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 538.

19. Mladen Dolar, "One Divides into Two," *e-flux* 33 (March 2012), www.e-flux.com/journal/one-divides-into-two/.
20. Gail A. Hornstein, *To Redeem One Person Is to Redeem the World: The Life of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann* (New York: Free Press, 2000), xxiii.
21. Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 62.
22. Frederick C. Beiser, "Hegel, A Non-Metaphysician? A Polemic: Review of H. T. Engelhardt and Terry Pinkard (eds), *Hegel Reconsidered*," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 32 (fall/winter 1995): 1–13; Terry Pinkard, "What Is the Non-Metaphysical Reading of Hegel? A Reply to Frederick Beiser," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 34 (fall/winter 1996): 13–20; Frederick C. Beiser, "Response to Pinkard," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 34 (fall/winter 1996): 21–26; and Frederick C. Beiser, "Hegel and *Naturphilosophie*," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 34, no. 1 (March 2003): 135–47.
23. Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hegel*, ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 275–97.
24. Reading Hegel two decades before Pippin, Taylor recognized that intentions are observable behaviors, not introspectable states, and so agents could be entirely wrong concerning the content of their intentions. He also perceived that agency can be collective, where the collective is not reducible to individuals. See Charles Taylor, "Hegel and the Philosophy of Action," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Action*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich and David Lamb (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1983), 1–18; and Charles Taylor, "Hegel's Philosophy of Mind," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 77–96. Jeffrey A. Gauthier is thanked for bringing this to our attention.
25. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, 101n206.
26. *Ibid.*, 101; see also 144 and 154.
27. Klaus Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 101–25.
28. Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience: With a Section from Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" in the Kenley Royce Dove Translation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); and Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
29. Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42.
30. Robert B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
31. See Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller, "We-Intentions," *Philosophical Studies* 53, no. 3 (May 1988): 367–89; and Michael Bratman, *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113.
32. See Robin George Collingwood, *The New Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947); Wilfrid Sellars, *Essays in Philosophy and Its History* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974); and

- John Searle, "Collective Intentions and Actions," in *Intentions in Communication*, ed. Philip R. Cohen, Jerry L. Morgan, and Martha E Pollack (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 401–15.
33. As noted above, Taylor perceives that, for Hegel, agency can be collective.
 34. Jeffery Paine, *Father India: Westerners Under the Spell of an Ancient Culture* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 101–2.
 35. Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, "The Extended Mind," *Analysis* 58, no. 1 (Jan. 1998): 7–19. Compare Richard Menary, ed., *The Extended Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).
 36. Clark and Chalmers, "Extended Mind," 8.
 37. Mark Rowlands, *The Body in Mind: Understanding Cognitive Processes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.
 38. Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), xiv.
 39. *Ibid.*, 177–78.
 40. Bruno Latour, "Review Symposium: *Cognition in the Wild*, E. Hutchins," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 3, no. 1 (1996): 61.
 41. Lynn Hankinson Nelson, *Who Knows: From Quine to a Feminist Empiricism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 313. Compare Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
 42. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings: Authoritative Texts, Other Poetry and Prose, Criticism*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: Norton, 2002), 74, 77.
 43. Tavis Smiley, ed., *America I Am: The African American Imprint*, www.americaiam.org.
 44. Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Sybol S. C. Anderson, *Hegel's Theory of Recognition: From Oppression to Ethical Liberal Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 2009).
 45. Malcolm Gladwell, "Group Think: What Does *Saturday Night Live* Have in Common with German Philosophy?" *The New Yorker* (Dec. 2, 2002): 105–6.
 46. Compare Wendy Lynn Clark and J. M. Fritzman, "Reducing Spirit to Substance: Dove on Hegel's Method," *Idealistic Studies* 32, no. 2 (summer 2002): 73–100.
 47. Gladwell, "Group Think," 106.
 48. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6–7.
 49. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
 50. Compare Isabelle C. DeMarte and J. M. Fritzman, "Diderot's Uncle, Hegel; Or Rameau's Nephew as a Branch of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* 14 (2007): 177–220.
 51. David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005); Michael Ruse, *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). James Lovelock suggests that all life on earth is a single organism. See James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
 52. Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, trans. David White (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71.

53. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012).
54. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).
55. See Melissa Clark, "A Sashay to India for Spicy Beets," *New York Times* (Oct. 12, 2011): D5, www.nytimes.com/2011/10/12/dining/indian-spices-for-roasted-beets-a-good-appetite.html.
56. See Alexis Sanderson, "Purity and Power Among the Śivas of Kashmir," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 190–216; Alexis Sanderson, "The Hinduism of Kashmir," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 1: *Regions, Pilgrimage, Deities*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 99–126; and Alexis Sanderson, "The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period," in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, 2009), 41–349.
57. Joni Mitchell, "Woodstock," *Ladies of the Canyon* (Reprise Records, 1970).
58. J. N. Findlay "Hegel's Use of Teleology," in *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 96.
59. Rafael Yglesias, *Dr. Neruda's Cure for Evil* (New York: Warner, 1996), 317.
60. Jeffrey A. Gauthier and William A. Rottschaefer are thanked for useful comments.

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Narration, *Bildung*, and the Work of Mourning in Hegel's Philosophy of History

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The philosophy of history has long been a marginalized area in philosophy, due in large part to the desire of many historians to establish their discipline's legitimacy as a social science (on the credentials of empirical methods) and the perceived irrelevance of philosophy in such an endeavor. Beginning with Leopold von Ranke's nineteenth-century critique, Hegel frequently is held up as the paradigm case of these failings of the philosophy of history, and all the sins of idealism are projected onto his philosophical approach to history – sins that center on the imposition of a narrative or set of abstract ideas upon the concrete events of history. Despite this reputation, Hegel himself criticizes the historians who impose “*a priori* fictions” in their research (LPW 29 [VPW 31]), and he affirms that “the sole end of history is to comprehend clearly what is and what has been, the events and deeds of the past. It gains in veracity the more strictly it confines itself to what is given... and the more exclusively it seeks to discover what actually happened” (LPW 26 [VPW 27]). However, he also claims that the philosophy of history is “the application of thought to history,” history viewed through a philosophical lens, which forces history “to conform to its preconceived notions and constructs history *a priori*” (LPW 25 [VPW 25]). This chapter will examine how Hegel navigates between these two familiar and contradictory positions, and how he presents a philosophy of history that both enacts and recounts the unstable process by which our thought creates what we are. In Hegel's account, the sweep of human history poses the problem of how to mourn well, or how to overcome prior versions of ourselves. The question I raise for Hegel is whether the work of mourning can realistically be governed by a norm, and thus whether finally we control the narratives that make up our identities.

The value of philosophical history

Hegel opens his lectures on the philosophy of history by distinguishing among three approaches to history, which themselves form a dialectic: original, reflective, and philosophical history.¹ Herodotus and Thucydides exemplify original history, in which the historian narrates events in which he or she is more or less directly immersed, during his or her lifetime. This form of history gains power from the closeness of eyewitness testimony, as in the case of Pericles's funeral oration in Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*. However, precisely because of the closeness of the historian to his or her material, there is little interpretation or context-setting to gain an appreciation for the significance of the recorded events. Reflective history is more like what we have come to expect of professional historians, and it shows up in various forms, including histories of particular nations, attempts to draw lessons from past events, evaluations of the validity of historical accounts, and histories of particular fields, such as art, religion, or law. Despite our familiarity with this kind of history, Hegel argues that reflective history must be overcome, as insufficiently reflective, due to the fact that it does not push us to the most important question within history: the question of the meaning of history, the purpose of all of this activity. And the question of purpose, Hegel claims, is a question appropriately addressed by philosophers, not professional historians, for it attempts to get at the essential meaning behind diverse occurrences. Hegel remarks that, in philosophical history, "physical perception and a finite understanding are not enough; we must see with the eye of the concept, the eye of reason, which penetrates the surface and finds its way through the complex and confusing turmoil of events" (LPW 30 [VPW 32]).

Empirically minded historians neglect the dual meaning of the term *Geschichte* (history), which Hegel claims is a necessary connection rather than an arbitrary set of connotations: "history" refers both to what has actually happened (*res gestae*) and to the account of what has happened, a historical representation (*historia rerum gestarum*) (LPW 135 [VPW 164]). As thinking human beings, we try to make sense of our experience, to weave together a narrative of how and why things unfolded as they did, whether we interpret those events in terms of divine action, the effects of magic, human motivation, or natural forces. These narratives may be causal or purposive, but they are necessarily selective, by highlighting the significance of certain factors and diminishing the significance of others, and by tracing or constructing a web of connections between far-flung acts and accidents. The interpretation of historical events may have the purpose merely of telling a coherent story of a movement, a monarch's reign, or a form of art, but it may also serve to ground the identity of a people or a nation. For instance, historical narratives may attempt to retrieve

the history of the Roma in Europe, or be used to influence political decisions by drawing parallels between a prospective military adventure and past quagmires. Despite the scientific aspirations of some historians, there is no such thing as history unmediated by concepts: “Even the ordinary, run-of-the-mill historian who believes and professes that his attitude is entirely receptive, that he is dedicated to his facts, is by no means passive in his thinking; he brings his categories with him, and they influence his vision of the data he has before him” (LPW 29 [VPW 31]). As Hegel emphasizes, what it means to “apprehend the historical accurately” is not quite as simple as it appears to be (LPW 29 [VPW 31]).

The idea that the historian substantively mediates the events of history, rather than merely recording or conveying the facts, leads to the idea that the representation of history reveals something significant about the activity of thinking that produces it and the material context of that activity – social aims, political structures, and economic pressures. When we read a history, we are also reading, indirectly, the consciousness of the historian who produced that work and the larger life of the culture in which it was written. As a human activity, the writing of history creates coherence and sense in the events it represents. Duncan Forbes argues that history cannot represent those events without mediating them: “All historical writing is pragmatic [that is, not the study of the past for its own sake] in so far as a past is present in a mind which gives the events a unity which they do not possess in themselves, so that the past is *aufgehoben*: taking it up into the present means that it is abolished as sheer past.”² *Aufhebung* has been variously translated as sublation, overcoming, or transcendence, and more recently has been left untranslated, due to the complex intersection of meanings contained in the term: negation, preservation, elevation. In this process, the past is then negated as a brute fact and incorporated into how *Geist* understands itself in the present.

The two meanings of “history”

The internal connection between history-as-events and history-as-the-telling-of-events leads Hegel to the unfamiliar conclusion that not everything that has happened is properly historical. An event does not have historical meaning until it has been reflected upon through the writing of history. Therefore, only those cultures that are able to reflect on their past, through writing it down, are capable of truly historical acts and the communal organization of the state that “needs a consciousness of the past”:

Those periods – whether we estimate them in centuries or millennia – which elapsed in the life of nations before history came to be written, and which may well have been filled with revolutions, migrations, and the most

violent changes, have no objective history precisely because they have no subjective history, i.e. no historical narratives. (LPW 136 [VPW 164])

On this narrow definition of the properly historical, Hegel notoriously excludes from the scope of world history everything that happened in Africa, North and South America, Australia, and most of Asia prior to European colonization. In Hegel's terms, these cultures were pre-historical, *Geist* living as if it were merely another piece of the natural world, without "intelligent recollection" and thus "buried in the obscurity of a voiceless past" (LPW 137 [VPW 166]). It is only through written history that the determinate negation of self-reflection can occur, and a culture can begin to constitute its identity deliberately, over and against its past forms.

In his introductory lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel succinctly symbolizes the history of *Geist* (we could say, equivalently, history) in two related images: the solar progress from sunrise to sunset, and the process of physical maturation in human beings. The "Oriental World" is the dawn of history, or childhood; the "Greek World" is noon, representing adolescence; the "Roman World" is the afternoon, *Geist's* "manhood"; and the "Germanic World" represents sunset, or old age, an image Hegel immediately qualifies:

it is a peculiarity of old age that it lives only in memories, in the past rather than in the present, so that the comparison is no longer applicable. In his negative aspects [as a physical organism], the individual human being belongs to the elemental world and must therefore pass away. *Geist*, however, returns to its concepts. (LPW 131 [VPW 156–57])³

These two images contain Hegel's claim that history should be understood as a narrative directed toward some definite end, but the images play with Hegel's careful separation between the workings of nature and the workings of history, a distinction he establishes early in the lectures and to which he regularly returns. Whereas we can observe change in the natural world, Hegel asserts that nature cannot produce anything fundamentally new, but rather undergoes endless change without development, or "an impulse of perfectibility [*ein Trieb der Perfektibilität*]" (LPW 125 [VPW 149]). Mere matter cannot direct its own transformation.

Making sense of the progress of human history by reference to these images of natural progression, then, is a curious rhetorical strategy. Hegel may be obliquely calling our attention to how human thinking constructs a story of progress out of the observation of simple change. Even when we look at natural processes, such as the sun moving across the sky or the physical growth of an individual organism, reason seeks not only a causal story but a purpose-driven one. Hegel may also be invoking the idea that our first materials for

understanding reality may need to be determinately negated as that understanding becomes progressively refined. We first try to make sense of *Geist* in terms of natural metaphors but then come up against the contrasting elements of the two processes. In the same way, human beings may first understand themselves to be just part of the natural world, as Hegel describes the indigenous cultures and peoples of Africa and the Americas, and only gradually come to conceive of themselves as free, *geistige* beings.

The activity of constructing a narrative of progress describes philosophical history itself, in Hegel's view. As thinking beings, we try to tell meaningful stories about reality, rather than allowing it to remain a bewildering chaos. At the beginning of the lectures, Hegel depicts the divide between *Geist* and nature precisely in terms of the defining activity of thought:

the philosophy of history is nothing more than the application of thought to history; and thinking is something we cannot stop doing. For man is a thinking being, and it is this which distinguishes him from the animals. All that is truly human, as distinct from animal – feeling, knowledge, cognition – contains an element of thought, and this applies to all historical studies. (LPW 25 [VPW 25]; see also LPW 49 [VPW 56–57])

We shape events into narratives that have beginnings, middles, and endings, and establish connections between those events so that they become rational rather than merely random occurrences. This activity is a simplifying interpretation, one that allows us to understand the vast profusion of history (LPW 49 [VPW 56]). In Hegel's terms, this approach to history must begin from but also enact "the idea that reason governs the world" (LPW 27 [VPW 28]). It is only through reflecting on our history and trying to discern this internal order that we fully understand ourselves as human beings, or that *Geist* comes fully to self-consciousness.

History and *Bildung*

In this sense, Hegel's philosophy of history conforms to the structure of a *Bildungsroman*, a novel that represents the process by which a single character comes to maturity.⁴ *Bildung* has no direct equivalent in English, but can be variously translated as formation, education, maturation, or self-realization. This last term carries all the weight of Hegel's dual understanding of history: it is both through historical events and consciousness of those events that *Geist* becomes in reality what it only was potentially. Unlike animals, in Hegel's account, whose physical maturation happens involuntarily and without reflection, as "merely a quantitative increase in strength," a human being

can only fulfill himself through education [*Bildung*] and discipline... [and] must realize his potential through his own efforts, and must first acquire everything for himself, precisely because he is a spiritual being [*Geist*]; in short, he must throw off all that is natural in him. *Geist*, therefore, is the product of itself. (LPW 50–51 [VPW 58])

Human maturation requires the rejection of what characterizes matter, its heteronomy. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explicitly represents the progressive self-consciousness of *Geist* as *Bildung*: “The task of leading the individual from his uneducated [*ungebildete*] standpoint to knowledge has to be seen in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual, self-conscious *Geist*, whose formative education [*Bildung*] had to be studied” (PhG §28 [HW 3:31]). Knowledge here must be understood first and foremost as self-knowledge, knowledge of the world that *Geist* has interpreted and organized both through intellectual and material activity.

Understanding Hegel’s philosophy of history as an instance of the *Bildungsroman* genre is not intended to reinforce the empiricist historians’ criticism, that Hegel is projecting an imaginary master narrative upon the facts of history and thereby distorting them. In both fictional and nonfictional narratives, the integrative work of thought constitutes the coherence of the story, even if the raw materials of those narratives have different origins. Hegel refers to this parallel activity in the *Aesthetics*, when he defines history as having a poetic form and a prose-based content, where “prose” characterizes the historians’ commitment to facts as well as a particular kind of facts – primarily those dealing with politics and social life, the “prose of life” (LA 987 [HW 15:258]). The coherence of those narratives requires what Hayden White has famously called “historical emplotment”: “the truths figured in historical narratives of the highest sort [i.e., philosophical history] are the truths of Tragedy, but these truths are only poetically figured there as the forms of historical representations whose contents are the actual life dramas lived by individuals and peoples at specific times and places.”⁵ The underlying story is structured like a tragedy, the rise and fall of the fortunes of an individual; however, rather than being an imaginary creation, the substance of the story is historical events and peoples. The shape of the story is a tragedy, but the historian still holds to the imperative to record what really happened. According to White, the key moment of a tragedy is how a character is transformed by whatever catastrophe he or she has faced, a process that corresponds to the idea of *Bildung* as the spiritual growth of an individual, especially through loss or suffering.⁶ White argues that Hegel’s philosophy of history should be understood as the attempt to convert the tragic narrative governing each particular culture, or each stage of *Geist*’s maturation, into a comic one, in which ultimately all is well: “the chaos of forms... becomes a revel, a joyous affirmation of the whole.”⁷ The conversion of one narrative into another kind

of narrative reflects the move to philosophical history, or the working of reason. Although our initial awareness of historical events may impel us toward a tragic or even despairing vision of human reality, Hegel insists that we are then challenged to answer the question of the larger purpose of such tragedy. That higher reconciliation makes up the narrative that unfolds in the *Philosophy of History*, the maturation of *Geist*.

Hegel is at pains to emphasize that this maturation happens only through the telling of that maturation, which is why history-as-events must be accompanied by history-as-the-representation-of-events to count as authentic history. The formation of *Bildung* is self-formation. What happens in one's life does not determine who one is, but rather provides the situations in which one makes sense of what that life means, or what one's identity is. That process of constituting, or consolidating, one's own identity is a fundamentally narrative process, involving reflection and interpretation. As Charles Taylor argues, "we grasp our lives in a *narrative*. ... In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going."⁸ But this self-interpretive activity is not reducible to fantasy, or to the "*a priori* fictions" of the idealist who is demonized by empirically minded historians (LPW 29 [HPW 31]). The kind of *Bildung* in question is clearly focused on the internal development of a character, rather than his or her physical maturation. Such cognitive and emotional transformation happens through experience, but more importantly through reflection on that experience, as Louis Dupré argues: "Time remembered differs from the time of perception even though it relates to it. In recollection I select only those intuitions to which I decide to pay attention."⁹ The identity of the mature person is constructed through this activity of self-interpretation, without being a mere fabrication. *Bildung* is thus neither a process that a subject undergoes, as a passive spectator to an automatic maturation, nor an arbitrarily assembled fantasy. It rather involves reflecting on who one was as a child or an adolescent, the distance one has traversed since that period, challenging the forms of authority that no longer have binding power, and comprehending who one is now.¹⁰

That unpredictable, idiosyncratic activity expresses the complexity of Hegel's alternative form of history, which refuses both the impossible ideal of empiricist history and the fabrications of the *a priori* historian. Philosophical history looks for the internal rationality of world history, and assumes that

world history is governed by an ultimate design, that it is a rational process – whose rationality is not that of a particular subject, but a divine and absolute reason. ... [I]ts proof lies in the study of world history itself, which is the image and enactment of reason. The real proof, however, comes from a knowledge of reason itself; for reason appears in world history only in a mediate form. (LPW 28 [VPW 29])

In writing philosophical history, Hegel is constructing a narrative that attempts to capture the meaning in the wide range of human actions and cultures. It has to be accountable to what has actually happened, but in order to tell a coherent, significant story it must go beyond a chronicle, the flat representation of dates and major events – even though a chronicle is also the result of some (albeit minimal) interpretive construction. In trying to capture the meaning of human experiences, a philosophical history must also go beyond causal explanations, to seek the purposes within those events.

The maturation that results is an achievement of consciousness rather than an end-state of an automatic process that the organism passively undergoes, and that achievement can only result from a critical repudiation of one's immature states – a replacement of naïveté with a more nuanced set of expectations, for instance. The capacity for maturation is thus a kind of determinate negation (*Aufhebung*), a process of annulling but also transforming. Hegel deliberately emphasizes the pain associated with this activity: in James Schmidt's words, "What is striking...is that Hegel eschews the conventional image of Bildung as an organic unfolding of a form immanent in an individual or a people and instead presents Bildung as a process of relentless self-estrangement."¹¹ In discussing the peculiar fertility brought about by this self-estrangement, Hegel invokes the contrast between matter and *Geist*, in order to emphasize how in the process of maturation *Geist* comes to renounce external forms of authority – natural forces, family bonds, tradition. Part of telling one's own story involves critically reflecting on the forces that have made one what one is, and thus digesting them, converting those childish forms of authority into one's own authority through deliberate negation, preservation, and elevation.

Freedom and mourning

That capacity to rule oneself is what Hegel calls freedom. In stark contrast to nature or matter, *Geist* has the capacity for self-definition through self-knowledge: "Matter has its substance outside itself; *Geist*, on the other hand, is self-sufficient being [*Beisichselbstsein*], which is the same thing as freedom....*Geist* produces and realizes itself in the light of its knowledge of itself" (LPW 48 [VPW 55–56]). Whereas matter coheres into inert objects, *Geist* is capable of reflecting upon itself and transforming itself. Stephen Houlgate defines *Geist* as this activity of self-formation: "human beings are nothing but the activity of producing and determining themselves and their identity."¹² This freedom is not capriciousness or negative liberty, but instead the capacity to rule oneself, lived out not only as an isolated individual but objectively, in a society (a political and religious culture) structured to recognize that freedom. In this sense, Hegel echoes Kant's definition of enlightenment as "emergence from...self-incurred minority," into the possibility of thinking and acting for oneself (WE

35). In Hegel's account, this is now understood on the scale of the state, rather than merely in individual terms. Still, Hegel draws analogies between the maturation of *Geist*, through the collective ethical life of a people, and the development of an individual person, as when he compares world history to the stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

Within these analogies, Hegel emphasizes how the past forms of *Geist* live within the present, rather than being fully rejected. This is the movement of the *Aufhebung*:

Geist has all the stages of the past still adhering to it, and the life of *Geist* consists of a cycle of different stages, of which some belong to the present and others have appeared in forms of the past.... Those moments which *Geist* appears to have outgrown still belong to it in the depths of its present. (LPW 151 [VPW 183])

What those forms mean in the present, however, is repeatedly reinterpreted, so that even a prior manifestation of *Geist* is not an external, inflexible source of authority, but instead is retrospectively understood in light of *Geist's* current form. This kind of self-determination, or self-ownership, in William Maker's words, requires "a break from the past in the sense of rejecting the unquestioned determining authority of what is found *already given* to us."¹³ Self-formation thus requires the rejection of what had previously been accepted as valuable, natural, true, or immutable.

The renunciation of those previous, externally defined forms of authority also requires the renunciation of the habits of thought and the self-understanding that accepted that authority: "it wins its truth only when it finds itself in utter dismemberment" (PhG §32 [HW 3:36]). That is, maturation requires a kind of destruction of the present self, or a progressive recognition of what has been lost. If we read the philosophy of history as a *Bildungsroman* of *Geist*, the central problem of the work then becomes how to mourn well: how to leave behind immature modes of thinking and activity while still recognizing that those stages have contributed to one's present identity.

The incorporation of death within life preoccupies Hegel in a number of texts and forms an important backdrop in the *Philosophy of History*. To take a paradigmatic example, in the *Aesthetics* (LA 221, 1217–18 [HW 13:287, 15:549–50]) and the *Phenomenology* (PhG §§444–83 [HW 3:327–59]), Hegel reads the core conflict between Antigone and Creon in terms of the authority of divine and civil law, but at a more immediate level, the dispute concerns the boundary between the human and the natural worlds – whether Polyneices will be treated as a human being in death, honored and remembered, or instead treated as only dead matter, left "unwept, unburied, a dainty treasure / for the birds that see him, for their feast's delight."¹⁴ The activity of mourning insists on

the personhood of the one who is mourned, and resists the “depredations of time [*Verschlingen der Zeit*],” which simply negates or destroys all of its material children (LPW 147 [VPW 178]). In this sense mourning is the conscious, mediating negation of the significance of death. Tracing the meaning of *Aufhebung* as preservation and overcoming, Catherine Malabou makes this same connection between growth and mourning: “every one of *Geist*’s shapes will appear retroactively, as an exteriorization which is reinteriorized, making each a kind of imaginary presence, a spectral mode of being their past selves. In this sense, the *Aufhebung* can be interpreted as the labour of speculative mourning.”¹⁵ The process of spiritual maturation requires the work of integrating past versions of the self into present identity, so that the autobiographical narrative of *Geist* hinges on comprehending its whole series of immature stages, which have to be mourned and thus overcome.

In the context of world history, mourning demands that *Geist* moves beyond the limitations of one form of life (social/political organization) to create another. To take an example central to his philosophical history, Hegel interprets the violent impetus behind the French Revolution, in Rebecca Comay’s words, as “the seething melancholia of a subject gripped by the phantasm of an ungrieved past.”¹⁶ France suffered from trying to realize the utopian ideal of “absolute freedom” without reconciling the conflicts at the heart of modern culture – the split between reason and faith, and the loss of traditional identity and the need for social cohesion. As a result, the Revolution ends in the Terror, the antithesis of individual freedom. The stark emblem of the guillotine reduces human beings to mere matter, like Polyneices outside the gates of Thebes (PhG §590 [HW 3:436]).

The problem that Hegel sets for us, or rather that *Geist* sets for itself, is how to mourn history well, or how to respond to the collapse of earlier forms of authority. On his account, mourning essentially takes the form of *Aufhebung*, in which earlier formations of *Geist* are recognized as obsolete (negated) but also incorporated into the present thought and activity of *Geist*. In the *Phenomenology*, describing the self-externalization or self-renunciation of *Geist*, Hegel makes the arresting claim that the “wounds of *Geist* heal, and leave no scars behind” (PhG §669 [HW 3:492]). Part of the integrative activity of mourning is telling a narrative in which what has been lost is given a place and significance in one’s current identity, but in so doing the loss loses its traumatic or overwhelming character, and instead can be interpreted as having a purpose, a *telos*, in making one who one is.

Answering the problem of evil

Hegel characterizes this sense-making activity, or “the idea that reason governs the world,” as the core of the philosophical approach to history (LPW 27 [VPW

28)). For those who might experience doubt about the boldness of this claim, he cites two more familiar precursors of it: Anaxagoras's account of *nous*, or the law-governed state of the natural world; and the Christian idea of providence, a set of underlying religious purposes that structure the apparent accidents of the world. Neither of these ideas captures the full meaning of Hegel's claim about the orderliness of history, but they contain seeds of it, in trying to identify an essential order amidst the frenzy of events. However, instead of human thinking discovering an external set of laws that determine natural events, Reason in history represents *Geist's* self-understanding, the gradual recognition of a "reconciliation" between the purposefulness of world history and the apparent evil within that history. In that sense, philosophical history constitutes a theodicy, which Hegel defines as "a justification of the ways of God" (LPW 42 [VPW 48]). But it is a justification not so much of God as of the rationality of the world as a whole: "It should enable us to comprehend all the ills of the world, including the existence of evil, so that the thinking *Geist* may be reconciled with the negative aspects of existence; and it is in world history that we encounter the sum total of concrete evil" (LPW 42–43 [VPW 48]). Just as reflection on one's development has performative force in that development, and just as historical events must be recorded in order to be properly historical, comprehending the ills of the world in terms of a larger purpose allows us to reinterpret their significance. At this highest level of reflection, they take the form of conditions for the possibility of growth.

A philosophical approach to history must include such a theodicy because an insufficiently reflective survey of human history may well threaten us with despair, as Hegel emphasizes:

When we contemplate this display of passions, and consider the historical consequences of their violence and of the irrationality which is associated with them (and even more so with good intentions and worthy aims); when we see the evil, the wickedness, and the downfall of the most flourishing empires the human spirit [*Menschengeist*] has created; and when we are moved to profound pity for the untold miseries of individual human beings – we can only end with a feeling of sadness at the transience of everything. And since all this destruction is not the work of mere nature but the will of man, our sadness takes on a moral quality, for the good spirit [*des guten Geistes*] in us (if we are at all susceptible to it) eventually revolts at such a spectacle. (LPW 68 [VPW 79–80])

Immediate responses to this tragic panoply include a kind of overwhelmed apathy or self-absorbed relief that whatever has happened in past centuries or in other cultures is at least not happening to *us*. But in the *Logic*, Hegel associates the repudiation of the world with childish despair: "youth believes that

the world is in an utterly sorry state, and something quite different must be made of it" (EL §234Z). The more mature attitude of reconciliation overcomes repudiation, and even uncomprehending consolation.

The passage from the *Philosophy of History* continues with a famous image: "but even as we look upon history as a slaughter-bench [*Schlachtbank*] on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals are sacrificed [*zum Opfer gebracht worden*], our thoughts inevitably impel us to ask: to whom, or to what ultimate end have these monstrous sacrifices been made?" (LPW 69, translation modified [VPW 80]). This is the pivot or transformation that Hegel thinks is essential to rational thought: the seeking of a purpose behind chaos or destruction. This shift from despair to the demand for explanation constitutes the redemptive orientation of reason. The very language of sacrifice (*Opfer*), even monstrous sacrifices, generates the redemptive structure of a loss sustained for the purpose of some greater good and contained within a divine order. Those losses come to be seen as "the means whereby what we have specified as the substantial destiny, the absolute and final end, or in other words, the true result of world history, is realised" (LPW 69 [VPW 80]). Confronted with horror, despair, or loss, reason attempts to make sense of those events, not only explaining them causally but in terms of purposes:

What is usually called reality is seen by philosophy as no more than an idle semblance which has no reality in and for itself. If we have the impression that the events of the past are totally calamitous and devoid of sense, we can find consolation, so to speak, in this awareness. But consolation is merely received in compensation for a misfortune which ought never to have happened in the first place, and it belongs to the world of finite things. Philosophy, therefore, is not really a means of consolation. It is more than that, for it transfigures reality with all of its apparent injustices and reconciles it with the rational. (LPW 67 [VPW 78])

The idea of providence, or the belief that human history enacts the mysterious but ultimately good purposes of a divine power, can provide consolation to those gripped by despair in the face of particular events or the broad sweep of history. This worldview recognizes wickedness in the world and tries to compensate for it by attributing to that wickedness some unknown purpose or some future, indeterminate compensation. But Hegel criticizes providence as an empty form of faith, which forecloses any understanding of the content of divine intentions. By contrast, philosophical history works toward a substantive justification of the present in light of its past and of the past in light of the present. Consolation may encourage us to accept the troubles of the world but does not fully transform our understanding of those events. In their focus on causal explanation, empirically based histories fail to console us and also

fail to provide any reason for the events they record. Psychologically, despair of the kind described in the above passage might arise even if we can give a causal explanation of an event, if a teleological explanation is lacking. On Hegel's account, the mature activity of reason seeks a purpose within the welter of causes.

As many scholars have noted, Hegel's philosophy of history strongly resembles, in secular form, the Christian narrative of innocence leading to the Fall and expulsion from that initial, familiar life, followed by redemption, a unification or reunification with the divine. But for Hegel, as for some Christian theologians, the Fall is a necessary step in a process of maturation in which the beginning does not represent perfection, and redemption is not merely a repetition of that perfection. Instead, the process of loss and healing is transformative, a series of determinate negations that allow *Geist* to know itself fully, and thus to be fully itself. In this sense Hegel's philosophy of history has strong associations with the Irenaean version of theodicy. Revived in recent decades by John Hick, Irenaeus's justification of evil conceives of an imperfect world as pedagogically necessary for an imperfect organism to achieve spiritual maturity. In the phrase that Hick borrows from John Keats, evil in the world functions as a "vale of soul-making."¹⁷ This justification of evil deemphasizes the Augustinian focus on punishment incurred by moral disobedience toward God and likens the human experience of evil to a child's moral education. Virtue cannot be bestowed from an external source. It can only be learned and cultivated, and the conditions under which human beings accomplish this moral state are conditions of imperfection, including suffering and injustice. Before the Fall, virtue is at best infantile. According to this tradition in theodicy, both natural and moral evil are pedagogically necessary for our moral development.

This theme resonates in Hegel's claim that the "slaughter-bench" of human history must be understood as the process by which *Geist* realizes itself in its freedom. And it is the philosophical method of history that teaches us to interpret it that way, by retrospectively reflecting on the purpose of that turmoil. Reason is teleologically inclined, by seeking and constructing the framework in which these events have that meaning. Taylor comments on this central function of reason: "What human reason can do is only to grasp what has already been realized, to understand what reason has already achieved. In doing this, of course, philosophy defends the rationality of the real and purifies it..."¹⁸ Unlike reflective history (or the professional discipline of history), which tends to remain neutral about the ultimate purpose of historical events, philosophical history seeks a rational world.

In this sense, rational activity has an essentially redemptive cast, insofar as it attempts to discover a purposive order in history. Lynne Arnault makes the dynamics of this process more precise in her analysis of horror, as a reaction

to human-inflicted violence. She argues that horror contains the judgment that an event has violated our basic conceptual norms – that people should not be tortured, or that dead people should not return as flesh-eating zombies, for instance. Such an experience (real or virtual) challenges not only that particular expectation or moral judgment, but “exposes my futile aspirations to be a legislator of universal ends,” or demonstrates that my judgments do not govern reality.¹⁹ Therefore, horror constitutes what Arnault calls “an ordeal of practical reason.”²⁰ The attempt to redeem whatever has provoked our horror is animated by the desire to see the world as an orderly place, and one that conforms to our basic judgments about how it should be. A redemptive narrative allows that there are events of great suffering or cruelty or destruction, but contains the horror caused by those events by placing them within a trajectory that leads to some greater purpose. The redemptive narrative thus functions as an antidote to horror by restoring a person’s confidence in the conceptual homology between his or her thinking and reality. One’s basic conceptual norms are restored to a position of authority over the given.

In Hegel’s philosophy of history, the issue is not specifically horror caused by human-inflicted violence but the despair caused by the brutal power of time and by the destruction wreaked by and in whole peoples and individuals. Interpreting this slaughter-bench as a series of sacrifices toward the realization of spiritual freedom allows us to “look at the world rationally,” shaping our experience of reality to conform to our rational expectations (LPW 29 [VPW 31]). The problem, as Arnault argues, is that this antidote carries along side-effects, including (most problematically for Hegel) the tendency to treat the negative moment as necessary or justified, in its role in bringing about the greater good. Mourning succeeds in containing its loss within this purposeful narrative.

Norms of mourning

In his philosophy of history, Hegel describes a form of mourning with strong connections to Christian models of redemption. But this transcendence would efface the process of mourning by assimilating the loss as a means toward a higher purpose. The teleological orientation of Hegelian mourning, or the redemptive impulse in contemporary culture more generally, contrasts sharply with the immediate (or slightly mediated) experience of grief, in which the undoing of identity seems to outweigh any integration of that loss into a more mature self. I say “slightly mediated” in the previous sentence because even the description of one’s own grief requires the conversion of that experience into a narrative – even fragmentary, meditative, sometimes circular narratives, such as Joan Didion’s accounts of mourning, *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*.²¹ Her work is an example of a reflective narrative about loss, without

being an exemplary narrative. In developing a critique of Hegel's philosophical history in the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to Didion, among others, to suggest that defining a normative standard for mourning is an unrealistic endeavor. No single process of mourning and no single reflection on that process could successfully represent all the others.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion demonstrates both the attempts to make sense of her loss and the ways in which those attempts fall apart. She traces and retraces the significance of particular details surrounding her husband's death (her reaction at the hospital when she was told her husband had died, when precisely he died, the writing that he had done just prior to his death) and certain phrases or sentences that reflect that loss ("You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends").²² She tries to understand her husband's death, both in causal terms and in more spiritual ones, in Hegel's sense of that word. Without suggesting that his death served any overarching purpose, she ends up telling much of the story of his life, or their life together, in mourning him. In this way, she instantiates the core insight of Hegel's philosophy of history: the activity of thinking is the activity of making our experience significant to ourselves, which requires the fabrication of narratives. Those narratives necessarily involve reflection on what has happened and open the possibility of learning from those experiences. Every narrative contains teleological tendencies, then, but those tendencies may be either strengthened or contested by other threads within the narrative.

Didion's narrative is not redemptive in any straightforward way, and she provides no standards for measuring or methods for achieving successful mourning. She instead records what Judith Butler calls the "undergoing" of loss: "Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life."²³ This emphasis on the "obliterative" passivity of grief, as well as its repetitive quality, cuts against Hegel's idea of a healing without scars, without remainder, or the image of the Phoenix, which is not only rejuvenated ("an image of the East," consisting of mere repetition) but "enhanced and transfigured" as a result of its dismemberment or consumption (LPW 32 [VPW 35]). Although her memoirs record intense self-awareness, Didion's reflections do not lead to reconciliation, in Hegel's terms, at least not in the writings themselves. She instead consistently challenges and questions the cultural image of grief as a well-contained and predictable process of healing.²⁴ At the same time, she does not express indifference, despair, or consolation through a blind belief in providence, attitudes which Hegel identifies as immature alternatives to philosophical reconciliation.

The anti-teleological experience of grief interrupts the cultural tendency toward a redemptive narrative, but it can also be suppressed by that tendency. The rush to banish melancholy can foreclose the real work of mourning by

depicting the loss as necessary or ultimately good. Malabou claims that Hegel takes the character of mourning in a culture to reflect its level of self-consciousness, and that “mourning is only truly possible when the right proportion of suppression and preservation is found...the in-between of obsessive recollection and total forgetting.”²⁵ However, as she argues, the very attempt to define an ideal of mourning assumes that there is such a “right proportion,” or that mourning can be contained within a normative model. It may be that “closure” is a merely abstract vanishing point, as Butler suggests:

I am not sure I know when mourning has been successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being....Perhaps...one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance.²⁶

The multiple hesitations in this passage are reminders of the unmastered quality of mourning.²⁷ In this account, undergoing a loss signifies that the attempt to narrate one’s loss, or domesticate it within a structure of destruction and redemption, breaks down:

I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very “I” who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling.... My narrative falters, as it must.... One does not always stay intact.²⁸

Reflection may not provide enough distance from what one mourns for the transformative purposes of *Bildung*, but instead it may intensify the loss.

This line of critique does not suggest that Hegel’s philosophical history is a simple denial of human suffering. He clearly identifies history as a series of catastrophes, to which the most intuitive reaction is sorrow about the past and pessimism about the future. But he claims that the intensity of that negativity stimulates our thought to seek some underlying purpose, which then converts those events into a narrative of progress and even “perfectibility” (LPW 125 [VPW 149]). Pierre Chételat argues that Hegel’s theodicy involves an overcoming of suffering that is not the elimination of pain but the acceptance of that pain as we endure it. We become reconciled to it, and are therefore not ultimately threatened by it.²⁹ In support of this interpretation, he quotes from the *Logic*: “Since we also have the consciousness of our freedom, the harmony of our souls and our peace of mind will not be destroyed by the misfortunes that befall us” (EL §147Z). But even this emphasis on learning to live happily in the aftermath of suffering or loss is considerably more optimistic about the

sovereignty of consciousness than the experience of mourning as the undoing of the self would allow.

The very attempt to reconcile experiences of suffering with the demands of reason can contradict the mourner's strongest perceptions. In Susan Brison's philosophical memoir of her recovery from sexual assault, she rejects an aunt's facile reassurance that the attack on her is a "blessing from above" because it will allow her to help others:

Such attempts at a theodicy discounted the horror I had to endure [in recovery, not merely in the attack itself]. But I learned that everyone needs to try and make sense, in however inadequate a way, of such senseless violence. I watched my own seesawing attempts to find something for which to be grateful, something to redeem the unmitigated awfulness.³⁰

This passage reflects an ambivalent reflection of how reason functions for Hegel: Brison tries to find some significance in what she has experienced, but she ultimately refuses to seek a purpose that justifies those experiences. It may not be entirely appropriate to apply the term "mourning" to Brison's work of recovery, but the two processes overlap in crucial ways: mourning or recovery is interestingly neither fully a project controlled by the subject nor something passively undergone, and both tend to be distinctly rough, fragmented, and non-linear processes.

Brison emphasizes that her attempts to make sense of her world involved repeatedly telling the story of her trauma to others, and that the process of healing depended significantly on whether that story was listened to with respect and sympathy. Narration tries to capture a limit-experience and allows the subject to attempt to regain a coherent sense of self, by representing the trauma that had threatened that coherence, or even, as Brison suggests, destroyed a previous self. Although constructing narratives about her assault had healing power, especially when those narratives were affirmed by others, these narratives were anti-teleological:

Narrative ... facilitates the ability to go on by opening up possibilities for the future through retelling the stories of the past. It does this not by reestablishing the illusions of coherence of the past, control over the present, and predictability of the future, but by making it possible to carry on without these illusions.³¹

The very incompleteness of mourning or recovery speaks against a normative framework that defines "successful mourning."

Brison titles her work *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. The term "aftermath" suggests the retrospective accounting that is done, to represent

coherently what has happened. This is particularly challenging after a traumatic event, because trauma is an experience that overwhelms a person's ability to make sense of it. Brison's subtitle and much of her work claim that the self can be remade in the wake of loss, at least partially through the activity of telling one's story to sympathetic listeners. This idea overlaps importantly with the *Bildungsroman* genre, in which the self is constructed or reconstructed through the narrative that represents its history. But this capacity for transformation does not entail healing without scars.

The kind of mourning that Didion, Butler, and Brison describe suggests a different conception of self-formation, in which the individual or *Geist* retrospectively tells a narrative but in so doing does not constitute an identity that clearly masters its past, as in a *Bildungsroman*. Instead, contemplative self-reflection is threatened and interrupted by losses that cannot be redeemed or justified. Mourning can be an attempt to narrate what has happened, to tell a coherent story, but also the experience of the failure of these attempts. Then *Geist* would once again be the activity of trying to make sense of historical events, without necessarily being able to do so in any settled or stable way. Self-formation would have to take account of ongoing and ultimately irredeemable deformations, or challenges to the narrative one has told.

Recent scholars, including Slavoj Žižek and Rebecca Comay, emphasize the open-endedness of the Hegelian dialectic, its resistance to wholeness or closure.³² Comay in particular interprets the line about healing without scars against the "plastic" quality of the dialectic:

The only way to close the wound, or rather to undo its coercive power, is to reopen it: to become what we are. Absolute knowing is just the subject's identification with the woundedness that it is. Antidote is in this sense indistinguishable from injury, health from illness, and poison from cure; Hegel is here rehearsing all the paradoxes of the *pharmakon*.³³

On this reading, the self-alienation of *Geist* is continuous, and its attempts to establish a single identity for itself create the destabilization of those identities. However, Hegel's tone emphasizes a modernist optimism about perfectibility and a celebration of the "plastic" power to transcend losses.³⁴ The central contrast between *Geist* and matter hinges on this capacity for self-transformation, as opposed to mere change or repetition. This conception of matter is itself an interpretive construction, rather than the product of value-neutral observation.³⁵ Hegel's insistence on the mobility of *Geist* through its development is still moored to its overcoming of mere matter. But mourning undercuts the clear separation between *Geist* and matter, insofar as it troubles agency and self-possession. It is a process we undergo – and usually undergo in a strongly embodied way – even as it tends to impel us to try to make renewed sense of

our lives. If *Geist* can be purified of its material entanglements, its mourning can be envisioned as a process of transcendence and perfectibility. But the sharp distinction between *Geist* and matter itself needs to be acknowledged as interpretive, perhaps even protective, and thus subject to reevaluation, along with its implications for how we conceive of ourselves.

Conclusions: Understanding Hegel in some other way³⁶

Hegel provides resources for understanding the transformative, or self-transformative, power of human reason. Even in the midst of obliterative loss, we tend to look for meaning, to construct a narrative that sets our experiences within a coherent framework, and the narrative itself then makes possible the transformation of identity. The attempt to make sense of one's world, or to find order in what happens, is the constant activity of consciousness. In this sense Hegel expresses a characteristic feature of human thought. As Taylor argues, "We want our lives to have meaning, or weight, or substance, or to grow towards some fullness. ... If necessary, we want the future to 'redeem' the past, to make it part of a life story which has sense or purpose, to take it up in a meaningful unity."³⁷ Even "unsuccessful mourning," mourning that does not conform to normative standards of successful mourning, is an attempt to make sense of a new reality, the loss sustained by the subject, and the wounded sense of self.

But in Hegel's philosophical history, those resources help to construct a teleological narrative that repeats and reinforces Eurocentric and Christian narratives of loss, striving, and redemption. The picture of mourning that emerges remains beholden to an ideal of sovereignty, even if this sovereignty is plastic and mutable. In attempting to make sense of experience, we need to recognize that our narratives are interpretive constructions, subject to further criticism. What are the sources of our notions of perfection grounding the process of perfectibility? What are the costs of framing our histories, or our identities, in one way or another? This is not the same criticism that professional historians have launched against Hegel; the choice in this realm of human thinking is not between facts and fabrications. Hegel's description of history keenly picks out the interpretive work of narration, the attempt to organize what has happened into a cohesive, meaningful account. Our thought tends to seek not only a causal explanation but reasons and purposes as well. There is thus an interplay between the "bare facts" (as if even those could be articulated shorn of all interpretation) and our thinking activity. But our autobiographies and historical narratives need to be exposed to ongoing critique, so that our understanding of successful mourning or coherent narratives are open to revision. The forms of mature freedom that Hegel describes should also be invoked in relation to his philosophical history, so that even this narrative may be

challenged, given that it carries along forms of authority that may themselves need to be dismantled.

Notes

1. The introductory sections of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history are often used to introduce Hegel's thought as a whole, and there is some evidence that Hegel himself conceived of his philosophy of history as a way to make his system more accessible to the general public. One of the features of the text that makes this usage problematic, however, is that the available versions of the lectures have been compiled from Hegel's incomplete lecture notes from the 1830 course, and from four sets of student notes from the 1822–23 course, the 1824–25 course, and the 1826–27 course. Four major editions of these compiled notes have been published: Eduard Gans in 1837, Karl Hegel (G. W. F. Hegel's son) in 1840, Georg Lasson in 1917, and Johannes Hoffmeister in 1955. The Suhrkamp edition of *Hegels Werke* (HW) is based on the Karl Hegel edition of 1840. The most common English translations are J. Sibree's *Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956); H. B. Nisbet's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) (LPW); Robert S. Hartman's *Reason in History* (New York: Liberal Arts, 1953); and Leo Rauch's *Introduction to "The Philosophy of History"* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988) (IPH). Sibree, Hartman, and Rauch translate the Karl Hegel text, while Nisbet translates the larger Hoffmeister edition.
2. Duncan Forbes, introduction to *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), xviii.
3. Nisbet consistently translates *Geist* as "the spirit." Quotations from *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* have been amended to leave this central term untranslated.
4. Josiah Royce compares the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to an account of *Geist* as "the self viewed metaphorically as the wanderer through the course of history, the incarnate god to whom the events of human life may be supposed to happen" (*Lectures on Modern Idealism* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919], 149–50). See also G. A. Kelly, *Idealism, Politics, and History: Sources of Hegelian Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Michael Beddow argues that what makes the *Bildungsroman* a distinctive genre in modern Europe is that it tells the story of the internal development of its central character (on its own a theme present in many cultures and time periods) to make a claim about human nature in general (*The Fiction of Humanity: Studies in the Bildungsroman from Wieland to Thomas Mann* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 5). In that sense, Hegel's isomorphism between the maturation of an individual and world history inverts the essential feature of this genre.
5. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 93.
6. *Ibid.*, 95.
7. *Ibid.*, 131.
8. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 47.
9. Louis Dupré, "Hegel Reflects on Remembering," *The Owl of Minerva* 25, no. 2 (spring 1994): 142.
10. See Paul Redding, "Absorbed in the Spectacle of the World: Hegel's Criticism of Romantic Historiography," *Clio* 16, no. 4 (summer 1987): 297–315; and John H.

- Smith, *The Spirit and Its Letter: Traces of Rhetoric in Hegel's Philosophy of "Bildung"* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 174–238.
11. James Schmidt, "The Fool's Truth: Goethe, Diderot, and Hegel," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, no. 4 (Oct. 1996): 630.
 12. Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 14.
 13. William Maker, "The End of History and the Nihilism of Becoming," in *Hegel and History*, ed. Will Dudley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 19.
 14. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, in *Sophocles I*, trans. David Grene, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 162.
 15. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005), 146.
 16. Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 56.
 17. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 253.
 18. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 425.
 19. Lynne S. Arnault, "Cruelty, Horror, and the Will to Redemption," in *Feminist Philosophy and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Robin May Schott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 175.
 20. *Ibid.*, 176.
 21. Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: Knopf, 2005) and *Blue Nights* (New York: Knopf, 2011).
 22. Didion, *Year of Magical Thinking*, 63.
 23. *Ibid.*, 27.
 24. *Ibid.*, 188.
 25. Catherine Malabou, "History and the Process of Mourning in Hegel and Freud," trans. Jay Lampert and Olivier Serafinowicz, *Radical Philosophy* 106 (March/April 2001): 17.
 26. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 20–21.
 27. Jacques Derrida discusses the "impossibility" of mourning in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, where the condition for the impossibility of mourning is the alterity of one's friend. This is a mourning that "refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism" (trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava [New York: Columbia University Press, 1986], 6). Derrida's emphasis on the passive and interruptive quality of mourning converges with my critical reading of Hegel, but his Levinasian emphasis on alterity remains outside the framework of this project.
 28. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23.
 29. Pierre Ch  telat, "Hegel's Philosophy of World History as Theodicy: On Evil and Freedom," in *Hegel and History*, 224.
 30. Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.
 31. *Ibid.*, 104.
 32. Slavoj   i  ek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), 199–240.
 33. Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 130.
 34. Malabou, *Future of Hegel*.

35. Nietzsche reminds us of the contingent interpretations of nature in relation to the Stoics' definition of virtue: "you demand that nature be nature 'according to the Stoa' ...nature too can be tyrannized over" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Penguin, 1973], I:§9). Although the Stoics manipulate nature to function as an ideal, rather than the foil to *Geist*, in both cases nature is presented as a given, fore-closing critical reflection on dominant conceptions of nature.
36. I am borrowing Hegel's phrase from the preface of the *Phenomenology*. The original passage reads: "The philosophical proposition, since it *is* a proposition, leads one to believe that the usual subject-predicate relation obtains, as well as the usual attitude toward knowing. But the philosophical content destroys this attitude and this opinion. We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition, and understand it in some other way" (PhG §63 [HW 3:60]).
37. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 50–51.

31

Our All-Too-Human Hegelian Agency

Sally Sedgwick

My title is meant to challenge a common preconception of Hegel, a preconception we might plausibly associate with a philosopher who designates his form of idealism as “absolute” and who claims that modern philosophy (at least his version of it) has arrived at the standpoint of “absolute knowledge.”¹ In the area of practical philosophy, the preconception is that Hegel’s claims are similarly immodest, and that he awards human nature the capacities of unlimited freedom and perfect self-awareness.

In this chapter, I offer some reasons for why we should not take this view of Hegel seriously. Very generally, I am interested in the role he allows contingency to play in his system. My aim in these pages is to make a few suggestions about the implications of his views about contingency for his account of human agency.

I begin by taking a look at a piece of the story of human freedom Hegel lays out in the *Philosophy of Right*. The *Philosophy of Right* outlines the progression of human history from “lower” to “higher” forms of freedom, and from “less adequate” to “more adequate” forms of agency. I will be drawing attention to Hegel’s characterization of the *mechanics* of the development, that is, the underlying causal forces that are supposed to move the process along. I want to consider questions such as: What conditions does Hegel identify as necessary for securing the transitions from “lower” to “higher” forms? What insures the emergence of “higher” from “lower” forms of agency, on his account?²

The focus of my discussion will be the transition that occurs between the first and second chapters of the *Philosophy of Right*, the transition from “Abstract Right” to “Morality.” For Hegel, this transition represents an important piece of philosophical progress in the history of modern political theory. Very roughly, it is the transition from Locke and Hobbes to Rousseau and Kant.

Nothing significant turns on my decision to single out this particular transition over one of the other transitions Hegel lays out in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Again, my concern is to highlight features of the *general causal story* he tells of the progressive development of right. I have chosen the transition from “Abstract Right” to “Morality” as one example of this development, but my purpose could just as well be served by reviewing some other transition in the text.

I will be asking these questions: What is the causal story Hegel tells to explain the transition from “Abstract Right” to “Morality”? What role does he award contingency in moving the process along? What can we learn from the role Hegel assigns contingency about the respect in which our agency, in his view, is all-too-human?

From “Abstract Right” to “Morality”

In “Abstract Right,” the first chapter of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel portrays human freedom in a primitive or natural condition, before anything like a modern state is in place. He aims in this chapter to call our attention to essential elements of modern Western state-of-nature narratives, and to remind us of arguments deployed by philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes for the rationality of trading the state of nature condition for that of the modern state.

We can divide the causal factors responsible for the transition from “Abstract Right” to “Morality” into two main classes. First, some of the causal factors are *situational*. As just noted, “Abstract Right” describes a state of nature. Particular wills in this natural condition are initially unaware that they would be better off, individually as well as collectively, leaving this natural condition behind and allowing themselves to be governed by a certain kind of state. They believe that the best situation for them is one in which, as private individuals, they exercise the powers to judge, make, and execute law.

It is Hegel’s view that once we have made the details of these situational factors explicit, we will have at least *part* of the explanation for the transition to the higher level of Morality. But he highlights a second set of causal factors as well, factors we can classify as *psychological*.³ These psychological factors include both the particular will’s self-understanding and its motivational set. The particular will in the state of nature has a specific conception of its unique nature. It considers itself to be more than a mere animal or mere natural creature, and as therefore driven by more than the desire to satisfy its basic physical needs. On Hegel’s representation, the particular will in the state of nature is indeed unlike other animals in that it is endowed with the capacity for thought. In addition, it possesses a *will* precisely because of its ability to do what other animals cannot do: to *act* on its thoughts. In possessing a will, the particular individual in the state of nature is in Hegel’s terminology a “person” and not a mere “thing [*Sache*]” (PR §§34, 35).⁴ As a person, it not only puts its will into things, but considers itself *entitled* to put its will into things. That is, it considers itself entitled to claim things as its own. In short, the particular will

or “person” thinks of itself as a bearer of right (PR §§35–37). Hegel thus identifies the “person” as the “basis” of “abstract...right” (PR §36).

Hegel wishes us to appreciate that a particular will’s status as a “person” is not derived from the desires and capacities that *distinguish* it from other particular wills. A particular will is a bearer of right only because of its nature *qua person*. Strictly speaking, the particular will, *qua person*, has no particularity. This is why Hegel writes that particularity is “not yet contained” in “abstract personality” (PR §37). It is why he describes Abstract Right as a system of right that “remains indifferent to particularity” (PR §49Z).

Since Hegel is interested in retracing the steps of intellectual history that explain as well as justify the origin of the modern state, he highlights factors associated with Abstract Right that generate conflict and therefore account for the transition to the “higher” stage of right that he calls Morality. As a person, a particular will is entitled to rights and shares this entitlement with other persons. But a particular will in the state of nature is not *just* a person. It is motivated above all by a concern to satisfy its own interests. At this stage, the particular will does not care about the fact that rights are something to which all persons, *qua persons*, are entitled. Insofar as what motivates it is its particularity, this will has a reason to violate right when it serves its interests to do so.

Furthermore, since effective and impartial laws and effective means of enforcement do not exist in the state of nature, particular wills in that state cannot settle disputes by relying on those resources. They must resolve conflict privately and by any means available. Following Hobbes, Hegel describes the state of nature condition as a state ravaged by insecurity and violence. Although each particular will seeks to realize its freedom, it finds itself in a situation “governed entirely by force,” a situation of *unfreedom* (PR §§93, 194).⁵

Part of what makes the state of nature insecure is the fact that particular wills in this condition do not just possess the *capacity* for freedom but desire also to *express* their freedom. Each person in other words seeks to give its will an existence and thereby *exercise* its right (PR §57).⁶ Each will exercises its right by putting its will into things, by designating things as its own (PR §46). Each designates things as its own with the help of various means of expression or externalization – from primitive forms such as physical seizure, to more subtle modes of signifying ownership such as making contracts.

If we wonder why self-expression is *necessary* for the particular will, we get our answer by specifying the situational details more completely. It is significant, first of all, that the wills Hegel describes in the natural condition do not enjoy perfect solitude. Did they enjoy such solitude, they would not only have no need to assert their right to things, but they would most likely not even be *aware* of themselves as bearers of right. Also significant is the fact that the state of nature is no paradise. It is a state in which particular wills experience some form of physical and psychological scarcity. Were this not the

case, these wills would presumably likewise experience no need to assert their right to things. Finally, were particular wills in the state of nature so constituted that their overriding concern was the welfare of others, it is doubtful that they would possess the idea of property – of “mine versus thine” – at all.

On Hegel’s description, however, the state of nature situation is one in which self-interested wills must contend with each other as well as with conditions of scarcity. The “persons” of Abstract Right are motivated by a concern for their own well-being over the welfare of others, and each person seeks above all to insure that its own natural right to property is respected. The particular will’s need for self-expression in the state of nature is thus parasitic on at least these factors.

Hegel portrays the general conflict generated in the context of Abstract Right as a conflict between the will as “person” and the interests of its particularity. As a person, a particular will is entitled to rights and shares this entitlement with other persons. But as also having particularity, a particular will seeks to satisfy its unique interests. As Hegel puts it, the particular will at this stage does not “will the universal as such” (PR §103); it does not care about right “as right” (PR §99).⁷ The particular will of Abstract Right is in other words not yet moved by the idea that *all* persons have rights and are entitled to have those rights respected.⁸

Taken together, these motivational and situational factors propel the dialectical movement forward. For modern Western political thought, as Hegel portrays it, they provide key premises of the argument justifying the modern state. In the final chapter of *Philosophy of Right*, “Ethical Life,” Hegel joins Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant in defending the thesis that the modern state is a necessary remedy for the state of nature condition.

Since my focus in this chapter is Hegel’s description of the transition between Abstract Right and Morality rather than his discussion of the transition to Ethical Life, I am not going to comment on his treatment of the role the ethical state plays in resolving the conflicts of Abstract Right. In the transition with which we are concerned here, Hegel is interested in another piece of the solution to the deficiencies of Abstract Right. He outlines the way in which Rousseau and Kant address what I will call the *motivation* problem.

There is a motivation problem, at the stage of Abstract Right, for reasons we just reviewed. At this stage, the particular will does not yet *identify* with its own nature as a universal will or person. The particular will seeks to have *its* rights respected, but this is only because it wishes to satisfy its particular ends. It does not at this stage recognize that its universal aspect – its identity as a person – is the *essential* aspect of its will.⁹ The particular will is therefore unmoved by the implications of this essential aspect of its will. It has no interest in the fact that personhood is a feature it shares with other wills; nor does it acknowledge that other particular wills have the same rights that it does. The particular will of

Abstract Right experiences right as “external,” that is, as not necessarily compatible with its particular interests, and therefore as not necessarily worthy of its respect.

Hegel suggests that we are indebted to both Rousseau and Kant for the insight that this motivation problem can be solved if we think of right in a new way. What secures the transition to Morality is a new self-awareness on the part of the particular will. The transition is secured by the will’s recognition that right is an expression of and derives from an essential part of itself. The particular will that has been enlightened by this new self-awareness comes to appreciate that it is not just a *bearer* of right but is also the *author* of right. In Hegel’s terminology, the particular will of Morality thinks of itself as no longer a mere “person” but as also a “subject.”

The standpoint of Morality derives the following lesson, then, from the conflict generated by Abstract Right: the particular will of Abstract Right experiences right as “external” or “coercive,” and therefore lacks the motivation to care about right.¹⁰ It is only able to care about right if it finds itself somehow reflected in right. Unless it can find its own interests reflected in right, the particular will experiences right as issuing only prohibitions – as merely limiting versus also enabling its freedom.¹¹

The moral of this story

Clearly, Hegel takes conflict to play an essential role in making possible the transition from Abstract Right to Morality. He is clearly also convinced that, rather than produced out of thin air, conflict arises in response to the situational and psychological factors we just outlined. These factors are internal to the system of Abstract Right; for this reason, Hegel tells us that the conflict is itself *internally* generated.¹²

As we saw, the transition to Morality is Hegel’s representation of part of the solution modern Western political theory has provided to the violence and insecurity of Abstract Right. With this transition come at least three major changes. First, there is a change in the will’s self-understanding. It no longer thinks of itself as just a particular will driven to realize its particular interests and entitled to right because of its special status as a person. The particular will of Morality now appreciates that its essence is defined by its status as a person. It grants, in addition, that other wills are persons as well and are thus entitled to precisely the same rights.

Second, there is a change in the particular will’s motivational set. Precisely as a consequence of its new self-understanding (its recognition that right derives from the essential aspect of its nature), the particular will or “subject” of Morality is now willing to submit to the governance of its essential nature. It is motivated to will the universal.

Third, the “subject” of Morality is now aware that it can express its freedom, not just *externally* but also *internally*. That is, it knows not only that it can put its will into things and claim mastery over those things; it can also express its freedom internally by making and giving itself law. By means of the law that it makes and gives itself, it can determine the practical fitness of its acts and intentions. The subject of Morality now recognizes its freedom as having in this respect an inner as well as outer existence.¹³

Returning to our central concern: How does any of this story about the transition from Abstract Right to Morality support the thesis that Hegelian agency is all-too-human? I have been drawing attention to key *causal factors* that Hegel takes to be responsible for the transition. On the basis of this causal story, we can conclude that he considers human agency all-too-human at least in the following respect: as he portrays the system of Abstract Right, the particular will must confront certain situational and psychological givens. It must contend with its own natural tendency to look after its own welfare over that of others; it must contend as well with other particular wills which are similarly motivated, with conditions of scarcity, and with a state of nature condition in which the roles of judge, lawgiver, and executor have not yet been handed over to impartial and effective state powers. These factors and the conflicts they generate are not themselves products of choice; in this respect, they are factors external to the will. Particular wills must nonetheless contend with them and cannot simply wish them away.

From these points, we can safely conclude that Hegel believes our freedom depends on external factors of this kind for its *awakening* or *activation*. It seems clear that he grants that our freedom is *to this extent* all-too-human. The conflicts of the system of Abstract Right are causally implicated in the will’s response and therefore in the transition to Morality. The conflicts of Abstract Right, furthermore, have their own causal history as well. They result from the fact that, in the state of nature, particular wills are forced to confront each other in conditions of scarcity and are largely indifferent to the welfare of others.

Far more difficult to determine, however, is whether Hegel is, in addition, convinced that our freedom is all-too-human in the following further respect: Is it his view that contingent or external factors play a role, not just in *triggering* the development or maturation of our freedom, but also in *generating its content*? That is, is Hegel also committed to the thesis that the idea of freedom itself – and the norms or laws we associate with it – depend for their very being on contingent factors? Is it his view that there *is* no contentful or non-empty idea of freedom prior to the interactions of thinking beings with situational and psychological givens, and that there is therefore no innate or *a priori* normative compass that merely requires the presence of the right conditions to get activated or expressed? And if Hegel is indeed committed to the assumption

that the idea of freedom gets generated in this way, is it also his view that new *motivations* come into being thanks to contingent factors as well? Does he hold, for example, that the particular conflicts associated with Abstract Right are responsible not for awakening in the “subject” of Morality an already-given but still dormant interest in willing the universal, but rather for actually producing or generating that interest?

These are questions about how deep Hegel’s appreciation for the role of contingency really goes. It is important that we appreciate that our discussion so far does not give us the resources to answer them. The reason it does not is that Hegel’s assumption that external factors have to be in place as conditions of the expression or development of human freedom, does not by itself commit him to the further assumption that external factors *shape the nature of freedom itself*. He could consistently affirm the former assumption and deny the latter. His view could simply be that the nature of our freedom is set from the start and requires the right conditions for its actualization.

What evidence is there, then, that Hegel endorses the latter, more generous view of the role of contingency? Why should we think that he defends the thesis that the enlarged conception of freedom or agency that results from the conflicts generated in Abstract Right, comes to be only in response to a particular constellation of highly particular contingent factors, and *not* because of an original endowment by God or fate or pure reason? What basis is there for supposing that there is, for Hegel, no original, essential moral self waiting to realize itself, no particular preset conception of ourselves as free agents, no wholly innate or *a priori* moral law? Why should we assume that he holds that freedom or agency depends upon contingent factors not just for its *activation* but also for its *content*? Why should we think that he believes that our freedom is all-too-human in this further respect?

The necessity of the development: Two interpretative proposals

It might seem that there is plenty of evidence *against* this second interpretative suggestion, according to which Hegel takes freedom or agency to depend upon contingent factors for its *content*, that is, for the meaning as well as principles or laws we associate with it. After all, he frequently asserts that the progressions he lays out in the *Philosophy of Right* are “necessary.”¹⁴ In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, he complains about the merely “formalistic” conception of development that regards historical progress as a series of “external contingencies [äußerliche Zufälligkeiten]” (IPH 59 [HW 12:77]). He insists that human freedom or “Spirit” “does not toss itself about in the external play of contingencies [äußerlichen Spiel von Zufälligkeiten]...[but] determines history absolutely against contingencies [schlechthin fest gegen die Zufälligkeiten]” (IPH 58 [HW 12:75]). But what kind of necessity is Hegel really committed to? This

is an important and difficult question, requiring far more extensive treatment than I am able to provide here. In this section, I gesture toward an answer by contrasting two interpretative proposals.

According to the first proposal, Hegel defends the bold thesis that the course of history is necessary in that it unfolds according to a plan that was set from the start. While he acknowledges that we may sometimes be tempted to identify certain events as merely accidental or contingent, his view is that in such cases, we fall prey to an illusion. We classify an event as accidental when we are ignorant of its cause. In fact, however, all causes are set in advance, and we are mistaken if we think that an alternative event or series of events could have occurred. Since everything that happens in history unfolds according to a preset blueprint or plan, there are no accidents or contingencies in history.

According to the second and, I believe, more defensible interpretation, Hegel's remarks about the necessity of the historical progressions have no such fatalistic implications. The necessity of history, on his account, refers instead to the patterns and regularities historians or philosophers discover in their efforts to construct a coherent narrative out of the multifarious phenomena. In undertaking a science of history or a science of right, this is what we do. We seize upon perceived regularities in order to separate out the essential from the inessential. In telling our story, we focus on what we take to be essential, and we tell a causal story about how the essential moments are connected. In telling the story of the history of right, for example, we discover in the age of Rousseau and Kant evidence of a genuine revolution in our understanding of ourselves and of our freedom. We seek an explanation for how this new self-understanding came to be. We assume that this revolution in the history of ideas did not arise out of nothing; we suppose that its emergence came to be in response to a particular set of problems. We offer a causal account of the conditions that led up to it – an account of the conflicts resulting both from human reason's prior self-conception and from a variety of situational factors. We understand the new system of ideas to be *necessary*, because we believe we can explain its emergence with reference to conflicts and deficiencies internal to its predecessor system.¹⁵

Hegel holds that, as thinking creatures, we cannot *but* seek unity or coherence in the diversity of the given phenomena. Thinking just *is* the activity of sorting through the chaos and discovering patterns. Hegel's view is not simply that there can be no history of right or of human consciousness without the effort to separate out the essential from the inessential. His view, instead, is that there can be *no acts of thinking* at all without this activity.

What we do in telling the story of human freedom, then, is weave together a narrative of the conditions that caused and therefore explain the various historical advances. We seek conditions that sufficiently explain the transitions from lower to higher forms. It is important to note that in doing so, however,

we need not also commit ourselves to the assumption that the conditions we discover are the *only* ones that could possibly explain the occurrence of a particular event. In other words, we do not rule out the possibility that some other set of conditions could have produced the same results. (Some other set of conditions, then, could have caused the transition from Abstract Right to Morality.) Our claim to have identified the conditions *sufficient* for event X, thus does not by itself commit us to the view that these conditions were also *necessary* for event X. Moreover, our search for sufficient conditions does not commit us to the further assumption that any particular event X *had to happen*. Our search for sufficient conditions is in other words fully compatible with the assumption that human history could have unfolded differently than it has.

This second interpretation of what Hegel has in mind by the necessity of history allows a role for contingency in at least the following four ways: First, it assumes that Hegel grants that the conditions he identifies as sufficient to explain a given event need not be the *only* conditions that could have produced that event; alternative causal pathways were really as well as logically possible. Second, this interpretation assumes that Hegel is open to the possibility that the actual events of history could not have occurred. Human history could have taken a different course. Although the conflicts of Abstract Right sufficiently explain the emergence of Morality, nature could have molded us differently. She could have fashioned us into absolute altruists. Or, she could have insured that we never encountered conditions of scarcity.

This interpretation of Hegel's thesis of necessity allows for a third kind of contingency. Within this interpretative framework, the historian identifies as "contingent" those events she deems insignificant for her overall narrative, events she takes to have little or no explanatory value. Hegel frequently uses the term "contingent [*zufällig*]" in this way. If what we are after is a "scientific" understanding of history, our task is to separate out the essential in human action from the inessential (IPH 68 [HW 12:87–88]). This by no means requires us to wholly ignore the richness and multiplicity of human activity, but our attention should be directed to what is "lawful" or "rational" in our subject matter.¹⁶

Fourth and finally, this interpretation allows for contingency in designating some events or states of affairs as "external" or beyond the control of any agent. The situational and psychological givens Hegel associates with Abstract Right count as contingent in this respect. They are beyond our control and limit our freedom.

The necessity of the development: Further reflections

What we have yet to determine is whether there are good reasons for attributing this second interpretation of necessity to Hegel. Is this really the interpretation

that most faithfully captures his position? In this section, I highlight one consideration in its favor.

Our main question, at this point, is this: Why should we suppose that Hegel is *not* a proponent of the first and more extreme interpretation of necessity, according to which the course of history and the development of our freedom is settled from the start? Before we try to answer this question, it may be helpful to recall some implications of this extreme interpretation of necessity. The thesis, again, is that historical development is necessary because it is the carrying out of a program or blueprint, decreed from the start by God or nature or pure reason or fate. This extreme view leaves nothing to contingency or chance; at most, it acknowledges that events may *seem* contingent to us, especially when we are ignorant of their causes. Strictly speaking, however, nothing contingent or accidental happens in history. There is one preset developmental path and no possible alternatives.

Of course, if we attribute this view of necessity to Hegel, we are left with the considerable challenge of explaining how it can be compatible with his insistence upon the reality of human freedom. If it is really the case that history's course has been settled in advance by forces external to human agency, then it would appear that the prospects for saving human freedom in any meaningful sense look bleak. Perhaps this more extreme view of necessity *is* indeed incompatible with Hegel's theory of freedom. If so, this may give us reason to doubt that it is the conception of necessity he endorses.

As fruitful as it may be to defend Hegel against the charge that he endorses the extreme view of necessity in just this way (that is, by arguing that this version of the necessity thesis is at odds with his theory of freedom), I am going to pursue a different line of argument here. I will suggest that the extreme view of necessity conflicts with Hegel's *theory of knowledge*. As I understand it, the extreme view of necessity is committed to assumptions about the nature of human knowledge that Hegel does not endorse.

The extreme view of necessity I have been sketching carries with it pretensions of what we might call of transcendent insight. It claims not just that, "so far, the empirical evidence seems to suggest that history has unfolded in keeping with a certain plan or purpose, a plan or purpose that perhaps will continue into the future." Instead, it claims to know absolutely that history could not have unfolded in any other way and will continue to follow a progressive course. As I am portraying it, the extreme view draws its evidence about history's purpose or the workings of fate from reflection or insight. It is confident that its knowledge is necessary, because it assumes that human reflection or insight is capable of accessing a trans-historical or "God's eye" point of view.

It is here that I think we can see the problem of attributing the extreme view to Hegel. Hegel unambiguously and repeatedly insists that a "God's eye"

perspective is unavailable to us. One of his frequent refrains is that it is not possible for us, either in thinking or in knowing, to wholly detach ourselves from this world. This is the message, for example, of his often-quoted remark in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that

each individual is...a *child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time. ... (PR 21–22 [HW 7:26])¹⁷

Hegel conveys a similar message in the Introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where he sketches his particular approach to the philosophy of history. He tells us there that the philosopher of history, on the one hand, “deals with history as a raw material, not to be left as it is, but to be construed according to thoughts...*a priori*” (IPH 10, translation modified [HW 12:20]). But although Hegel acknowledges in this remark that the philosopher of history construes the raw material “according to thoughts,” he at the same time clearly wishes to distance himself from those who practice what he calls “critical reflective” history. “Critical reflective” historians take themselves to be in the business of producing what Hegel refers to as “*a priori* fabrications [*apriorische Erdichtungen*]” in history (IPH 13 [HW 12:22]). They offer interpretative frameworks, but fail to appreciate the extent to which their interpretations reflect their own debt to history. They forget or ignore that “our thinking is subordinated to the given and to what exists” (IPH 10 [HW 12:20]).

This remark that our thinking is “subordinated to the given and to what exists” is revealing. It gives us a clue to Hegel’s understanding of his own methodological stance. In claiming that our thinking is “subordinated to the given,” Hegel arguably concedes that in his own narration of the progressive development of history, he, too, is a child of his time. He cannot escape history and therefore has to tell his story from where he is.¹⁸ Any hypothesis he advances about the general shape of historical progress – any claim he defends about what is and is not “necessary” in the course of events – must reflect his own limited historical perspective.

What I am suggesting, in short, is that Hegel’s methodological allegiances require him to grant the contingency as well as fallibility of his own causal narrative. He undeniably makes bold pronouncements about the necessary course and plan of history, and he repeatedly asserts that history’s plan can be known.¹⁹ But we need to interpret Hegel’s bold claims through the lens of his theory of knowledge. Because Hegel denies that we can know or even think a world wholly beyond this world, he is committed to the view that the only kind

of evidence we could have for our claims about the past and future shape of history is evidence that derives from our acquaintance with *this* world. And our thoughts about this world – about what is – have to reflect where we are; our philosophical consideration of history, as he says, is “subordinated to the given and to what exists.” In proclaiming that philosophy is “*its own time comprehended in thoughts*,” Hegel effectively grants the fallibility and revisability of his own assertions about the necessity of history (PR 21 [HW 7:26]). He at least implicitly acknowledges the fragility, even, of the self-knowledge underlying those claims.

Contingency in history

My larger objective in this chapter has been to identify the degree to which Hegel allows a role for contingency in his system. In particular, I have wanted to determine the extent to which he grants that our freedom as well as our self-knowledge as agents is all-too-human. With these objectives in mind, I have considered two interpretative proposals regarding what he could mean in claiming to discover necessity in history. I have outlined two proposals, but there may be others worthy of attention.

I hope to at least have given some reasons for doubting that Hegel is committed to what I have been calling the extreme view of necessity. Essentially, my suggestion has been that the extreme view claims to possess a kind of knowledge or insight Hegel does not believe is available to us. The problem is not so much the boldness of its assertions that we can know with necessity that the course of history is settled from the start and that history will continue its progressive course. After all, Hegel makes his own bold assertions about the course and purpose of history. The problem is connected with the fact, rather, that the bold claims of the extreme view are taken to rest on a special kind of knowledge, knowledge we can achieve thanks to our capacity to escape this world in thought. I have suggested that, for Hegel, this is knowledge no human thinker can have. His own claims to discover necessity in history and to know its progressive nature rest on a more mundane kind of evidence, the only kind of evidence he could have for them. They are justified by his thinking consideration of history, a form of thinking that, as he says, is “subordinated to the given and to what exists.”²⁰

But where does all of this leave us with respect to the main thesis of this chapter, the thesis that agency, for Hegel, is “all-too-human”? At this point, we can say at least this: If the foregoing effort is successful in casting doubt on Hegel’s purported commitment to the extreme view of necessity, then there is hope for the suggestion that his appreciation for the role of contingency in history and in the formation of our agency runs deep.

Recall that the second interpretative proposal we considered a moment ago allows a role for contingency in at least four respects: (i) It allows for the real as well as logical possibility that the causal story the historian tells is contingent in that a different causal path could have produced the same event. (ii) It allows for the possibility that human history could have consisted of a different sequence of events. History's course did not have to be progressive, and its progressive course did not have to follow the path that it did. (iii) The second interpretation allows for contingency in the further sense that it recognizes that, in the historian's search for patterns, she is likely to designate some events as contingent in the sense of inessential – as making no significant contribution to her historical narrative. (iv) Finally, this interpretation allows for contingency in granting that much that happens in history is beyond the control of individual or collective human agency. These are the “givens” with which we as agents must contend and to which we must react, givens that constrain our freedom.

I have not established beyond a doubt that Hegel takes history to be contingent in any of these senses, but I have given a few reasons for not taking him to be committed to the extreme view of necessity. I have also suggested that if Hegel is not committed to this view of necessity, then the door is open for him to accept a role for contingency in at least some of these four senses. This includes allowing for the possibility that contingent factors do not just stimulate or awaken our capacity for freedom, but give our freedom a content. And this would imply that we are indebted to contingent or external factors for the very shape our freedom comes to take. More precisely, we are indebted to contingencies that, in interaction with our capacity for thought, actually *generate* new ideas and laws of freedom.

Applying this interpretation to Hegel's philosophies of right and history, we would then be warranted in asserting that the psychological and situational factors that belong to Hegel's causal story of the dialectical progressions should not be understood as providing the conditions which stimulate into existence an already-given or preformed agency or freedom. The causal role of these factors should not be understood in this way, because Hegel's view is that there *is* no already-given or preformed freedom awaiting activation. Instead, these psychological and situational contingencies are responsible for the very nature of our freedom; they contribute to the determination of the kind of agents we take ourselves to be.

On this line of interpretation, we have the contingencies of Abstract Right to thank, for example, for generating in us a new self-understanding. It is not that we were destined from the start to arrive at the conception of ourselves associated with the higher standpoint of Morality. Rather, the contingent features of Abstract Right and the conflicts they generate explain why, instead

of thinking of ourselves merely as “persons” entitled by nature to the right to property, we now appreciate that we are also “subjects” capable of giving ourselves law and of respecting this “essential” aspect of ourselves. We have the contingencies of Abstract Right to thank, as well, for the origin of the new kinds of laws and rights that appear at the level of Morality. The “persons” of Abstract Right think of themselves as governed simply by laws of nature, and they understand nature to command them to secure their own survival and well being above all else. In contrast, the “subjects” of Morality recognize an additional, “higher” law. They understand that this higher law originates in their faculty of reason and requires the subordination of self-interest to the ends of rational agency as such. The “subjects” of Morality now recognize more than their own right to put their will into things; they accept in addition their obligation to honor the fact that *all* rational nature possesses this same right.

We have been focusing, here, on the transition from Abstract Right to Morality, but were we to expand our discussion to include the *further* dialectical progressions in Hegel’s story of human freedom, we would discover how those progressions, too, generate in us new understandings of the nature of our knowledge and of our freedom. At the highest level (the level Hegel indeed designates as that of “absolute knowledge”), we arrive at the awareness that philosophy is “its own time comprehended in thoughts.” That is, we arrive at the awareness that the only kind of knowledge we can have about who we are as agents and about the nature of our freedom is historical knowledge. This is knowledge that is both informed and generated by our particular place in history. At this highest stage, we recognize that our agency is tied to our special nature as thinking animals – thinking animals that seek to give their thoughts existence. But we appreciate that our thinking as well as our willing occurs only in historical time. As such, both activities are limited or conditioned by history. At the higher level, we appreciate that even our ideas, for example, of a “transcendental” subject and of “noumenal” freedom owe their origin to actual historical conflict.

The position I have been defending in this chapter may seem implausible for the simple reason that I have been suggesting that Hegel – the philosopher who identifies his system as that of “absolute knowledge” – is not after all guilty of some of the totalizing, dogmatic claims often attributed to him. My proposal has been that he cannot be guilty of such claims, given the role he allows contingency to play in his system. If I am right, it is because Hegel’s hyperbolic pronouncements need to be interpreted through the lens of his methodological commitments. By this I mean: they need to be interpreted in light of his own characterization of the kind of knowledge that he, as a philosopher sensitive to the inescapability of history, is able to achieve.

Notes

1. I presented an earlier version of this chapter at the University of Tübingen in July of 2013 and owe thanks to Ulrich Schlösser and members of the audience for valuable feedback.
2. I have explored some of these questions in “On Becoming Ethical: The Emergence of Freedom in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” in *The Freedom of Life: Hegelian Perspectives*, ed. Thomas Khurana (Berlin: Der Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2012), 209–27. Published in German as “Die Emergenz des sittlichen Charakters in Hegels *Philosophie des Rechts*,” in *Akten des Hegel-Kongress Stuttgart 2011, Veröffentlichungen der Internationalen Hegel-Vereinigung*, vol. 25, ed. Gunnar Hindrichs and Axel Honneth (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2013), 513–27.
3. At the level of Morality, “the question of the self-determination and motive of the will and of its purpose now arises” (PR §106Z). The “Z” here indicates that this passage belongs to an “addition [Zusatz]” to Hegel’s text. The additions should in every case be treated with caution since they were compiled by editors of the various editions of the *Philosophy of Right* from notes students took from Hegel’s lectures.
4. A “thing” “has no subjectivity” and hence no will or “soul” (PR §42Z).
5. As Hegel writes in his Heidelberg *Encyclopedia* of 1817: “A natural condition is... a condition of violence and injustice, of which nothing truer may be said than that one ought to depart from it. Society, by contrast, is the condition in which only the law [*das Recht*] has reality; what is to be limited and sacrificed are precisely the arbitrariness and violence of the state of nature” (EPS §415, translation modified). Hegel thus agrees with Hobbes: there is no right, effectively speaking, in the absence of law. In Hobbes’s words from *De Cive*: “what any man does in the bare state of nature, is injurious to no man...; for injustice against men presupposeth human laws, such as in the state of nature there are none” (Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen* (“*De Homine*” and “*De Cive*”), ed. Bernard Gert [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991], ch. 1, §10n [p. 116n]).
6. “The free spirit consists precisely in not having its being as a mere concept or in itself,” but in “giving itself an existence” (PR §57). At PR §92, Hegel describes property as the “being [*Sein*]” of freedom.
7. “In abstract right, I have the right and someone else has the corresponding duty” (PR §155).
8. Hegel writes in the “Morality” section that what is required as a cure for the ills of the state of nature is “a justice freed from subjective interest and subjective shape and from the contingency of power... Primarily, this constitutes a requirement for a will which, as a particular will, also wills the universal as such” (PR §103).
9. “[T]he relation of the good to the particular subject is that the good [in Morality] is the *essential* character of the subject’s will, which thus has an unqualified obligation in this connection” (PR §133).
10. Hegel describes the state of nature condition of Abstract Right as a “state governed entirely by force” (PR §93). Right is so far experienced as “external” versus as having an “internal determination” (deriving from the will of the subject) (PR §114Z).
11. Right “appears at first only as obligation, because the will is not yet present as a will which has freed itself from the immediacy of interest in such a way that, as a particular will, it has the universal will as its end” (PR §86; see also §29).
12. It is Hegel’s view that *all* of the conflicts responsible for the transitions of the *Philosophy of Right* are internally generated. In his Introduction to that work, he

describes the development in his science as one of “immanent progression” (PR §31). In his *Philosophy of History*, he tells us that “Spirit’s” development is the product of a “hard, unending struggle against itself” (IPH 59 [HW 12:76]).

13. “In right, the will has its existence in something external, but the next stage is for the will to have this existence in itself, in something internal” (PR §104Z). The “next stage” is that of Morality, which concerns itself with how actions can be “inwardly determined” by the will (PR §110Z).
14. The *Philosophy of Right* is an exercise in “philosophical cognition” versus “positive” law, which merely describes which laws are accepted as valid at some particular time. A “philosophical” approach to right is chiefly concerned, instead, with the “necessity [Notwendigkeit]” of the concept of right. In demonstrating the “necessity” of the concept of right, the “philosophical” approach provides an account of the rationality of a particular conception of right at a particular time. It gives us a “proof and deduction” of the “route” by which a concept has “become a result” (PR §2Z).
15. Who are the historians and philosophers constructing the historical narrative, for Hegel? What determines the validity of their interpretations? Although I cannot do justice to these difficult questions here, a few points are worth highlighting. Hegel is surely convinced that his own interpretation has validity, but he also insists upon the following: (i) The validity of any interpretation of history will depend in part on its success in faithfully capturing the facts. He insists that it is the job of the philosopher of history to “apprehend the historical faithfully” (IPH 14 [HW 12:23]). He thus chastises those who are insufficiently concerned to establish a factual basis for their claims, those who indulge in “*a priori* fabrications [*apriorische Erdichtungen*]” in their treatment of history (IPH 13 [HW 12:22]). (ii) Valid historical narratives are not the achievements of individuals thinking in a vacuum. Just like great warriors or statesmen, the great historians or philosophers of history, for Hegel, are those through whom the “spirit of the times” is powerfully expressed. (I provide some justification for attributing this position to Hegel in the discussion to come.)
16. We can extract from these points an explanation for Hegel’s unsavory-sounding remarks, in his Introduction to the *Philosophy of History*, about the “insignificance” or ordinary individuals in world history. A philosophy of history is concerned with the universal, not with particulars. For that reason, it principally aims to describe the actions of the “great men” or “heroes” of history (IPH 32–35 [HW 12:45–49]).
17. He makes a similar remark in his Introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*: “each individual is the child of his people, and likewise the child of his time. ...No one is left behind by his time, nor can he overstep it” (IPH 55 [HW 12:72]).
18. I say “arguably,” because it would take more argument than I am providing here to establish that I am interpreting Hegel correctly.
19. For Hegel, history’s overall trajectory or “purpose” is not a mere “idea” of reason that, as such, refers to an object of thought or belief but not of knowledge. In this respect, he parts ways with those such as Anaxagoras, Leibniz, Schlegel, and Kant, who claim that the purpose or plan of history cannot be known by the human mind. Hegel indeed states that an explicit aim of his own philosophy of history is to “recognize the ways of providence in history” (see, e.g., IPW 16–17 [HW 12:26–27]).
20. In the Introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel identifies his own method as that of “philosophical history” (IPH 10 [HW 12:19]). Philosophical

history is neither an uncritically empirical approach to history, which supposes itself able to simply report the facts unmediated by an interpretative framework or conceptual scheme. Nor is philosophical history, according to Hegel, identical with the "reflective" approach, which in his view places *too much* faith in our powers of creative or *a priori* reconstruction.

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Kant's Critical Legacy: Fichte's Constructionism and Hegel's Discursive Logic

George di Giovanni

The Kantian legacy

This chapter is essentially about Hegel.¹ If I bring Fichte conspicuously into the picture, this is for the sake of contrast. There is another reason as well. Common wisdom has it that Fichte was the one who remained the closest to the master in the reception of the Critique of Reason.² No doubt, Kant's legacy is broad enough, and in places even ambiguous, that a case can be made to that effect, especially if one concentrates on the legacy's moral side. But I want to say that, in what counted most, it is Hegel who was Kant's true inheritor. I shall presently say what I consider as "counting most." I must first make clear that the Fichte I have in mind is post-Jena – notably the Fichte of 1804 onward, the time when Fichte dropped from his Science the idiom of the "I"; when Hegel, for his part, finally made it to the philosophical stage, and a conversation between the two, albeit always at a distance and perhaps not even ever deliberately intended, was in fact taking shape. The Fichte whom Hegel had in mind in his explicit criticisms was always the author of the early versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. As for Fichte, his primary confrontation was with Schelling³ – not Hegel, to whom he occasionally only alluded. A conversation was nonetheless taking shape between the two, for, whoever their immediate philosophical interlocutor (and Schelling was as much on Hegel's mind as on Fichte's), it was with respect to Spinoza's metaphysics that both, in their contrasting ways, were taking position, and, in so doing, were also staking their respective claims to the Kantian legacy. That Spinoza should have been the catalyst for sorting out, so to speak, their differences with respect to Kant might seem strange. But the fact is that, because of historical events connected with Goethe and Jacobi,⁴ the figure of Spinoza came to dominate the intellectual scene of the late Enlightenment, and continued to dominate it in the

subsequent early Romanticism. The net result was that the issue of how to interpret this venerable metaphysician co-opted the reception of Kant. Post-Kantian idealism was born under the large shadow of Spinoza. How one interpreted Spinoza reflected how one intended to build on Kant's legacy.

This was, of course, a historical accident. But there was conceptual appropriateness to it. To turn first to what I said "counted most" in the Kantian legacy, Kant's critical move consisted essentially in defining the possibility of objective experience from the standpoint of one who is immersed in experience and is *ex hypothesi* unable to step outside it. The error of all prior metaphysics (the metaphysics that Kant dubbed "dogmatic") lay precisely in the presumption that one can perform this step and explain what things are "in themselves," rather than limiting oneself to their presence in experience – that is, without abiding by the limits that experience imposes on this presence. Fichte posed the problem of experience in precisely these terms in the 1797 new Introduction to his Science. As he said, "A finite rational being possesses nothing whatsoever beyond experience.... These same conditions necessarily apply to the philosopher, and thus it appears incomprehensible how he could ever succeed in elevating himself above experience" (IWL 10–11 [GA I/4:425 (§3)]). How can one establish the genesis of objective experience while remaining within it? On the assumption that experience is necessarily directed at a transcendent "thing in itself," Kant had dealt with the problem simply by establishing, on the one hand, the conditions under which that supposed "thing in itself" is *given* to experience, and, on the other hand, the conditions under which it is *recognized* in judgment as *being so given*. "Sensibility" defined the conditions of "being given"; "conceptual reflection," of its recognition. What counted most in Kant's critical project, and also defined Kant's critical legacy, was precisely the requirement that one abide by these conditions alone: that, although reflectively elevating oneself above experience, one does not thereby step outside it.

But unfortunately Kant himself did not necessarily abide by these self-imposed limits. At issue was the robustness of the claim of "being given" as applied to any object. On Kant's assumption that the "thing in itself" is no more than an empty formal intention, and objectivity, therefore, purely phenomenal, how could one tell whether the intelligible structure, the coherence of determination, by which one recognizes objects as validly given is indeed truly *given*? that it is not just a product of the imagination? that science, therefore, is not a fiction that only masks the fact that in experience events *de facto* occur at random, as Hume had wondered? The phenomenal objectivity of experience was the issue that precipitated the critical skepticism of Salomon Maimon and Aenesidemus/Schulze.⁵ Kant was making stronger claims about the objectivity of experience than he was entitled to on his very assumptions about the nature

of experience. In this, he was stepping outside experience, thus contravening his own critical demand.⁶

One can understand, therefore, why Fichte and Hegel staked out their positions by criticizing Kant's "thing in itself," as well as his *a priori/a posteriori* dichotomy; why this criticism, moreover, was motivated by Kant's own critical requirement. One can equally understand why this critical preoccupation could blend in their mind with the further Romantic problem of how to speak of the Absolute if, *ex hypothesi*, there is no space outside it from which to objectify it and thus speak of it. This is where Spinoza's otherwise purely historical intrusion on the scene showed its appropriateness. The two concerns, the critical and the Romantic, seemed indeed antithetical: the one, not to step outside experience; the other, how to allow for experience at all in the face of the Absolute. But they coincided in that for both the issue was one of saving the objectivity of experience, of explaining the *givenness* of it. As Fichte asked in 1797, "But what is the basis of the system of representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity [I gloss: the feeling of being bound to, and by, an 'other'], and what is the basis of this feeling of necessity itself?" (IWL 8 [GA I/4:423 (§1)]). Fichte and Hegel came up with radically different answers to this question: Fichte, by means of idealizing constructions; Hegel, by a method of logical discourse that required dropping the language of the Absolute, and replacing it with that of Spirit.

Ideal constructionism

For this reason, because of the shadow cast by Spinoza, it is important to turn to the Berlin Fichte – the Fichte who, after being driven out of Jena, began to present his *Wissenschaftslehre* in several series of public lectures. The significant new development, as we said, was that Fichte dropped the idiom of the "I" around which he had hitherto expounded his science, and replaced it with the classical idiom of the Absolute. He took his *Wissenschaftslehre* to presuppose the idea of an all-encompassing One, the source of all truth, and the Science's function to interpret experience (hitherto interpreted as the product of the freedom of the "I") as the manifestation of precisely this One (WL₁₈₀₄ 23–24 [GA II/8:9]; see also GA IV/5:57, lines 8–9). The new idiom was of course a play on Spinoza's "substance" as *causa sui*; and, on the face of it, it seemed that Fichte had capitulated to Schelling, adopting the standpoint of his system of identity. In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth. At one level, the shift from one idiom to the other was only rhetorical. The previous "I" stood for a presupposed self-contained act of thought which was both indeterminate and ultimately inexpressible, the same as Spinoza's *causa sui*.⁷ Whether one referred to it as "substance" or "I" was, therefore, immaterial. The advantage

of the new idiom, however, was that it was more likely to prevent the charge of subjective idealism to which Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* had been vulnerable from the beginning – a natural objection indeed, because of the ordinary meaning of “I” which easily led one to believe that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* was an attempt to generate a whole physical world out of a finite mind.

With reference to Schelling, however, the innovation served to clarify the significant difference that separated Fichte from him. On the assumption of the same One, Schelling had simply proceeded to give a narrative of its ideal manifestations, first as a process by which nature assumes ever more complex shapes and culminates in mental life; and, second, as a process of mental activities that recreate nature's shapes in the medium of their reflective conceptualization. The two processes, which clearly corresponded to the two attributes of “thought” and “extension” of Spinoza's “substance,” came together, according to Schelling, in the act of artistic creation – an act which, at once natural and spiritual, also provided the intuitive evidence of the One's presence in both nature and mind on which Schelling's system was presumably based.⁸ Of course, how the One would give itself an “ideal manifestation” remained an unexplained point – buried, perhaps, in the darkness of the genius' creative intuition. Fichte's newly restated *Wissenschaftslehre* stood in opposition to precisely any such cosmogonic mystification. While accepting, as all the early Romantics did, the monism of Spinoza – which Jacobi had proclaimed to be, and not without justification, the logical consequence of classical metaphysics⁹ – Fichte had proceeded with a narrative, not indeed of the One (as Schelling's was), but of what it must be like to do science, and, even more fundamentally, to exist, in a universe, the ultimate truth of which is *das all-eine Absolute*, the *hen kai pan* of Spinoza.

Let me expand. The “I” of Fichte's earlier presentations of his science was *ex hypothesi* an infinite act which, like Spinoza's *causa sui*, was directed exclusively at itself. Inasmuch, therefore, as, *per impossibile*, the act attained a determinedly recognizable product, this product would no longer be attributable to it as *its* product, because of the infinite disproportion separating the two. Even more to the point, the positing of any such product would indeed have to be *per impossibile*, for the original act, because of its supposed infinitude, preempted *ex hypothesi* the possibility of anything existing on its own distinct from it. This was also the problem that Spinoza's “substance” presented, and, it must be said, Jacobi had recognized Fichte's underlying Spinozism from the beginning.¹⁰ By shifting from the idiom of the “I” to the more overtly Spinozistic language of the One, Fichte was therefore positioning his *Wissenschaftslehre* within the context of classical metaphysics, making the science's central problem precisely the transition from this One to the manifold of the objects of experience; or again, to use the language more in tune with Kant-inspired idealism, from the Absolute to its presumed appearances in experience. The

problem, in other words, still was essentially the same as the critical problem (which had made Kant vulnerable to skepticism) of justifying the objectivity of appearances even *as appearances*.

Fichte was perspicacious enough not to try to explain the possibility of the transition, as any Enlightenment metaphysician might have tried (and Moses Mendelssohn actually did).¹¹ Nor, for that matter, had Spinoza tried. From the standpoint of the Absolute that Spinoza had assumed, and Schelling also now assumed, there was no need of explanation, for, *from that standpoint*, there was no transition. The need arose only on the part of the manifold of experience, where Fichte, in keeping with Kant, positioned himself, and it was generated by the very fact of assuming that position. This was the proto-case of the conundrum confronting reason – that it is beset by questions which it must ask (for it reflectively transcends experience) but cannot answer (for, as a matter of fact, it *exists* in experience, and if it were *actually* to transcend it, it would thereby annul both itself and the questions that go with it). Fichte dealt with the problem by simply accepting experience as a fact, and by imaginatively representing its genesis (“representing,” mind you; not “explaining”) as the result of a transition from the presumed One to the manifold of experience that occurs, as Fichte said, *per hiatus irrationalem*; that is to say, as a projection (*projectum*) across an ontic¹² gap at which rationality has its origin, but where it also comes to naught if it tries to bridge the gap by explaining both the gap and the transition.¹³ This was only an image, of course, but it served to set the stage for Fichte’s new *Wissenschaftslehre*. Whereas the image represented the *projectum* as if antedating experience, the Science’s task was to reveal it as constituting the very structure of experience – to act it out, so to speak, from within experience itself as a problem affecting it intrinsically. The *Wissenschaftslehre* was to be the narrative of what it is like to exist poised upon an ultimately irrational ontic gap. In this Fichte’s science differed from both Schelling’s metaphysics and Kant’s critical idealism. Unlike the former, it was a phenomenology: it assumed its position from within experience. Unlike the latter, in assuming this position, it did not simply leave the “thing in itself” as an idealizing image – as providing the ideal space for a postulation process which, while discharging a systematic role in science, added nothing to the phenomena of experience internally. Fichte’s kind of phenomenology had to manifest the ultimately irrational fact of finite existence from within experience. Phenomena were to be revealed to be, not just appearances (*Erscheinungen*), but *illusionary* appearances (*Schein*).

But, for that kind of phenomenology, one needed a special *logos* – a language about the objects of experience which, in saying anything determinate about them, at the same time negated itself as saying what it said. It perforce had to perform this negating act, this self-deconstruction,¹⁴ for if it let anything determinate stand about phenomena, it would thereby grant them at

least a modicum of truth; on the assumption, however, that the Absolute is the only truth, it would thereby claim to be saying something positive about it, whereas the Absolute is ineffable. Whatever one would say about it, even that it is ineffable, had to be a falsification. This is what made Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* a form of what I have called *ideal constructionism*. It is not that its representations were the products of conceptual art. This is true of all abstractive representations: to this extent, they too are constructs. But specific to the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s constructs was that they were deliberately non-revelatory: while intimating a transcendent object, they fell back upon themselves, holding on to a content of their own which made them, just like metaphors, non-transparent with respect to the intimated object. For this reason, in order to be true to their own constructionism, they had to negate themselves as actually succeeding in representing what they otherwise intended. They had to de-construct themselves.

It is to the logic of this self-deconstructing language that Fichte dedicated the three versions of his Science in 1804,¹⁵ and again the versions of 1807 to 1812. His strategy, differently carried out in each version, was to translate the original problematic thought, "the Absolute appears," into the thought of an appearance which, while intending a transcendent term, in fact only resolved itself (not unlike Spinoza's modes) into another appearance, and so on *ad infinitum*. The only manifestation thus realized was that of the appearance *as mere appearing*. It was a manifestation, in other words, that hid what it manifested while revealing it, for it suspended itself in the revealing, in this way falling back upon itself as a manifesting in general. This was, of course, a phenomenal figuring of the self-containedness of the Absolute – one realized, however, at the cost of reducing appearances, inasmuch as they would be the appearance of anything determinate, to mere illusion. The irreducibly determinate *givenness* of the objects of experience remained an unexplainable fact, a surd.

Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* unfolded, therefore, as a series of reflections on supposed *facts of consciousness* – each fact constituting a particularized form of experience; each progressively more complex than the previous; each with a language typically its own; each the foundation of past systems of philosophy, and each originally assumed as constituting the truth of experience. According to the logic of the Science's constructionism, however, as so assumed, each form of experience was struck down (Fichte's expression) even as it was assumed. Idealism and realism were struck down, and also the new forms of idealism and realism that emerged over the demise of the previous ones.¹⁶ Consciousness itself was struck down, as well as the subject/object division which was essential to it.¹⁷ The very process of thus constructing *a priori* otherwise mere facts of consciousness, thus presuming to genetically enact within *oneself* a passage to the ineffable Absolute; indeed, even this "oneself" itself, the "we" who believed

was doing the constructing creatively, whereas, in truth, the construction did itself mechanically – all this was also struck down.¹⁸

What about Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* itself? What about its language? How did it deconstruct itself, and with what results? It is significant that Fichte repeatedly characterized the shapes of experience of which the science was the reflection as "schemata of the Absolute." The characterization was well chosen. It perfectly figured the relation of the shapes to the presupposed Absolute. Just as a schema, in ordinary parlance, represents something other than itself, but does so at a distance, that is to say, according to a material and a logic internal to it, so also did the shapes of experience reflect the Absolute at a distance – in their case, of course, at a disproportionate distance that required the critical self-deconstruction just described. On this characterization of experience, Fichte's Science was itself a schema of the Absolute, but as the schema of all schemata. Its specific determination (where "determination [*Bestimmung*]," means also "vocation" in German) was to drive all these schemata to their existential resolution by each striking itself down; in this way, however, also the very process of reflection which, more or less explicitly, was at the origin of every schema was itself struck down. In effect, this meant that Fichte the philosopher, after the agonizing reflection that produced his new science, had no choice but to rejoin the lived experience where the nothingness of things, their escaping rational explanation, was just an immediately felt fact, an irreducible surd.¹⁹ Materially, nothing in experience had thereby changed. Things still were as always. Their meaning, however, had irrevocably been altered. Henceforth, to exist was not unlike to live according to the Gospel's injunction that one must be in this world while belonging to another. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* naturally issued in silence, occasionally only filled in by religious rhetoric.²⁰ "Away with all words and signs!" Fichte once told his auditors. And he continued, "Nothing remains except our living thinking and insight which can't be shown on a blackboard nor be represented in any way but can only be surrendered to nature" (WL₁₈₀₄ 60 [GA II/8:95, lines 30–33]).

Schelling also relied at the time on "constructions," and he too, like Fichte, made a claim to intellectual intuitions. Fichte's constructionism, however, had nothing to do with Schelling's cosmogonic figures. Nor did his claimed intellectual intuition pretend to adduce any otherwise inaccessible knowledge, as Schelling's artistic intuition did. It was, rather, nothing more than our instinctive, even natural sense ("natural" according to Fichte, of course) of existing in a world where the truth is never what it *prima facie* seems to be. Fichte's Science only clarified this sense, and Fichte himself had always dearly hoped that Jacobi would recognize his own faith in it.²¹

Here we come to Hegel. To reaffirm the speculative value of the concept was the motive behind Hegel's confrontation with the Romantics. One cannot indeed step outside conceptual discourse, but this must be understood, not

as a limit, but as an achievement. This was the claim underlying Hegel's Logic.²²

The genesis of Hegel's Logic

Hegel conceived the idea of his Logic when in Jena; he did so progressively, to some extent perhaps even inadvertently.²³ In 1800 he was Schelling's collaborator; by 1807, the year of the publication of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he had clearly cut loose from his mentor – in a limited respect had even marked a return to Fichte's subjective idealism, as we shall see. From what we know from his course announcements and the extant fragments of unpublished manuscripts, it transpires that the inspiration of his system as originally conceived was strictly Schellingian. As he announced to prospective students in 1801–2, just as the absolute substance “first gives a sketch of itself, as it were, in the idea,” then realizes itself in nature by giving itself an articulated body therein, and in spirit finally sums itself up by recognizing itself in this process of externalization, so philosophy must display the idea of the Absolute in cognition, and must then develop it into a philosophy of nature, an ethical system, and finally into a religion that recaptures the simplicity of the original idea (GW 5:262–65). How the Absolute would “first [give] a sketch of itself, as it were, in the idea [*in der Idee sein Bild gleichsam entwirft*]” was a mystifying image, its mystification perhaps redeemed by the “as it were,” but certainly not clarified. But it certainly conveyed a Schellingian position, and the system that Hegel proceeded to develop proved the point.

The system fell into five parts: logic, metaphysics, philosophy of nature, ethics, and religion.²⁴ The logic exposed the limitations of ordinary thought by dialectically exposing the contradictions it incurred by fixating on limited categories, assuming them as ultimate. The function of the logic was to overcome this sclerosis of thought, in this way to induce the kind of conceptual fluidity that would make the concept of a self-contained Absolute intuitively evident. It reminded one of Spinoza's mental therapy (*intellectus emendatio*) that prepared the way for the idea of absolute substance (*causa sui*). Metaphysics was the first exposition of this substance. The philosophy of nature further expounded it as reflected in the inorganic and organic shapes of nature. Ethics did the same in the forms of social existence, and religion, finally, expressed the whole in the medium of its myths and beliefs. As Hegel put it in a 1802–3 text (ISL xviii), the system had to regain the unity of intuitive apprehension which the concept had disrupted by reflectively setting itself up against intuition, yet had to regain through its own reflective means. The adequacy of the two, intuition and concept, was the goal. All this was eminently Spinozist and Schellingian. A number of transformations took place, however, that ended up by 1807 recasting the system on a totally new conceptual foundation. They occurred

sequentially, yet each time whittling away at the still classical metaphysical assumptions that informed the original plan.

One transformation occurred in connection with an early fragmentary version of the ethics planned as part of the overall system. This ethics sought to realize the intended adequacy of intuition and conceptualization by focusing on the laws and institutions by which a people (*Volk*) would have to deliberately structure its existence in order thereby to regain the sense of being at one with itself and the Absolute that had made it a *Volk* in the first place (GW 5:660–61, ISL xvii). It is likely that for Hegel this *Volk* would have finally assumed the character of a religious community.²⁵ But, be that as it may, the point is that in this text Hegel treated his subject matter as if assuming with respect to it the position of an external observer – or again, as if narrating the vicissitudes of the life of a *Volk* from some absolute external standpoint, exactly how Schelling also narrated the unfolding of his System.²⁶ In a later text of 1803–4, apparently originally intended as a complete System, the same subject matter was, however, treated in a totally different spirit (GW 6; cf. ISL xix–xxi). The starting point was not the *Volk* directly, but consciousness, the point where organic nature acquired its highest point of concentration by reflecting upon itself as nature and thus became spirit. When this consciousness developed into language, and this language in turn became the language of a people, the social character of spirit was revealed. At this point Hegel returned to social existence, the subject matter of the earlier text. The introduction of the extra factor of consciousness, however, made a significant difference in two respects. With respect to the overall structure of Hegel's System, it provided a smoother, more organic, transition from philosophy of nature to ethics. This last approach was now renamed "philosophy of spirit," where by "spirit" Hegel essentially meant "social existence." Even more significant, with respect to the ethical subject matter itself, it allowed Hegel to assume a position within spirit itself from which to follow its development as it emerged from nature and then proceeded to recreate the latter after its image. Hegel now portrayed this development as it was internally experienced by spirit – not from the purely objective standpoint of an external observer, as was the case in the earlier text on the ethics. There was the beginning here of a phenomenology of spirit.

Of equal significance was another transformation that occurred also in the 1803–4 text, in this case on the logic/metaphysics side of the System (GW 7; cf. ISL xx–xxi). Officially the logic was still meant to be the introduction to metaphysics. But the distinction between the two tended in fact to disappear. Hegel still seemed to think of dialectic in a negative, still Kantian sense, as a reflective operation that unmasked the contradictions incurred by finite thought because it fixated on finite determinations. It now transpired, however, that this unmasking operation was not brought to bear on finite thought externally, by submitting it to the pressure of critical reflection, but

was rather internal to thought itself, spontaneously elicited by the very logic of finitude. And the operation extended beyond the editorial confines of the logic. It extended to the categories of the metaphysics as well. It took on the character of a conceptual movement by which thought developed into ever more complex forms, and the movement could be traced within thought itself simply by pursuing the latter's internal logic. The net result was that, *de facto*, logic had lost its introductory function. It extended into metaphysics. Whether logic thereby became metaphysics or metaphysics logic is an all-important issue to which we shall presently return. The point now is that, like consciousness in the philosophy of spirit, the logic had acquired a new subjective depth which made possible another smooth transition, this time from formal thought to nature. The metaphysical category of "infinity" provided the basis for the required transition. The "infinite" was conceived as indeed transcending the "finite" – not, however, in the sense that it annulled it, but that it provided the conceptual space within which the finite could emerge in its multifarious forms while at the same time being contained by it. The "infinite" discharged the function, which Hegel had already attributed to it in 1801–2, of transforming the otherwise shifting world of nature into a harmonious whole.

Hegel's original five-part outline of his System had already been altered, *de facto* at least, into a three-part configuration. How this change also entailed a further transformation from a linear configuration to a circular one, in which the third part rejoined the first, was confirmed in 1805–6 (GW 8; cf. ISL xxi–xxii). Returning to the theme of the absolute *Volk*, and the society that this people would constitute, Hegel described the latter as one in which nature became certain of itself. Spirit (i.e., social existence) was where nature was conscious of being conscious: was deliberate about itself, or again, became a product of spirit. This process of spiritualization was completed in the media of art, religion, and science, in each of which nature assumed a new existence as the subject matter of spirit's interests and activities. By implication at least, since the logic was the science of the concept *as* concept – the science of science, in other words – the three-part circle of Hegel's mature System was complete by turning back upon itself.

Not the System, but the *Phenomenology of Spirit* came out in print in 1807. The mature System was yet some years in the making. The idea behind it was, however, already in place. It was unique to Hegel. The architectonic shift from a five-part linear configuration to a three-part circular one was only as important as this idea. In one respect, Hegel had moved from Schelling to Fichte, to the extent at least that the move from the concept to nature, and from nature to the synthesis of concept and nature in spirit, was documented, not as if from an external standpoint in Schellingian fashion, but, more in keeping with Fichte's subjectivism, from the standpoint of one immersed in experience. This was in itself an important development – not as important,

however, as the fact that intuition, whether of Schelling's or Fichte's type, no longer played any function in Hegel's System, and that, therefore, the nature of the experience in which one was immersed had changed accordingly. For Fichte the determining factor in the experience was the attempt at the representation of a transcendent Absolute which *ex hypothesi* cannot be represented – before which, therefore, the representation falls back upon itself, the appearance of an appearing *as mere appearing*. The objectivity attained was, exactly like that of Spinoza's modes, but a surface event with no depth, no substance, behind it – or, at least, with none in which it would not disappear if ever manifested. This was equally the case for the objectivity attained in Schelling's cosmogony, whatever its differences from Fichte's Science. All this was altered in experience as Hegel conceived it by 1806, and as his System was supposed to reconstruct reflectively. The point of experience, its meaning, lay in the subject's recognition in its objects of the work that it had itself accomplished by reflectively raising nature to a more existentially complete status – more complete because more intelligible – first as the object of science; then as transformed into social structures; finally as celebrated in the medium of art and religious mythology. And the summation of all this work lay in the subject's recognition of its rationality as the factor that had made the work possible in the first place. This was nothing but a more elaborated form of Kant's claim that in experience we must find answers to questions that we ourselves have posed (Bxiii). In such a new systematic context, no room was left for an Absolute that transcended conceptualization. The Absolute was either reduced to nature, Spirit's past; or it was brought within the sphere of the intelligible as an achievement of Spirit's idealizing work, ultimately as the absolute Idea which presents rationality in the form of method at the conclusion of the Logic. Nor, for that matter, was any room left for the need to make the concept conform to intuition. Whatever the place intuition might still have had in particular experiential contexts, it no longer was a factor in the System. Truth, indeed, absolute truth, was all there to see displayed in Spirit's discourse about itself as the creator of a new nature.

The Logic as a discourse about discourse in general

Hegel must have taken to heart the "as it were" in his 1801–2 original plan of representing the Absolute as first giving a sketch of itself in the Idea. By 1806 he had dissipated the mystification which that limiting clause only masked. The idea now stood on its own, with only its internal logic to display. For this reason is the question important, whether in 1804–5, when logic and metaphysics had *de facto* already run together, it was logic that had turned into metaphysics or metaphysics into logic. If the first alternative was the case, Hegel would have only turned Schelling's cosmogony into a logical procession, compounding the original mystification instead of dissolving it. To read Hegel

in this way – which, incidentally, was John McTaggart’s approach in the nineteenth century and is still echoed today²⁷ – is to fail to take note of Hegel’s evolution in the Jena period; also to take note that, at least as of 1807, the Absolute was replaced by Spirit; most of all, it is to fail to do justice to the idea that governs Hegel’s mature Logic.

Hegel’s Logic is logic in the traditional meaning of being “the science of the concept,” or, as Hegel also defines it, of being “the concept of the concept” (SL 514 [GW 12:17]). On this understanding, inasmuch as one still wants to call it “metaphysics,” its issue can no longer be one of determining being *a se*, but, in a sense more akin to Kant’s transcendental logic, of determining it inasmuch as being is *made present* to the mind conceptually – that is to say, present as intelligible object. Note that I say “made present,” not “represented,” for “representation” entails the “reference/referent” model of the metaphysics *de re* which presupposes a difference of content separating the “reference” and its “referent” (as we have indeed in Fichte’s constructs). Here, on the contrary, the only content that counts is the intelligible one of the conceptual object. The shift, in other words, is from metaphysics as establishing the outline of a physical universe to one which establishes the outline of a universe of meaning.²⁸ And this is a shift that explicitly occurs in Hegel’s Logic with “absolute relation,” poised as this category stands at the transition from the Logic’s objective part to the subjective. But it is already virtually at hand in Hegel’s preceding reflection on the language of the “absolute,” and in the categories of modality that directly issue from it. “Absolute” and “modal categories” immediately call Spinoza to mind, and Hegel indeed refers to him in a long comment added to this section, criticizing his pantheistic monism. A more telling criticism, however, is to be found elsewhere, earlier in the text, in its revised part of 1832, and, even more telling, the criticism is equally directed at Spinoza and Kant. I shall return to this. But first I must set up the conceptual framework for understanding the criticism.

The categories are reflective terms. They are not universal genera which need specification by a content being added to them (as, regrettably, Kant also uses them at times) but define, rather, the kind of meaning that various terms or groups of terms contribute to actual discourse without, however, themselves being part of it. But Hegel entertains the conceptual fiction of a discourse of which the categories are the primary terms. This is a discourse *sui generis* – a discourse about discourse itself; one, therefore, that defines the limits of meaningfulness. Such is Hegel’s Logic. It is based on two assumptions about language, by which I mean “ordinary language,” where “ordinary” does not exclude a high degree of sophistication. These assumptions are implicit in the very notion of “category.” The first is that language, no less than the categories, is itself essentially reflective – as much a discourse about itself as about the subject matter which is its object. And that it is a discourse about

itself is the most important feature, for only inasmuch as in saying whatever it says it recognizably retains thematic unity, and for the sake of retaining this unity it generates norms of relevance and continuity internal to it, does its subject matter attain articulated presence: it is objectified. The discourse's reflective nature generates the rational space necessary for this presence to be realized. I say "rational space." This is a metaphor that I borrow directly from Wilfrid Sellars, who famously spoke of a "space of reasons,"²⁹ but its Kantian heritage is just below the surface. Just as physical space, as we normally picture it, makes possible the orderly juxtaposition before us of physical things, so the mind's representational activities, be they imaginative or conceptual, make possible the presence of these same things to the mind as objects. The metaphor, in other words, is just another way of speaking of a conceptual *a priori*. Kant had relied on a psychological model to locate the source of this *a priori*. For Hegel, it is rather generated by discourse itself. Its thematic unity makes possible the objectively recognizable unity of presence of a subject-matter. The Logic delineates in its artful ways the conceptual geography of precisely this space.³⁰

This first assumption assures the existential continuity between Hegel's Logic and ordinary language. The second simply reinforces this continuity from the side of ordinary language. Because of its reflective nature, language spontaneously formalizes itself internally: we are all born logicians. All terms, even those which, on the face of it, are direct determinations of a supposed subject-matter, are the more or less explicit products of a judgment regarding how they (the terms) stand within the context of discourse in general. And these judgments have a history: I mean, a real history in time, but one which is nonetheless governed *a priori*. It is governed by the fundamental interest motivating all language to be at one with itself, that is, to create meaning (this is another way of defining rationality). It is equally governed by the need generated by this same interest to introduce new judgments about its subject matter – in effect, to coin new terms or invest already existing ones with new meaning – in order to resolve problems of coherence that threaten to break out into outright contradictions in the course of its praxis. Language constantly reforms itself. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel gave an account of this process of self-reform staying close to the historical circumstances in which it occurred, both in the development of science and of social structures. The Logic, for its part, brings this process to completion – not indeed chronologically, for this is not a matter of summing up an old-age conversation, but in the sense that, in the medium of an untensed language which is the work of conceptual art, the Logic defines the internal norms which made that process, though *historically* open-ended, already *formally* complete at every moment. The language of the Logic expresses this completeness. It defines what Hegel calls *das Logische*.³¹ The key-word here is "completeness." There is no need to validate

the categories existentially, either by following up their exposition with a transcendental deduction, as Kant did for his “metaphysical exposition”; or, as in Schelling’s case, by supporting them intuitively throughout the exposition, as if by divine inspiration; or finally, as for Fichte, by deconstructing them in the very act of setting them up. The need for validation arises only on the classic reference-referent model of truth that requires intuitively testing the concept against the being *a se* of the Absolute, or, in case the latter is not intuitively accessible, against such a contingent proxy as “sensations.” For Hegel, on the contrary, only by virtue of the intelligible space which the concept creates is the presence of anything in any way existing *a se* manifested in the first place. It is not the validity of the rational which is to be tested against being *a se*, but the *aseitas* of being which is to be tested against the ideal. The actual is the rational. This is the claim that might be construed, and has been construed, to mean that Hegel’s Logic is the first outline of a logical cosmogony. It is important that it be placed in its proper logical context.

From the Absolute to Spirit

At each stage of the Logic’s unfolding, a set of categories is introduced which define the parameters of a new type of discourse: they define the kind of distinctions and connections of terms by virtue of which this discourse achieves coherence and unity. The new discourse is intended to support the preceding by bringing it to completion, although at a more developed level of reflectivity. It was in fact presupposed by the preceding, but only implicitly – still as left reflectively unvoiced. A conspicuous example of this move is the transition from the Logic of Being of Book One to that of Essence of Book Two. The categories of Being define the language of surface events – a language which determines its objects qualitatively and quantitatively, by juxtaposing and calculating them, in this way bringing them to a degree of coherent unity, yet always according to distinctions and connections which, despite their becoming progressively ever more complex, ultimately remain external to the adduced determinations. These fail, therefore, to be absorbed in the discourse itself: they are adduced *immediately*, their presence *as objects* still an unexplained fact. The categories of Essence are introduced to remedy this lack of intelligibility, this immediacy; or more precisely – since with the language of “measure” and “degree” the otherwise qualitative external distinctions and connections are already incipiently interiorized in the intended object – they are introduced in order to explicitly formalize an achievement so far realized only *de facto*. The fundamental distinction in Book Two is between the essential and the non-essential (GW 11:245) – a distinction (and a connecting reference) internal to the object itself; a norm therefore, for justifying, at least in principle, whatever is said about it.

The categories of Essence determined the language of "thick objects," so to speak; such objects as would justify themselves. They are the objects of classical metaphysics; and, indeed, in the unfolding of this part of the Logic, Hegel reflectively establishes the conceptual possibility of all the moves made by that metaphysics, and also criticizes them. Here also immediacy disrupts the logical flow. The categories now brought into play are meant to determine an object which, as essence, would stand on its own, its presence self-justifying. Inasmuch as these determinations are not absorbed into their relations to each other and to the object as such, they retain with respect to the latter an independence of their own, a merely immediate content on which the object still depends for its presence as a factor external to it and which, therefore, detracts from its would-be complete intelligibility. To remove this immediacy is the theme governing the unfolding of the whole logic of Essence. Historically, of course, the idea of the Absolute was intended to provide precisely the kind of self-justifying, hence totally intelligible objective presence, which would satisfy this logic.³² And, indeed, Hegel's logic of essence comes to a turning point with the introduction of the category of the Absolute and the language of attribution relating to it. It is followed by the modal categories which finally explicitly voice the play of contingency and necessity only *de facto* displayed in the determination of the previous objects.

The categories determining the Absolute as object are "absolute," "attribute," and "mode" (GW 11:370–75). They clearly bring Spinoza to mind.³³ They express in as extreme a form as possible the dominating belief of Western metaphysics that Being is *a se* and *per se*, that is, "absolute." As so expressed, however, the Absolute's presence turns out to be problematic, not because it is unclear whether it is self-justifying or in need, rather, of justification, but because this presence transcends the issue of justification altogether. This is an issue that arises only on the side of discourse, because, *as discourse*, it is by nature explicatory, hence explanatory, whereas the "absolute" is by definition refractory to precisely any explanatory process. It is *a se*, and, therefore, resists objectification. Discourse is consequently settled with the problem of both subjectively *needing* explanation, and yet recognizing the objective *superfluity* of it. Whatever is said of the Absolute must only be *attributed* to it: it is *said* of it, not because of it, but because of the language about it. From the Absolute's own standpoint, whatever is thus being attributed to it is only a *mode*, a merely relative, accidental determination. And, in saying this, one must keep in mind that, from the Absolute's standpoint, the notion of a "standpoint" is, paradoxically, itself problematic.

Conceptually, we are here at a crossroad. The Logic's subject matter has finally been conceived indeed as intended, as an object standing *a se* and *per se*, but at the price of rendering all determinations of it, hence the very objectifying conception of it, problematic. A gap is created between subject

matter and its determination which renders the latter contingent, a radical new source of immediacy.³⁴ This is the *hiatus irrationalis* over which Fichte had agonized – the *Abgrund*,³⁵ the abyss where reason comes to grief if it tries to transcend it. Accordingly, Hegel introduces at this point the theme of an *Auslegung* of the Absolute, of a possible “narrative” about it, an “exposition” of it (GW 11:370–73). The question is whether this narrative must be self-deconstructing, like Fichte’s; a positive narration like Schelling’s;³⁶ merely idealizing, like Kant’s; or rather, whether Hegel succeeded in forging a new alternative.

Here we see the relevance of Hegel’s already mentioned 1832 criticism of Spinoza (GW 21:324). Significantly, the criticism is equally directed at Kant. Hegel blames both for having assigned to the modal categories only subjective validity. But what would it mean to assign to them objective validity? Certainly not to revert to a pre-Kantian form of dogmatism. If the move, however, cannot be from Kant back, then it must be from Kant forward, and, at the present stage of the Logic, the “forward” can only consist in dropping once and for all the dogmatic assumption of being *a se* as the unspoken subject matter of discourse. There can be an exposition internal to the Absolute only in the sense that it is performed by the Absolute itself (GW 11:372)³⁷ – a self-narrative *by* the Absolute, now, however, become Spirit. In effect this amounts to deflating the Absolute as classically understood by reducing it to the realm of nature (the domain of the second part of Hegel’s mature system) where it stands simply as the antecedent of Spirit, the latter’s past. As for the Logic, this means that its *underlying subject matter is the very objectifying process so far directed at it*. This is a result that only makes explicit the assumption that *de facto* governs the whole Logic from the beginning, namely, that the main business of language is not to refer to anything outside it, but, on the contrary, to create a universe of meaning, a space of reasons, within which alone nature is first made *effectively* present: is made *actual* (*wirklich*) precisely by being rationalized, that is, transformed into the works of Spirit. Language is the most fundamental of such works. The immediacy which has hitherto irrupted at every stage of the Logic *de facto*, far from signaling the presence in it of an irreducible surd at which all discursiveness comes to grief, is instead the product of discursiveness itself: it marks an achievement on the part of reason, its rising above nature, not a failure. If, historically speaking, reason took it as an intractable surd, that was only because it did not yet know itself as reason. Reason’s *Abgrund* was one of *finite* reason, not of reason as such.

The modal categories

The leading move in this deflation of the Absolute is made by virtue of the fluidity of the modal categories (GW 11:384, lines 31–34). Since the meaning

of each spontaneously slides into the meaning of the others, together they constitute a complete discourse that renders the assumption of anything transcending it superfluous. Essentially, this is a matter of demonstrating that the meaning of *die Sache selbst*, the “facticity of fact,” emerges from within this discourse: it consists in a synthesis of two judgments, namely, that a fact “is because it is,” where the stress is on the “is”; and that “it is because it is,” where the stress is instead on the “because.”³⁸ Ordinary language already acts out this synthesis. There is no difficulty assuming a thing, simply because it is *there*, as the starting point for the explanation of the presence of something else; yet, when the experiential context demands it, reversing the process and taking the presence of the original thing as requiring other things as conditions for its presence – that is, as providing the *because* of its being *there* in the first place. This is a language defined by “actuality” and “possibility,” where the meaning of the two inherently shift into one another, for the measure of the truly “possible” is its already being in principle “actual”; and, of the truly “actual,” that its actuality is the inevitable result of its possibility. This interplay of “actual” and “possible” is what makes for the ineluctable character of the “fact”: on the one hand, its presence is *necessary*, for, once *there*, it cannot be revoked; on the other hand, though *there*, it might not have been, and hence remains *contingent*. It is this “might have been” – which, however, only the space of reasons creates – that renders the otherwise merely physical presence of things both intelligible *and* problematic.

Within the artificially self-contained discourse of the Logic, Hegel subjects to analysis this mutual entailment of the modal categories, first at a purely formal level of abstraction, as categories in general; then as relativized, that is, in the form in which they would govern ordinary language in the particular contexts of the immediate world of experience, where only relative necessity is in each case at issue. The crucial transition, however, is made in a third step, where a totality of these particular contexts is envisaged. This is a universe in which the modal categories would indeed define meaning *in concreto*, not just formally; nor, however, just in particular contexts, but *in toto*, absolutely. It is a universe (reminiscent of Leibniz's) made up of particularized worlds, each self-contained and independent of the rest from its point of view – in fact, however, each reflecting and made possible by all the rest. There is no space available in it for any “might have been,” since any “might have been” at one place in the universe is already actual somewhere else. Reality is dense, so to speak. The connection between “possibility” and “actuality” is, therefore, one of “absolute necessity.” Hegel calls it “blind necessity” (GW 11:391, line 25) – one which is averse to light (GW 11:391 [line 38]–392 [line 3]), as he says, using an image which Fichte also used in connection with his Absolute. The narrative about the Absolute is now indeed internal to it, for it is through the mediation of the universe holding all its worlds together that these can each reflect all the rest

and be actual. But the problem is that there is nowhere from which the narrative can be narrated – not from the side of the actual worlds, because of their particularity; not from the side of the universe in general, because, if narrated apart from these worlds, it relapses into formal abstraction. The connection between the two remains opaque, and any disclosure of it unresolved.

Yet, Hegel says, the light will shine (GW 11:392, lines 3–4). It is the very fluidity of the modal categories that forces its revelation. For if one wants to avoid the opaqueness of the language of “absolute necessity,” yet hold on to the completeness of discourse that it tried to achieve, there is no choice left but to look for this completeness on the side of the discourse itself: in the universe of meaning that the latter generates, where absolute necessity is transformed into Spirit’s freedom. “The unveiling of substance” in the concept “is the one and only true refutation of Spinozism” (GW 12:15, lines 20–23). Discourse progresses by stating itself. It thereby particularizes its original theme and hence establishes the need to restate itself over and over again: in this sense, it generates immediacy. The sense of the ineluctable experiences of facts is due precisely to the freedom one enjoys of being able to speak the language of the “might have been” before any of them: of ever continuing a conversation about them in which the “is” and the “because” alternate in setting its leading motif. But it is the language itself, by virtue of its original theme, that governs this process of particularization, thereby retaining its unity and the capacity to declare normatively when it has become an achieved discourse – a thematic totality. *This is Hegel’s move away from classical metaphysics – from the language of the Absolute to that of Spirit.* The move’s full implications come to the fore only at the very end of the Logic, where Hegel reveals that its content is not any particular determination, or any totality of determinations, but the methodical and self-contained movement from one determination to the other. Method itself, which Hegel calls the rhythm of *die Sache selbst*, is the content.

Kant and his legacy

Kant was the one responsible for coining the expression “dogmatic metaphysics” and for using it in a derogatory sense, even though he had no brief against either dogma or metaphysics. His brief was against a metaphysics that presumed to step outside the bounds of experience. Nonetheless, that the *truly* true, as contrasted with the merely *phenomenally* true, would be had only if one could transcend those bounds by means of a non-sensible intuition, and behold the “thing” as “in itself,” was still Kant’s belief. This belief haunted, so to speak, his whole critical system, for although he undoubtedly wanted to maintain the robust reality of the objects of experience, when considered as one would see them from the standpoint of the “thing in itself,” such objects

might well be just imaginary constructions. This was the source of the new skepticism that irrupted in response to the Critique of Reason. Jacobi, with his penchant for the pithy statement, summed up the situation in this way: "Without the presupposition [of the unknown thing in itself] I could not enter into [Kant's] system, but *with* it I could not stay within it."³⁹ One could not be a realist, in any robust sense, on Kant's still classical assumption of an Absolute *a se* and *per se*, however hypothetical the assumption, and unknown its object.

In that he pursued Kant's at least hypothetical assumption of classical monism while positioning himself strictly within the bounds of experience, expounding that monism as it would have to be reflected in the very structure of experience, Fichte was indeed being true to Kant's legacy. Realism, as a natural attitude, was recovered only by suspending the hubris of a reflection to which the philosopher is fated by nature (as Fichte once said to Jacobi [GA III, no. 307 (see the last two paragraphs, pp. 392–93)]). It was recovered by deliberately immersing oneself in lived experience, and, like Jacobi (at least in Fichte's estimate), directly feeling the presence of a God which the philosopher, on the contrary, tries to capture reflectively.

But what counted most for Kant was not this monism, but the empirical realism of experience – the robust sense of the objectivity of such categories as cause/effect which is essential to this realism. What counted most was not intuition, but the discursiveness of explanation. And inasmuch as Hegel had purged Kant's system of the classical assumptions which still haunted it, shifting attention to Spirit, the language which provided the intelligible space within which nature could be first observed for what it happened to be, and then made to re-exist as satisfying the interest of reason – to this extent, in what counted most, he was the true inheritor of Kant's legacy.

Notes

1. I have recently explored the theme of this chapter in a number of public presentations (May 7, 2013, Louvain-la-Neuve; May 8, 2013, Leuven; Sept. 19, 2013, International Fichte Association Congress, Bologna; Nov. 24, 2013, Japanese Fichte Association Congress, Tokyo; Nov. 30, 2013, Osaka University), basing myself on the same texts, but in each case approaching the theme from a unique perspective and stressing a different aspect of its conceptual complexity. Although this chapter occasionally verbally overlaps with the texts of these presentations, it is nonetheless unique. The presentations might, but also might not, be published in a variety of venues, whether in English, French, or Japanese.
2. *Kritik der Vernunft* was how Kant's contemporaries referred to his critical work in general. I follow this practice.
3. This is true, but not exclusively so. Fichte's concern was also to prove himself before Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

4. ... which I have documented elsewhere. Cf. George di Giovanni, "The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi," introduction to *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"* by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), sect. 2; and George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 1.
5. ... as I have documented elsewhere. Maimon's critique is the philosophically more interesting one. Cf. di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion*, 97–104; and George di Giovanni, "The Facts of Consciousness," introduction to *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, trans. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 20–27, 32–36.
6. This is an oversimplification, and very likely a misinterpretation of Kant. But this is how Kant was understood in his days, and, when historical influence is at issue, how a philosopher is understood is more important than what the philosopher meant.
7. Fichte indirectly admits this much in a letter to Jacobi (of May 8, 1806) in which he announced the publication of his *Anweisung* (see note 20 below). He pointed out that the concept can comprehend everything except itself, and that the "we" or the "I" are bound (*gefesselt*) to a form (a determination) which it cannot transcend (GA III/5, no. 716).
8. Schelling's classical exposition of this position is in his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800).
9. Cf. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1785), in *Main Philosophical Writings*, 187–88.
10. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Jacobi to Fichte*, in *Main Philosophical Writings*, 501–2.
11. Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* (Berlin: s.n., 1785). The publication of this book was the immediate occasion of Jacobi's public dispute with Mendelssohn. Cf. Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 603n93, 94.
12. The image is Fichte's, but "ontic" is my gloss.
13. For the "*per hiatus irrationalem*," cf. WL₁₈₀₄ 113 (GA II/8:225, lines 6–11). For another text, see WL₁₈₀₄ 143–44 (GA II/8:293 [line 34]–295 [line 2]). Fichte also calls this gap (*hiatus*) "the place of death [*der Lage des Todes*]," that is, the place where all conceptual distinctions and determinations come to naught (WL₁₈₀₄ 71 [GA II/8:121 (line 7)–123 (line 10)]). See also WL₁₈₀₄ 111 (110–12 *in toto* are relevant) (GA II/8:217 [line 26]–220 [line 32]). Unfortunately, the English translation lacks in these contexts the rhetorical force of Fichte's German.
14. Schlegel gave to this self-deconstructing language the form of irony. Hegel clearly recognized that the source of Romantic irony was Fichte's idealism. The most important text for Hegel's criticism of this irony is his review of "Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel" (GW 16:77–129).
15. Fichte lectured on the WL three times in 1804. These lectures are in GA II/8. I am using the second version, for which there is an English translation.
16. Lectures XII, XIII, and XIV deal with this reduction. Both idealism and realism must be struck down because, in their different ways, they both presuppose an "in itself" as absolute which, in point of fact, cannot be such, for it implies an opposition and must be, therefore, a relative, the product of consciousness. This is not to deny that, factually, we presuppose the "in itself."

17. Lecture XIV is relevant, especially WL₁₈₀₄ 110 (GA II/8:217, lines 25–33).
18. Fichte praises Spinoza for having seen, regarding the opposition between God and us, that, if we seriously want to avoid dualism, since God ought not to be done away with, then the negation has to be borne by us. This of course applies first and foremost to the “I.” But then Spinoza, according to Fichte, went on to kill God as well, by turning him into a thing without life (WL₁₈₀₄ 67–69 [GA II/8:113 (line 28)–117 (line 27)]); note in particular p. 115, lines 24–26.
19. In 1804 Fichte said: “On a particular occasion I divided the science of knowledge into two main parts; one, which is the doctrine of reason and truth; the second, which is a doctrine of appearance and illusion, but one which is *indeed true* and is grounded in truth” (WL₁₈₀₄ 115, translation modified [GA II/8:228]). *Wahrheitslehre* and *Erscheinungslehre* are, respectively, the *Wissenschaftslehre* as schema of the Absolute and as schema of the phenomena of real life. The *Wissenschaftslehre* demonstrates the coincidence of the two – in effect, it demonstrates that the surd encountered in the attempt at schematizing the Absolute is equally present in the attempt at defining the “I” which is the subject of actual experience. There is continuity, in other words, between reflective/philosophical dissatisfaction and real-life dissatisfaction – a continuity, however, which itself defies conceptualization. It can only be lived: exhibited, rather than represented, by way of giving witness to it. This point is already made in 1804, but is more clearly developed in 1807. I owe this insight to Gaetano Rametta, “Einleitende Bemerkungen über die *Wissenschaftslehre* von 1807,” *Fichte-Studien* 26 (2006): 33–61. In this Fichte is echoing a theme already declared to Reinhold, with Jacobi in mind, in a letter of April 22, 1799 (EPW 434–35 [GA III/3, no. 440]).
20. Fichte’s 1806 *Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch Religionslehre* (*Initiation to the Blessed Life or also The Doctrine of Religion*) is there to prove the point (GA 1/9:55–212).
21. Cf. his letter to Jacobi of April 26, 1796 (EPW 413 [GA III/3, no. 335]).
22. I refer to Hegel’s Logic as “discursive” rather than according to the usual epithet of “dialectical” because, quite apart from the fact that “discourse” is a possible translation of the original Greek, “dialectics,” understood as a procession of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, is Fichte’s invention, inspired by Kant’s antinomies. Hegel’s Logic does not proceed according to that schema which for him would be the product of finite understanding.
23. I exclusively refer to the *Wissenschaft der Logik* as published in 1832, in the English translation of 2010 (SL). Since this translation includes the pagination of the critical edition (GW) in margin, I shall cite only from the latter, according to volume (whether 11, 12, or 21), page number and, when needed, line number. I shall refer to the Introduction to the 2010 translation as “ISL,” followed by page number.
24. For details, dates, and texts, see ISL, xvi.
25. Thus Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben: Supplement zu Hegels Werke* (Berlin: Dunder und Humblot, 1844), 132–44.
26. This attitude of unanchored observer, incidentally, was later to be found again in Hegel’s treatment of ethical life in Section V of the *Phenomenology*, where at issue is Objective Reason, or the Enlightenment’s scientific rationality.
27. For this tradition of Hegel interpretation, cf. ISL lvi–lvii.
28. Hegel speaks of three levels of being, that of immediate existence (*Daseyn*), concrete existence (*Existenz*), and objectivity (GW 11:324). Nature is intelligibly present precisely as objectified, in the medium of the concept.

29. Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1: *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), 298–99.
30. I am borrowing Gilbert Ryle's analogy of philosophy as a cartography of mental space. See Gilbert Ryle, "Abstractions," *Dialogue* 1, no. 1 (June 1962): 5–16.
31. It is "the *logicality* of the absolute idea" that brings the Logic to conclusion (GW 12:237).
32. The language of the Absolute was introduced by Fichte and Schelling. Kant spoke rather of the "unconditional."
33. ... who is discussed in the Remark introduced here (GW 11:376).
34. For the distinction between *Gegenstand*, which I translate as "subject matter," and *Objekt*, and the importance of this distinction which runs through the Logic, see ISL xxxvi, lxx–xxi.
35. The image of the "abyss [*der Abgrund*]" is in Kant, possibly inspired by Haller, and it reappears in Hegel. For Kant, cf. A613/B641. For Hegel, GW 21:380; GW 11:372, lines 28–37.
36. In Heinrich Heine's words, "In the year 1804, the God of Schelling appeared at last in His completed form in a work entitled 'Philosophy and Religion.'" And Heine added, "Here philosophy ceases with Schelling, and poetry – I may say folly – commences" (Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany: A Fragment*, trans. John Snodgrass [Boston: Beacon Press, 1959], 151, 152).
37. But what follows at this stage is only an external exposition.
38. This synthesis is what defines absolute necessity in the Logic: it marks the completion of the whole dialectic of modal categories. Cf. GW 11:391.
39. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue* (1787), Supplement, in *Main Philosophical Writings*, 336.

33

Hegel on Art and Aesthetics

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Hegel's approach to questions of art and beauty in his *Lectures on Fine Art* takes into consideration two competing narratives about aesthetic thought and its origin – one deriving from classical Greece and the other emerging in the eighteenth century – while offering an idealist stance from which the two can be synthesized. The synthesis which Hegel attempts raises a number of interesting questions about the relation between art and aesthetics and the relevant histories of those disciplines.

Some, including the twentieth-century aesthetician Frank Sibley, have argued that Hegel is distinctive for *identifying* the concerns of art and aesthetics: as Sibley emphasizes, earlier eighteenth-century approaches to aesthetics tended to see aesthetics as inclusive of concerns with both natural and artistic beauty.¹ Like Schelling, Hegel does insist on the *philosophy of art*, as opposed to *aesthetics*, as the appropriate subject matter for his extensive lecture series on these topics – although, like many in contemporary philosophy, he allows that “aesthetics” and “philosophy of art” are interchangeable terms for the discipline as such.² But the general approach of the *Lectures* is one which acknowledges two competing historical narratives: one that highlights the birth of aesthetics as an eighteenth-century phenomenon and one that looks back to the longer trajectory of art as it emerges in the ancient world, particularly in classical Greece.

Hegel's abiding concern for the singular fit of outer form and inner meaning that he found exemplarily visible in ancient Greek art – particularly in the sculptural renderings of the anthropomorphic Greek gods – is well known, and has led some interpreters to view his project with respect to the philosophy of art as a classicizing attempt focused especially on the notion of beauty. At the same time, however, Hegel is also read conceptually as the successor of distinctively eighteenth-century shifts that culminated, for example, in the separation of aesthetic from moral and utilitarian value achieved by Kant and in the more general eighteenth-century notion of the “fine arts” as such, as they

came to be codified in a list later identified by Paul Oskar Kristeller (and that Hegel takes over in his own treatment of artistic genres in the *Lectures*).

What is it that allows Hegel to bring these two narrative strains together in a synthetic approach? His attempt depends in particular on a new level of consideration for the role of historical contextualization within aesthetics and the philosophy of art. My argument is that the familiar tripartite structure of the *Lectures* – its concerns, respectively, with *the idea of artistic beauty* (what Hegel calls *the ideal* as such), the particular *forms of art* (in the historical development of symbolic, classical, and romantic modes), and the *artistic genres themselves* (Kristeller's list of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry) – is one which reflects Hegel's awareness of the discipline of the philosophy of art or aesthetics as requiring three distinct historical *tasks* that must be taken up in the wake of the debate about these two competing narratives centered in ancient Greece and the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. In what follows, I will first trace the debate between two narrative approaches to the histories of art and aesthetics as they center on the claims of Kristeller and others about the eighteenth-century origin of terms such as "aesthetics" and "the fine arts," and then I will examine both what Hegel's synthesis of these narratives achieves and what further questions that synthesis raises for the future of art and its relation to philosophy.

The "history of art" and the "history of aesthetics": Two competing narratives

There is no evident agreement about the relation between the history of art and the history of aesthetics (if they are indeed "two histories"). Nor is it clear what role philosophers – as opposed to art historians, intellectual historians, or historians of material culture – should be thought to play in connection with them. Giving an account of the history of aesthetics would appear in some ways to give us an easier task: the use of the word itself to refer to a specific discipline concerned with issues of art and beauty is, after all, the result of a precisely dateable philosophical coinage, by Alexander Baumgarten, in 1735.³ And the literature on the "birth of aesthetics" as a discipline that emerged in the eighteenth century, as a result of significant efforts in philosophical and material culture, is voluminous. But, as many others have urged, this relatively short, less than 300-year history of post-Baumgartenian aesthetics fits problematically with what may well be assumed to be the much longer history of art as a human activity – a history which stretches back to the remarkable artistic achievements of the ancient Greeks, of course, but also to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and even (thanks to recent improvements in radioactive dating techniques) to paleolithic European cave art now estimated to be as much as 40,000 years old.⁴

This question has recently taken a sharpened form in a debate between those who want to defend the distinctiveness of the eighteenth-century origins of aesthetics as a discipline and those who want to see a kind of aesthetics *avant-la-lettre* present in the artistic practice and reflection of the ancient world, as well. Much of this recent debate has centered on a contention over claims that go back to an oft-cited pair of articles by Kristeller concerning what he called the “modern system of the fine arts” – the *beaux arts* or *schöne Künste*. Kristeller claimed that this “system” reached a certain codified status in Western reflection on art and philosophy not long after Baumgarten in Charles Batteux’s 1746 *Les beaux arts réduits à une même principe*.⁵ Until recently, Kristeller’s claims about the origin of the “modern system of fine arts” were often regarded, Peter Kivy has claimed, as a kind of “dogma” within philosophical histories of aesthetics – and with important consequences, since without the modern recognition of the fine arts as a group as such it is indeed hard to imagine aesthetics as a discipline of the sort that we currently conceive it to be.

In this section, I would like to examine this recent debate in light of the broader question about what we as philosophers should say about the relation between the histories of art and aesthetics. I will look first at the contention over the Kristellerian formulation about the “modern system of the fine arts” and then turn, in a more speculative vein, to the question of the historical motivations that underlie the narrative construction employed by philosophers who work in these disciplines. My claim will be that what is at issue here is not what it may seem at first: that is to say, some recognizable form of the familiar “battle between the ancients and moderns” – interesting as that may be, though primarily of concern at the level of intellectual history and not necessarily of philosophy – but rather a set of ongoing philosophical questions about how philosophy should understand the status of art as a human activity. Part of what I want to explore in this connection is whether it might not be one of the merits of Hegel’s approach to these issues that it was able to find a framework in which the strengths of both sides in this debate could be seen as part of a general approach that opened up a new dimension for the explicitly narrative and historical understanding of philosophy’s relation to art and aesthetics.

1. *The “modern system of the arts”: Kristeller and his critics*

Kristeller claimed that it was a mid-eighteenth-century development that the fine arts as such – in a codified list after Batteux that included the five specific arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry – came to be explicitly considered as a “system,” distinguished from craft and utilitarian arts on the one hand and from activities with moral purposes on the other. The ancients, he argued, had no such “system,” made no clear distinction between

“the beautiful [*to kalon*]” and “the good [*to agathon*],” and produced no general philosophical account of arts such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. On Kristeller’s view,

only the eighteenth century produced a type of literature in which the various arts were *compared* with each other and discussed on the basis of *common principles*, whereas up to that period treatises on poetics and rhetoric, on painting and architecture, and on music had represented quite distinct branches of writing and were primarily concerned with technical precepts rather than with general ideas.⁶

Kristeller claims that “no ancient philosopher...wrote a separate systematic treatise on the visual arts or assigned to them a prominent place in his scheme of knowledge.”⁷ Even the organizational scheme in Aristotle’s *Poetics* gives only glancing mention to visual arts, treats music and dance as forms of poetry, and excludes some arts, such as architecture, entirely.

The historical narrative that Kristeller traces from the ancient world to the modern “system” of arts emphasizes several important stages in the development of new status for individual arts and artists themselves: in sixteenth-century Italy, as the three visual arts (painting, sculpture, and architecture) become for the first time clearly separated from the crafts with which they had been linked, and in seventeenth-century France, as the French Academies are founded. But the decisive shift, Kristeller argues, comes only in the mid-eighteenth century when the “irreducible nucleus”⁸ of the five arts appears first in Batteux and then is taken up with surprising consistency by later writers, and as the German aesthetic tradition develops between Baumgarten and Kant.

The resulting appeal from a notion of the “fine arts” as a defined group to “Art” as such – and then to the well-known Kantian/post-Kantian philosophical tripartition of the values of the good, the true, and the beautiful (as in Victor Cousin’s memorable title, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*) – thus stand, on Kristeller’s view, as distinctive eighteenth-century contributions to the beginning of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in its own right. By contrast, he claims, “ancient writers and thinkers, though confronted with excellent works of art and quite susceptible to their charm, were neither able nor eager to detach the aesthetic quality of these works of art from their intellectual, moral, religious and practical function or content.”⁹

Kristeller’s narrative has had a significant influence on other accounts of the history of aesthetics and on issues that go beyond the scope of his argument. Larry Shiner, for example, argues that the eighteenth-century developments so central to Kristeller’s argument represent the origin of the Western tradition of “high art” as it comes to be defined in opposition to craft and artisanship – in particular, the three notions that the fine arts are *pursued for their own sake*

(and not for the utilitarian ends of the crafts), involve their audience in the enjoyment of *refined pleasure* or ultimately even in a stance of *disinterestedness* (rather than one of seeking mere entertainment), and are the results of *creative genius* (as opposed to workmanlike rules).¹⁰ Putting these developments into the perspective of post-Danto philosophical concerns with the “end” of art, Shiner argues, may allow for aesthetic reevaluation of the sharp differentiation between craft and “high” art that, he argues, has been so central to the post-eighteenth-century tradition in aesthetics.

Despite the frequent appeal that has been made to Kristeller’s account, recent critics have directed attention toward important philosophical and historical issues that make for a more complicated narrative. Stephen Halliwell, for example, has argued that the ancient notion of *mimesis* – at least if it is appropriated in the sense not of mere “imitation” but instead as a representational and expressive form of activity – offers possibilities for a more unified conception of a “coherent group” of arts on classical grounds than is often acknowledged.¹¹ The sharpest attack on Kristeller’s narrative account, however, has come from James I. Porter, whose recent book, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece*, argues that the history of aesthetics should begin in the ancient world and not with the eighteenth century.¹²

Porter acknowledges in his attack on Kristeller (and by extension on Shiner and others who follow Kristeller’s lead) that the term “aesthetics” in our disciplinary sense is a modern coinage – and that there are as well no “obvious ancient equivalents” that could be readily translated by the modern term.¹³ He admits also that the modern discipline of aesthetics has in fact determined “in large part how we think about the subject matter,” so that it is not always easy to understand what the ancient view of art and artistic activity was. But his argument is that Kristeller nonetheless does not do justice to the ancient sources of aesthetic thought – a term which, he emphasizes, resonates with the sensual and material side of our experience of art that the ancients were well aware of. Porter’s interest in the ancients goes back thus not so much to Plato and Aristotle (whose approaches to the arts represent the “formalist” claims that he thinks fail to do justice to the material and sensual elements in ancient artistic practice and reflection), but particularly to the Presocratics (whose “invention” of the notions of matter and appearance allowed them to become “available in all their manifold forms for use...by artists, and then eventually, and increasingly, by more technically minded theoreticians, critics and systematizers of the arts”) and even beyond Greece to Mesopotamia and Egypt (where, he claims, aesthetic reflection was “embedded in practices rather than in surviving treatises”).¹⁴

Porter also criticizes not simply Kristeller’s account of what is absent in the ancient world but also his more positive claims about what is supposed to have developed in the eighteenth century. Although Porter’s account is a good

deal more detailed, I will emphasize four lines of criticism that are especially important for our discussion. They concern the issues of system, autonomy, art's opposition to aesthetics, and the nature of modernity.

1. *System*. Perhaps most pressingly, Porter argues against Kristeller's term "system": "the 'modern system of the arts' appears to have been neither a system nor an agreed upon entity, but only a construct of Kristeller's own making that matches up with no known historical reality." On the contrary, he claims, "there was... only a loosely defined and ever-changing grab bag of items that fell under the newly discovered rubric of 'fine arts' during this era."¹⁵
2. *Autonomy*. Porter claims that Kristeller has in fact confused ultimate claims about the *autonomy* of art and aesthetics with notions of a *system*. Yet even this claim of autonomy may not be as central to the eighteenth-century shift at the heart of Kristeller's account, since, as Porter points out, some of the most prominent philosophical writers within eighteenth-century aesthetics did not always argue for such a clean separation of aesthetics from other disciplines or modes of value: Hutcheson, Hume, and even Kant are still concerned to explore the relationship aesthetics bears to ethics and other areas of philosophical concern, for example. Relatedly, Porter argues that the individual arts themselves are more *interactive* with respect to one another than Kristeller suggests in his account of the distinct emergence of the five in the system: other interpreters of the development of eighteenth-century aesthetics have stressed more, for example, the debates about how literature and painting are viewed from the perspective of the other art.
3. *Art vs. aesthetics*. A criticism of particular relevance for our concern about the relation between art and aesthetics is Porter's claim that Kristeller's historical focus is on the new status accorded arts, artworks, and artists in the eighteenth century, and not on the development of the sensual side of aesthetic response and experience that comes to be so central in the formal development of aesthetics between the time of Baumgarten and Kant.
4. *Modernity*. Porter charges that Kristeller's approach rests on a "reductive and monolithic view of the 'modern,'" one which leaves out a number of (materialist, sensualist) strains that run counter to Kristeller's view of the Enlightenment and that are discernible in authors as diverse as Locke, Richardson, Hogarth, Burke, Hume, and Nietzsche. Porter also notices a remarkable feature of Kristeller's account of post-eighteenth-century modernity: that, while he makes the case for the distinctive emergence of the Kantian/post-Kantian triad of truth, goodness, and beauty as a result of the eighteenth-century formation of the modern "system" of the arts, Kristeller nonetheless acknowledges that this "systematic" perspective on the arts is one which is already under great attack even a generation after Kant: "as

soon as the aesthetic (never) does take hold on Kristeller's story, it crumbles away again."¹⁶ If the "system" as Kristeller articulates it does not last, should it really be viewed as so central a moment in the development of Western aesthetics?

Against these charges, contemporary Kristellerians (as Porter calls them) such as Kivy and Shiner have responded with a defense (even if a qualified one in some cases) of the basic shift that Kristeller sees as central to eighteenth-century aesthetics. Each has a somewhat different stance and set of concerns, yet both share Kristeller's commitment to the decisive break represented by the eighteenth century.

Kivy argues that, while Porter makes some important criticisms of Kristeller, the basic position is correct: "something – *some things* – of great moment in the history of aesthetics and the philosophy of art transpired in the age of the Enlightenment."¹⁷ Kivy acknowledges that Kristeller's term "system" was "singularly ill-chosen," but claims that Kristeller was nonetheless right to insist that there is a coherent *grouping* of the modern fine arts and that this grouping is not an arbitrary one. "The fine arts became recognized as a group of entities, albeit a group epistemically open" (i.e., like the London subway system, a collective entity about which there is at any given time consensus as to *what its elements are*, even if it was in the past different or may in the future be changed). They are in any event a group "not arbitrary in character, but susceptible of a necessary-and-sufficient condition definition."¹⁸

On the autonomy issue, Kivy does not think there is in the eighteenth century an autonomy of the "absolute" sort he finds in later aestheticians such as Bell and Collingwood: few Enlightenment philosophers, he argues, would separate art so that it was completely devoid of religious, moral, or philosophical content. Likewise, although it appeals to the important notion of disinterestedness, the eighteenth-century sense of "aesthetics" does not yet involve the claims implicit in more recent usages such as "aesthetic attitude," or "aesthetic concepts" in the later sense argued, for example, by Sibley.¹⁹

For Kivy, what Kristeller got right in the end is the realization that aesthetics begins as a new discipline in the eighteenth century. And (as something of a concession to Porter) he acknowledges that this does not mean that it was only in the eighteenth century that "philosophers first began to do philosophy of art *in fact*, but that they first started to do it in full realization that *that* was what they *in fact* were doing."²⁰ On Kivy's view, then, the origin of aesthetics is distinctively modern, even if the eighteenth century still does not have the sort of "autonomy" associated with the "aesthetic" that is accorded to it in later philosophy of art; and even if we then need to draw a distinction between something that may have gone on before but that is different once it is pursued in terms of its "full realization."

Shiner, for his part, also defends Kristeller's basic claim about the eighteenth-century origins of the "system," stressing Kristeller's perhaps more apt formulation of the five arts as an "irreducible nucleus" – that is, a grouping that can also be added to (as Kristeller acknowledges that certain eighteenth-century figures, including Batteux himself, did), but that remains central to philosophical discussions of the artistic genres across the later eighteenth century. And, Shiner emphasizes, Kristeller is right to notice the importance of these five arts across very different eighteenth-century modes of doing aesthetics (in figures as diverse as Lacombe, Nougaret, Kames, Gerard, Robertson, Mendelssohn, Schlegel, Roth, and Kant).²¹ But more to the philosophical point in Shiner's view: "both the term 'system' and the idea of a fixed nucleus of five could be abandoned without damaging [Kristeller's] ... primary thesis that there was a significant change in the understanding of art over the course of the eighteenth century."²² Shiner's larger response concerns what he sees as the essentially Deweyan import of this more fundamental eighteenth-century shift for the history of aesthetics: that is, that there is a continuum between craftsmanship and art that obviously stretches back to the ancients, and the breaking off of the fundamental claims about artistic autonomy, aesthetic indifference, and refined pleasure in the eighteenth century all meant the beginning of a new history of "high art"; if the tradition of "high art" has indeed come to an end (in Arthur Danto's sense), whatever will succeed it must be examined in light of something that Kristeller got right about the emergence of that tradition in the first place.²³

What conclusions can be drawn from this debate? In the next section, I want to examine the historical assumptions underlying the two broad sets of (pro- and anti-Kristellerian) claims and then look at Hegel's attempt to construe the history of aesthetics in a way that might offer some resources for incorporating essential claims of both sides.

Narrative motivations in the history of art and aesthetics: Three views

The two positions we have explored concerning the history of art and aesthetics involve implicit commitments to the conceptual relation between art and aesthetics. For Porter, as we have seen, the first and most important construal (etymologically and conceptually) is about aesthetics: some relevant notion of aesthetics must be present already in (at least the practices of) ancient art, even if the practitioners involved are not yet explicit about why what they do should count *as* art. Porter's position with respect to the relation between the history of art and the history of aesthetics is that there really are not "two histories" at all: art and aesthetics somehow arise together in the ancient world – even with the qualification that we have to consider it as it

is “embedded in practices.” Porter quotes with approval the abstract expressionist Barnett Newman’s account of the origin of art and aesthetics at once: “What was the first man, was he a hunter, a toolmaker, a farmer, a worker, a priest, or a politician? Undoubtedly the first man was an artist. ... Man’s first expression, like his first dream, was an aesthetic one.”²⁴ Perhaps the best way of thinking about this view of the relation between aesthetics and art is one that can be found in Bosanquet’s remark that “*the thing* [i.e., the ‘Aesthetic’] *existed before the name.*”²⁵

For the “Kristellerian” views, on the other hand (in their different ways, Kristeller himself, Kivy, and Shiner), there is an important sense in which a relevant notion of “art” which precedes the explicit development of “aesthetics” is understood in a different way than “art” in the sense identified by the post-Enlightenment tradition. The consequence is that the pre-history of art prior to the emergence of aesthetics as a discipline must be viewed in different ways. (And sometimes quite differently: Shiner, for example, is drawn, as for similar reasons is Arthur Danto, to Hans Belting’s account of devotional art in the West prior to the year 1400, which relates a narrative of the “before” to Shiner and Danto’s “after,” offering a “history of the image before the era of art,” by which he means the era in which images construed as *being* art or artists construed as *being* artists, did not figure as such into their production).²⁶

Can both the Kristellerian and the anti-Kristellerian positions be done justice? Is there a way to accept the decisive shift that occurs in the eighteenth century without being merely dismissive of earlier art in relation to aesthetics? Some light can be shed on these questions by looking at an attempt to put together essential elements in both claims – one in this case with a distinct pedigree, emerging out of German Idealism, to some extent in Schelling but most explicitly (and with the greatest consequences for the future of the discipline of the philosophy of art) in Hegel’s attempt to think through the historical implications both of the ancient world and the Enlightenment. In this section, I will turn to the new framework for the history of art and aesthetics that Hegel developed and which may (despite its own difficulties) offer some resources for thinking through some of the issues involved in this question.

The discussion of art in Hegel’s time was, much like the current debate, also especially concerned about the relation between the contributions of ancient Greece and the development of eighteenth-century thought. On the one hand, there had been by his time a generation or more of reappropriation of ancient Greek works of art and literature. Winckelmann, Goethe, Schiller, the Schlegels, and others had explored what a notion of the “classical” must mean in terms of the ideal of beauty, and there had developed several formulae for distinguishing it from the modern and “romantic.” On the other hand, the new developments in aesthetics as a discipline between Baumgarten and Kant – and

the marking off of “the fine arts” and “art” as such – are clearly crucial background to Hegel’s own approach to the philosophy of art.

Hegel is thus well-known for his appeal to the beauty of ancient Greek art: “nothing can be or become more beautiful”; it is “art in its supreme vitality” (LA 1:517, 436 [HW 14:127, 24]). And what is characteristic of Greek art for Hegel is precisely that it gives external and sensual embodiment to the ideal. His account of the various artistic genres, however (in the terms of his *Lectures on Fine Art*, the “system of the individual arts” [LA 2:613 (HW 14:244)]), is one which Kristeller would clearly recognize: it is indeed structured around Batteux’s nucleus of five arts, arranged in a progression from the most material (the three-dimensional arts of architecture and sculpture, where ancient examples abound) to those requiring less externality (the arts which Hegel deliberately calls “romantic” (LA 2:792 [HW 15:10]) – painting in its two dimensions, music as free of spatiality, and finally poetry, where the medium is not even words but the faculty of imagination).

Like Porter, then, Hegel looked to Greek art for the special power of its sensuality; like Kristeller, he sees the eighteenth-century developments in aesthetics as representing something fundamentally new. But the key for Hegel for holding together the two insights lies in the overall structure integrating the two in his *Lectures on Fine Art*, a structure which involves a key differentiation of the tasks of historical narrative required by the philosopher of art.

Hegel’s *Lectures on Fine Art* can be construed as setting out three conditions for rethinking the history of aesthetics in the wake both of the emergence of the new questions posed by eighteenth-century aesthetics and of that century’s attempts to reappropriate the classical contribution to art and art theory. These three conditions concern, respectively, the need for *historical* accounts of: (1) the origin of the *concept* of art as such; (2) the development of art understood as an interpretive/reflective discipline that has a history prior to the formulation of the concept of art; and (3) the development of artistic genre theory. These three historical narratives are, as I understand them, the tasks, respectively, of the three main divisions of the *Lectures* in the standard edition stemming from Hotho: (1) “The Idea of Artistic Beauty, or the Ideal”; (2) “The Development of the Ideal into the Particular Forms of Art” that includes Hegel’s account of the symbolic, classical, and romantic; and (3) “The System of the Individual Arts” that Hegel takes over from the list of five post-Batteux arts central to Kristeller’s story.

1. *Development of the “concept of art”*

Hegel’s account takes as a starting point a claim that is in fact insisted on by both sides of the Kristeller debate: that the emergence of aesthetics as a distinct discipline in the eighteenth century marks a significant philosophical point of departure. Although he can speak, like Porter, in broader terms of the

eighteenth-century “reawakening [*Wiedererweckung*]” of (a presumably older) aesthetics, Hegel is clear that the “genuine origin” of the discipline – and the concomitant “higher estimation” of art that it provides – is a distinctive eighteenth-century achievement (LA 1:56 [HW 13:82]).²⁷ Like Kristeller, Hegel sees the clear point of arrival of the discipline as such in the publication of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In order to understand its emergence, however, Hegel sees the need for a historical account of the eighteenth-century claims that precede it and of the ways in which its “completion” required further development in the post-Kantian era. Such is the task of the first historical narrative presented in the context of Hegel’s *Lectures on Fine Art*, the so-called “Historical Deduction of the True Concept of Art.”²⁸ This “deduction” is framed first of all to show how the Kantian view of art and beauty has emerged out of the dialectical tensions in the preceding eighteenth century’s treatment of aesthetics and how the third *Critique* provides (in its attempt to reconcile reason and sense) the “starting point for the true comprehension of the beauty of art” (LA 1:60 [HW 13:88]). It then traces the post-Kantian completion of this reconciliation in a “genuinely actual” form in Schiller’s famous definition of beauty as “freedom in appearance” and in the “absolute standpoint” of Schelling’s claims on behalf of art. It is only in the course of this development from Kant to Hegelian idealism that, Hegel says, “the concept of art, and the place of art in philosophy” was discovered (LA 1:63 [HW 13:90]). (As quickly as the “true concept of art” has emerged, however – in the brief span from Kant’s third *Critique* to Schelling’s and Hegel’s philosophies of art – it just as quickly falls away in a decline: a pulling-apart of the notion of beauty in the direction of irony and subjectivity that Hegel seems to see as implicit in the very concept of art itself.)

2. *Development of the history of art*

The second account responds to what we might call Porter’s “Barnett Newman” question: if not the “first man,” then certainly very early human beings, were engaged in something that looks like artistic activity, so if aesthetics is such a late-evolving discipline, what account should it give of the history of art that precedes it? In Hegel’s narrative account, the real origin of art – as opposed to the philosophical concept of art – is always located in ancient Greece (where, as Hegel emphasizes, the most supreme expression of beauty appears in the representation of gods who have a human shape). But – again like Porter – Hegel sees the need not just to look back to Greek sources but more widely to other ancient civilizations.

What Hegel offers in addition is an account that, while privileging the distinctive artistic achievements of the ancient Greeks, places them nonetheless in the context of a longer history of the emergence of forms of art. This longer

history represents what is, in comparison with some of his contemporaries, one of Hegel's methodological innovations in the philosophical consideration of early art: he no longer thinks that the history of art can be viewed in terms of what he construes as the dialectical pair classical/romantic (as articulated in Schiller and Schlegel, for example); instead a wider account of the origins of art needs to begin with precursor forms that Hegel finds as far afield as ancient Egypt, Persia, and India. (These pre-classical forms Hegel terms "symbolic" because of their typical use of natural or animal forms – the straight lines of stone pyramids and the various combinations of animal-shaped deities – in contrast with Greek anthropomorphism in art [LA 1:300 (HW 13:389)].)

This longer story features a continuum from the development of the earliest artistic impulses to the masterpieces of Greek art and the more self-conscious forms of romantic art.²⁹ While Hegel employs within this narrative the eighteenth-century distinction between artisanship and art, he nonetheless gives a diachronic account of human artistic formation in which there is a transition from one form of making to another. The account is centered on a notion of the essentially interpretive effort that lies behind human representation in art: when the artisan can make an art-object which expresses his self-conscious activity (as, on Hegel's classic example, in the anthropomorphic renderings of Greek gods), what he produces rises to the level of art.

3. Development of artistic genres

The third historical narrative that shapes Hegel's aesthetics lectures takes over the familiar structure of the five post-Batteux artistic genres that Kristeller identifies. But Hegel's account does not treat them as the static and unchanging product of a post-Batteux world; they are forms that now have clear historical inflection (as Hegel explains the close links between the symbolic form of art and architecture, the classical form of art and sculpture, and the three forms of painting, music, and poetry that he now classifies under the term "romantic"). The sort of "interactivity" that Porter sees more elastically across the historical formation of the artistic genres is clearly something that Hegel's approach also attempts to take into consideration. Hegel's position in fact derives from a more general methodological posture: artistic genres on his view are not ready-made forms or natural kinds but modes of expression that themselves are bound up with their content. The genres of sculpture, epic, tragedy, and comedy were not preexisting and therefore ready to be seized by artists and imposed on new material, but were instead the only forms in which the essential content of art could actually have been expressed. The mode of expression is thus essential to the artwork itself.³⁰

4. General conclusions concerning these three historical tasks

With these innovations, Hegel's shift in the historical narrative has some striking consequences. Each of these narrative projects has the common aspect of showing how a philosophical stance has emerged *out of* an oscillating and self-canceling set of oppositions that "dissolve" into a speculative way of seeing them: the concept of art itself out of the oppositions of the moral worldview and the reflective culture of the modern age; the notion of the "art forms" out of the oscillating and unresolved tensions between "classical" and "romantic" that Hegel thought Schiller and to some extent Friedrich Schlegel had been unable to address; and the third, a way of seeing the individual arts themselves as the result of a dialectic of internal unity and external, multiform shapeliness. It is only once one has seen the emergence historically in the post-Kantian world of the concept of art, and adopted its perspective on aesthetic issues, that one can start to see that the most widely current (if limited) narrative then in use concerning the historicity of art stands itself in need of further historical context. That current historical narrative, as championed by Schiller and the Romantics and to some extent by Friedrich Schlegel, held that the success of the Romantic movement lay precisely in its distinguishing itself from the past moment of the classical – and thus, among other things, opening up to contemporary enjoyment many works otherwise rooted in their time and place. From the perspective of Hegel's philosophy of art, we now see that "the classical" and "the romantic" are themselves terms that require a fuller historical perspective. And similarly, having taken the perspective on the *forms* of art that allows them to be seen as part of a larger historical progression, one can see the development of individual arts themselves as historically conditioned.

In moving to this more complicated sorting-out of narrative tasks, it is interesting to notice, with respect to the first narrative, that the "history of aesthetics" gets ever briefer than we might think. It is now not just an almost three hundred-year history (from Baumgarten to us), but on Hegel's abrupt view (much like that in Eckart Förster's recent *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*, which starts with Kant's insistence in 1781 with the publication of the first *Critique* that philosophy only begins with *him* and ends with Hegel's 1806 claim that philosophy now comes to an end with *him*), the history of the philosophy of art is actually even shorter than the history of philosophy, since it runs just from the publication of the third *Critique* to the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. At the same time the "history of art" as such gets longer: now the history of art-before-the-eighteenth-century does not just involve, as with Schiller and Schlegel, a move back to the Greeks, but rather a move back to pre-Greek antiquity. And the narrative involved is concerned with the longer question of

human self- and divine-formation that Hegel thinks is inescapably involved in the concept of human agency as an essentially interpretive activity.

Conclusions and questions

The consequences of bringing these views together as Hegel does are of course not ones that all of those engaged in the philosophy of art and aesthetics will find tolerable. Those who take Kristeller's side may chafe at Hegel's Hellenism; more problematically, perhaps, aestheticians who find Porter's approach appealing may think that too much is lost in the shift to a Hegelian perspective to consider it a possible solution. To mention two issues of potential loss that remain central to the discussion of aesthetics: (1) Hegel's apparent move (as Sibley and others have argued) to de-link the connection in earlier eighteenth-century aesthetics between *natural* and *artistic* beauty in favor of a new (Kristellerian) focus on the philosophy of art as such; and (2) the close connection between Hegel's approach to the philosophy of art (as many have argued) and the perspective on the art-world framed by Danto and the post-Warholian sense of the "end of art," a world where, shorn of considerations resting in nature or sensibility, art may be envisioned as disappearing into the replacement discipline of philosophy.

A full defense of Hegel in relation to the anti-Kristellerians on these points would need to explore ways in which Hegel's philosophy of art may not entirely lose the connection with nature and sensuality, and likewise how art (however philosophical much of it becomes) may still remain some "indispensable" element of the modern world as Hegel sees it.³¹ Hegel's account, however, does have, in my view, at least three distinct advantages over the competing narratives we have discussed.

First, it does not depend on an inherently dialectical opposition such as the formal/material opposition that runs through Porter's account or the classical/romantic one that Hegel saw in the Schlegel/Schiller view of the history of art. Although Porter claims to be seeking a certain comprehensiveness with the inclusion of the material or sensual side that he sees neglected by many formalists, Hegel's general methodological approach makes perhaps for a less tendentious stance in its demands for overcoming the separation of form/content.³²

Second, because Hegel's criteria for the development of art depend on social and cultural shifts in the world of the artist – that is, whether anthropomorphic gods could now be culturally acceptable as renderings of the divine – and not just on the specific intention of the (proto)artist, Hegel's account offers some options that may not otherwise be available for accounting for what (to borrow Kivy's phrase) artists and those reflecting about art did *in fact* before they started to do it "in full realization that *that* was what they *in fact* were doing."³³

Third and finally, Hegel's construal of the history of art and aesthetics emphasizes the key role of *interpretation* at each point in the creation and understanding of what art is, all the way from the most ancient impulses toward artistic formation to the philosophical understanding of art's significance that marks the changes in its status following the eighteenth century. The awareness of human interpretive agency is indeed for Hegel the root of the "riddle" of art – one that even (or especially) in a post-Danto artistic landscape remains central to how we understand the historical efforts associated with art's construal.³⁴

Notes

1. Frank Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. John Benson, Betty Redfern, and Jeremy Roxbee Cox (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).
2. In what follows, translations from the so-called "standard edition" of the *Lectures* will be taken from the two volumes of T. M. Knox, trans., *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (LA). The German text on which this translation is based was prepared by Hegel's student Heinrich Gustav Hotho (who, as has been long discussed, had some agendas of his own in the philosophy of art), so I will also draw as well as corroborating testimony from the notes and transcripts taken by various students who attended the several (occasionally interestingly different) iterations of Hegel's lecture series. On the issue of "aesthetics" as opposed to "philosophy of art," note Hegel's qualified account of the terminological issues at the beginning of the standard edition series of the *Lectures*: "For this topic, it is true, the word Aesthetics, taken literally, is not wholly satisfactory, since 'Aesthetics' means, more precisely, the science of sensation, or feeling. In this sense it had its origin as a new science, or rather as something which for the first time was to become a philosophical discipline, in the school of Wolff at the period in Germany when works of art were treated with regard to the feeling of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, and so on. Because of the unsatisfactoriness, or more accurately, the superficiality of this word, attempts were made after all to frame others, e.g., 'Callistics.' But this too appears inadequate, because the science which is meant deals not with the beautiful as such but simply with the beauty of art. We will therefore let the word 'Aesthetics' stand; as a mere name it is a matter of indifference to us, and besides it has meanwhile passed over into common speech. As a name then it may be retained, but the proper expression for our science is *Philosophy of Art* and, more definitely, *Philosophy of Fine Art*" (LA 1:1 [HW 13:12]).
3. The word first appears in Baumgarten's *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis ad Poema Pertinentibus* (1735) and is subsequently used as the title of his (unfinished) *Aesthetica* (1750–58). To what extent Baumgarten's coinage should give him credit for being the "father of aesthetics" in our contemporary sense of the term is a more difficult question, of course. For a discussion of this issue in the context of the longer development of the German tradition of rational aesthetics, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 5.
4. On dating the most recent discoveries in El Castillo, Spain (now thought to be even older than the remarkable cave art at Chauvet-Pont-D'Arc), see A. W. G. Pike et al., "U-Series Dating of Paleolithic Art in 11 Caves in Spain," *Science* 336, no. 6087 (June 15, 2012): 1409–13.

5. Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 4 (Oct. 1951): 496–527; and *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13, no. 1 (Jan. 1952): 17–46; reprinted as Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts," in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts: Collected Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 163–227. Citations in what follows refer to the page numbers of the reprinted version.
6. Kristeller, "Modern System of the Arts," 164, emphases mine.
7. *Ibid.*, 171.
8. *Ibid.*, 165.
9. *Ibid.*, 174. Passages from ancient texts which are often considered as at least fore-runners of such a tripartition (e.g., Plato's *Phaedrus*, 246d–e) Kristeller represents as "incidental" and conceptually unrelated to the post-Kantian triad.
10. Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). See, for example, the summary chart of these developments on p. 115.
11. Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Halliwell acknowledges that the term aesthetics and the notion of *aesthetic disinterestedness* associated with the modern discipline of aesthetics are both eighteenth-century inheritances, but argues that a history of aesthetics in Western philosophy could also be understood in terms of a more persistent appeal to the notion of *mimesis*. On Halliwell's reading, the later eighteenth century shifts away from the notion of *mimesis* as imitation are not yet so apparent in Batteux, who after all puts a recognizably Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* at the center of his organization of the modern arts.
12. James I. Porter, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
13. In what follows, I draw not only on Porter's attack on Kristeller in his book but also on the preemptive strike in James I. Porter, "Is Art Modern? Kristeller's 'Modern System of the Arts' Reconsidered," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 1–24.
14. Porter, *Origins of Aesthetic Thought*, 18, 29.
15. Porter, "Is Art Modern?" 13.
16. Porter, *Origins of Aesthetic Thought*, 35.
17. Peter Kivy, "What Really Happened in the Eighteenth Century: The 'Modern System' Re-examined (Again)," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 61.
18. *Ibid.*, 65.
19. Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics*, 1–23.
20. Kivy, "What Really Happened in the Eighteenth Century," 73.
21. Larry Shiner, "Continuity and Discontinuity in the Concept of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 2 (April 2009): 159–69.
22. *Ibid.*, 160.
23. *Ibid.*, 164.
24. Barnett Newman, "The First Man Was an Artist," *Tiger's Eye* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1947): 57–60; quoted in Porter, *Origins of Aesthetic Thought*, 26–27.
25. Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), 1; also quoted in Porter, "Is Art Modern?" 4n7.
26. See especially Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Caroline Saltzwedel, Mitch Cohen, and Kenneth Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

27. "So ist dieser Standpunkt wie die Wiedererweckung der Philosophie im allgemeinen so auch die Wiedererweckung der Wissenschaft der Kunst, ja dieser Wiedererweckung verdankt eigentlich die Ästhetik als Wissenschaft erst ihre wahrhafte Entstehung und die Kunst ihre höhere Würdigung" (HW 13:82).
28. For an account of the textual and conceptual status of this "deduction," see my "Hegel and the 'Historical Deduction' of the Concept of Art," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 353–68.
29. Hegel initially developed this sketch in the fused context of the development of religious and artistic formation in the "Religion in the Form of Art" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* "Religion" chapter (PhG §§699–747); it is taken over (with crucial differences) in the context of the *Lectures's* account of the development of the Ideal into the particular forms of symbolic, classical, and romantic art. On the tension between Hegel's use of the artisan/artist distinction and the continuum of development sketched in both versions of this account of art's development, see my "Artisans, Artists and Hegel's History of the Philosophy of Art," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 34, no. 2 (Oct. 2013): 203–22.
30. Cf. Hegel's remarks about the relation between religious conception and artistic expression in the Greek genres: "[I]t was not as if these ideas and doctrines [i.e., the Greeks' religious conceptions] were already there, *in advance* of poetry, in an abstract mode of consciousness as general religious propositions and categories of thought, and then later were only clothed in imagery by artists and given an external adornment in poetry; on the contrary, the mode of artistic production was such that what fermented in these poets they could work out *only* in this form of art and poetry" (LA 1:102 [HW 13:140]).
31. Both points are actively discussed in Hegelian circles these days. On Hegel's use of the human shape as a possible tie between nature and art, see my "Hegel's Philosophy of Art," in *G. W. F. Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Baur (Durham: Acumen, forthcoming). On the issue of indispensability, see especially the recent discussion in Benjamin Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
32. On the philosophical origins and implications of Hegel's form/content holism, see Rachel Zuckert, "The Aesthetics of Schelling and Hegel," in *The Routledge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Dean Moyar (New York: Routledge, 2010), 165–93; and my "Tragedy and the Human Image: German Idealism's Legacy for Theory and Practice," in *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, ed. Nicholas Boyle and Liz Disley, vol. 3: *Aesthetics and Literature*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Ian Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46–68.
33. Kivy, "What Really Happened in the Eighteenth Century," 73.
34. Whether in the famous image of Rembrandt at the end of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* or his discussion of the Sistine Chapel "restoration," Danto claims to be working within a notion of "embodied meaning" that derives from Hegel (*After the End of Art*, 194–95). On some useful lines for seeing some differences in their approaches, see Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, 12–14.

34

The Scandal of Hegel's Political Philosophy

William F. Bristow

[This treatise] must distance itself as far as possible from the obligation to construct a *state as it ought to be*; such instruction as it may contain cannot be aimed at instructing the state on how it ought to be, but rather at showing how the state, as the ethical universe, should be recognized.

— Hegel, preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*
(PR 21 [HW 7:26])

The reception of Hegel's political philosophy has been marked by controversy, not to say scandal, from its first appearance. Appearing in the context of the political struggle between progressive, liberal reformers and conservative forces in the Prussia of his day, Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* has been read as supporting, with philosophical argument, politically conservative and reactionary forces. In the work, Hegel defends hereditary monarchy; the structure of the state, as he articulates it, is non-democratic; he presents the state as a divine substance in relation to which individual citizens are mere accidents. These are among the doctrines that have fed the unattractive image of Hegel, carried down in the tradition, as an opponent of liberal reforms, as a more or less totalitarian thinker, and as a fount of German nationalism. This unattractive image has presented significant obstacles to the appreciation and appropriation of Hegel's political philosophy.¹

I say "has presented" because, owing to much excellent recent work on Hegel's political and social thought, the obstacles presented by the image of Hegel as an illiberal or totalitarian thinker have been cleared to a great extent. What Robert Pippin describes (in a 2001 article) as "the liberal-democratic re-appropriation of Hegel of the last thirty years or so" has corrected the traditional, unattractive image of Hegel as political philosopher.² Recent work has shown that the conception of Hegel as an enemy of liberal political reforms and individual freedoms and as a craven, servile apologist for the Prussian state

is incompatible with careful, sympathetic interpretation of his philosophy of right.³ The “liberal-democratic re-appropriation” of Hegel has proceeded in large part through emphasizing Hegel’s recognition of the distinctively modern principle of individual freedom. When one gives proper due to Hegel’s recognition of this principle, one sees that Hegel’s political and social philosophy is much closer to political liberalism than often supposed.⁴

However, I set out here from the hypothesis that, in light of, and despite, the recent “liberal-democratic re-appropriation of Hegel,” the *method* or *standpoint* of Hegel’s political philosophy continues to present a stubborn stumbling block to the appropriation and appreciation of Hegel’s political philosophy in the contemporary context. I use “scandal” in the title in the perhaps archaic sense of the word as “offense” or “stumbling block,” and, employed in that sense, I show here that the enduring scandal of Hegel’s political philosophy is that his philosophical science of right is fundamentally comprehension of the present existing social world as *already rational*, rather than the articulation of a rational ideal, of the political/social world as it *ought to be*. I do not attempt here to remove the stumbling block, both because I do not see how to do it and because I suspect that Hegel’s political philosophy serves us as much through presenting a stumbling block as through our reappropriation of it.

Political philosophy and the practical standpoint

My task in this chapter includes the attempt to draw a relatively sharp contrast between the procedure and standpoint of the political philosophies of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte and the procedure and standpoint of Hegel’s political philosophy. The political philosophies of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte are *practical*, in the sense that they are constructions of reason that are meant to serve us in the future-oriented practical activity of making the world and ourselves as they should be, according to practical reason’s model and mandate. In contrast, Hegel insists that the proper philosophical development of the concept of right is not practical in this sense. Instead, the philosophy of right is the comprehension of reason *as present in the world* (in contrast to: *as to be made real through our activity*).

In specifying what I mean by the “practical standpoint,” I rely on Kant’s explicit characterization of it. Consider the famous passage from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. (G 4:412)

Whereas, in the realm of nature, things invariably happen according to laws, in the practical standpoint, we represent to ourselves the laws according to which things *ought to happen*; and whether things actually *do* happen as they ought depends on us, depends on whether *we* make the practical laws effective through our own choice of them as maxims. The practical standpoint is the standpoint in which we represent the practical laws to ourselves, as constraints according to which we ought, but might not, act. It is the standpoint in which we deliberate about what to do, resulting in choice and action. Our task in the practical standpoint is the future-oriented practical task of choosing and acting well, doing as we ought to do, conforming our choices and behavior to the demands of practical reason. Practical philosophy serves us in this task insofar as it consists in the comprehension of the objective practical rational laws that govern our choice and action.⁵ *Political* philosophy, as a form of practical philosophy, provides us with a philosophically defended *ideal* of the rational state or social order, which serves us in the practical point of view in the task of realizing reason and freedom in the world.

Hegel's philosophical procedure: Against the historical school

Hegel's insistence on philosophical form, on the importance of scientific treatment of the subject matter, is a striking and emphatic feature of his philosophy of right. When Hegel contrasts his account of right from others and polemicalizes against his competitors, his fundamental objection is frequently that competing accounts, whatever their content, lack the proper form of philosophical science. For the purposes of this chapter, the main competitors to Hegel's treatment of right are, on the one side, the historical school, and on the other, the procedure of *Vernunftrecht*, associated with the Enlightenment, and exemplified in particular for Hegel by the political philosophies of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte. I will highlight the contrast Hegel draws between the latter and his political philosophy, but I first want to acknowledge his deep affinity with the latter, against the historical school.⁶

Hegel begins the Introduction articulating the demand of philosophical form in the inquiry into right. He writes in PR §2: "The science of right is *a part of philosophy*. It has therefore to develop the *Idea*, which is the reason within an object [*Gegenstand*], out of the concept; or what comes to the same thing, it must observe the proper immanent development of the thing [*Sache*] itself." The philosophy of right properly begins with the concept of right, and develops the content and object of that concept *out of itself*. The content of the work consists of an *articulated system of right* (PR §4), that is, an elaborated structure of social institutions and of the rights associated with them. It is essential, for Hegel, as a matter of proper philosophical procedure, that this system be generated internally through thinking the concept itself. That is, it

is essential that the content of right in a philosophical treatment proceed from what he calls the “development from the concept” (PR §3A).

Hegel contrasts the philosophical derivation of the determinations of right with a “historical explanation and justification” (PR §3A). A historical explanation and justification accounts for social institutions, and the rights and duties associated with them, based upon their historical origin and their function within the concrete existing circumstances of the time. For example, monasteries are “justified by an appeal to their services in cultivating and populating areas of wilderness and in preserving scholarship and instruction, copying of manuscripts, etc.” (PR §3A). Hegel objects that a historical treatment puts a *relative* justification “in place of the absolute,” insofar as it justifies only relative to given facts that are not themselves justified. Hence, a historical treatment is impotent to show the *necessity* of the determinations of right, which, according to Hegel, it is the prime business of a philosophical treatment to show (cf. PR §2A).

Hegel's philosophical procedure: Against *die Vernunftrechtlern*

Hegel's stated opposition to the historical procedure associates him with *Vernunftrecht*. Whereas the historical school accounts for determinations of right by appeal to external social needs and purposes, the Enlightenment procedure of *Vernunftrecht* derives determinations of right *a priori* from the concept. *Vernunftrecht* is exemplified in particular in this context by Rousseau's *On the Social Contract*, Kant's *Rechtslehre*, and Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*. For all their differences, these works agree in deriving the basic structure of the rational state as the necessary presuppositions or requirements for the realization of the free will. Hegel proceeds likewise. After noting that “the science of right” begins from “the concept of right” (PR §2), Hegel immediately relates the concept of right to the concept of the free will: “the basis of right is the *realm of spirit* in general and its precise location and point of departure is the *will*; the will is *free*...and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom” (PR §4). Hegel too articulates his political philosophy as the rational requirements of the realization of the free will, *a priori*, as it were. Hegel's political philosophy – or, more narrowly considered, his “science of the state [*Staatswissenschaft*]” – first begins when he arrives at “the state” late in his derivation of the determinations of right out of the concept. That Hegel arrives at the state as the third and final section of the third and final part of the philosophy of right, expresses that the state is for him “the actuality of concrete freedom” (PR §260). When he first introduces the state, Hegel credits Rousseau explicitly with the achievement of “put[ting] forward the *will* as the principle of the state” (PR §258A). This achievement is carried forward in the philosophies of right of Kant and Fichte.

However, Hegel fundamentally objects to, and departs from, the procedure of his predecessors in two main ways. I focus here on the second, after briefly noting the first. Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte conceive of the will fundamentally as the capacity of an individual, and thus can only conceive of the state as constituted by the agreement or union of individual wills. After noting Rousseau's achievement of "putting forward the will as the principle of the state," Hegel writes:

But Rousseau considered the will only in the determinate form of the *individual* [*einzelnen*] will (as Fichte subsequently also did) and regarded the universal will not as the will's rationality in and for itself, but only as the *common element* arising out of this individual [*einzelnen*] will *as a conscious will*. The union of individuals [*der Einzelnen*] within the state thus becomes a *contract*, which is accordingly based on their arbitrary will and opinions, and on their express consent given at their own discretion. (PR §258A)

Rousseau correctly proceeds from the concept of the free will, but errs fundamentally in conceiving of the will and its freedom in terms of the individual will. This error inevitably leads to a misconception of the state and its relation to its individual members. According to this misconception, the individual members of the state are self-standing units, and the state a composite thing constructed for the purpose of realizing the interests of the independently existing individuals who compose it. This gets the concept of the state and its relation to the individual wrong, according to Hegel, even if, as in Rousseau's account, the highest interest of individuals for which the state is necessary is recognized to be the realization of their freedom. Given this error, the procedures of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte cannot arrive, according to Hegel, at the true conception of the state as the self-abiding substance of which the individuals who belong to it are accidents.⁷

Hegel's second main objection to the philosophical procedure of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte is that they represent the realm of right as an *ideal world*, set over against the actually existing world, as a rational world that *ought to be* but *is not*.⁸ He marks this departure from his predecessors, I think, in the first paragraph of his *Philosophy of Right*, which reads: "The subject-matter of the philosophical science of right is the *Idea of right* – the concept of right *and its actualization*" (PR §1, final emphasis mine). He ends the Addition to that first paragraph with the sentence: "The idea of right is freedom, and in order to be truly apprehended, it must be recognizable in its concept and in the concept's existence [*Dasein*]" (PR §1Z). From the very start, then, Hegel tells us that the philosophical science of right knows *the idea* of right, which consists of the concept and its actualization, and that the Idea of right can only be known philosophically as *existing*. – Before attempting to clarify Hegel's claim, I want first to show, with the example of Rousseau's social contract theory, how the

procedure of Hegel's predecessors presupposes a divorce between reason as ideal and reality.

The employment of a social contract for conceiving the rational basis of the state is apt to cause confusion regarding the relation of rational form to historical, existing reality. This confusion is evident in a familiar objection that dogs the social contract tradition. The alleged social contract and the various forms of consent that allegedly confer legitimate authority on state powers, principles, and institutions are an utter fiction when judged against the historical record. Since the social contract does not *exist*, it has no validity (only actual consent actually binds). As directed against the theories of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte, such an objection would be misdirected, because for these thinkers the social contract is explicitly not something that belongs to historical existence; it is, rather, what *reason wills* as the *necessary preconditions of the will's own freedom*. For example, Rousseau's social contract is not a historically existing contract, but rather what we *ought to will* in order to preserve our own essence as free. According to Rousseau's argument, our essence as free can be realized only insofar as we join together into a communal will which governs supremely the political body constituted by the contractual act through which we join together.

In the tradition of political philosophy that runs from Rousseau through Kant and Fichte, the structure of the state is determined philosophically as the preconditions of the realization of the free will. As these thinkers employ the notion of the social contract, the necessary conditions for the realization of the free will are represented as the focus of an agreement or contract. What is right about this model, from Hegel's point of view, is that it expresses that the conditions of the realization of the free will *belong to the content of the will itself*. That is, these rational constraints are *internal to the will itself*. At least part of what Hegel means in his famous phrase that the free will wills the free will is that the will wills whatever is necessary for its own realization (see PR §21Z, §27). But what's wrong about this conception, from Hegel's point of view, is that it represents these conditions as having their reality, or not, through the choice of the arbitrary will. For Hegel, the truth is the opposite: the arbitrary will depends on these social conditions (on their existence) for its very being.

This discussion recalls the structure of practical reason and of the practical standpoint in Kant's thought, as I briefly sketched it above. When Kant wrote the *Groundwork*, he had not yet articulated the distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*, but the distinction is implicit in the above-quoted passage from the *Groundwork*. In saying that the will is practical reason, Kant means *Wille*, not *Willkür* (MM 6:213). The objective law of practical reason that we represent to ourselves confronts us in the practical standpoint (in our capacity of choice, *Willkür*), as a *duty*, as something that we *ought to choose*, ought to realize in our actions, but might not. This implies an ambiguity or duality in the "reality"

of laws of practical reason. They are valid or real only as a rational constraint, in the form of an “ought-to-be”; but whether they are real in the sense of existing, whether they are actualized in fact, whether they are effective in empirically existing reality or not, depends on our choice. This same duality/ambiguity belongs to the rational principles of political right in this period, and is embodied in the notion of right as arising through contract. The actualization of the rational principles of political right depends on what we may or may not choose to do, individually and collectively.

According to Hegel, an important and objectionable implication of this conception is that existing reality is *not in its nature* rational. Even if there were a rational state, constructed by *actual* contract on the basis of the ideal rational form, so that the *real* conformed in content to the *ideal*, this coincidence would be merely contingent. Conceptually, as it were, the rational form is external to the existing social reality. Consequently, in the tradition of *Vernunftrecht*, exemplified by Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte, there is a fundamental ontological dualism between historically existing reality and practical reason in general.

Against the progressive, reformist reading of Hegel's social theory

Hegel's fundamental opposition to the procedure of his predecessors in the Enlightenment rationalist tradition of political philosophy, with respect to this cleavage between rational ideal and historical reality, is implicit in the very first sentence of his *Philosophy of Right*: “The subject-matter of *the philosophical science of right* is the *Idea of right* – the concept of right and its actualization” (PR §1). Insofar as Hegel's predecessors presuppose in their very procedure or standpoint the cleavage between the realm of right as a rational form and historically existing reality, there is a cleavage between that tradition and Hegel's political philosophy, since Hegel's procedure presupposes that the rational is actual and the actual rational. Since contemporary political philosophy is fundamentally practical, this cleavage between the political philosophies of the *Vernunftrechtlern* (Rousseau, Kant, Fichte) and Hegel's political philosophy constitutes a severe obstacle to the recent “liberal-democratic re-appropriation of Hegel.”

Hegel's famous, or notorious, *Doppelsatz* – “what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational” (PR 20 [HW 7:24]) – has been taken to mean that the existing social world is everything it should be, and this interpretation has been used to support the view that Hegel is fundamentally a conservative political thinker, opposed to reformist efforts in his time. In his 1827 Introduction to the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel himself corrects this reading by calling attention to the fact that “actuality [*Wirklichkeit*],” as it appears in the claim, is a logical category, distinct from “existence [*Dasein* and *Existenz*]” (EL §6).⁹ In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel characterizes “actuality [*Wirklichkeit*]” as “the unity, become immediate, of essence with existence [*Existenz*] or of inward

with outward" (EL §142). This accords with Hegel's elaboration of his specification in PR §1 of the subject matter of the philosophical science of right as the Idea of right, the concept and its actualization: "the concept and its existence [*Existenz*] are two aspects [of the same thing], separate and united, like body and soul. ... The unity of existence [*Dasein*] and the concept, of body and soul, is the Idea" (PR §1Z). Though it is not easy to discern exactly what Hegel means by the unity of "essence [or concept] with existence, or of inward with outward," it is easy to see that actuality differs from what merely exists, and, hence, that Hegel is not, in his *Doppelsatz*, proclaiming the goodness or the rationality of whatever we observe as obtaining in our social environment. He writes at PR §1R: "Everything other than this actuality which is posited by the concept itself is transitory *existence* [*Dasein*], external contingency, opinion, appearance without essence, untruth, deception, etc." According to Hegel, there is plenty that exists that is not as it should be. In the later Introduction to the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he writes that "existence [*Dasein*] is in part mere appearance, and only in part actuality," and he asks, rhetorically, "who is not acute enough to see a great deal in his own surroundings which is really far from being as it ought to be?" (EL §6).¹⁰

However, there is a tendency to push too far the normative dimension of what Hegel means by "the actual," against what Robert Stern calls "the conservative reading" of the *Doppelsatz*.¹¹ "Progressive readings" fail to observe the above-mentioned cleavage Hegel himself insists on between his procedure and that of his predecessors. I find an example in Frederick Neuhouser's *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*. Against the conservative reading, Neuhouser makes the point that the state as Hegel articulates its structure in his *Philosophy of Right* does not exist precisely in that form anywhere. Neuhouser writes:

[An obvious but frequently overlooked feature of Hegel's view] is the simple fact that the social order the *Philosophy of Right* depicts and lauds as "actual" (*wirklich*) nowhere exists in precisely the form in which Hegel presents it there. Despite Hegel's reputation as an apologist for the Prussian state, the institutions he endorses are obviously not identical to those of nineteenth-century Prussia. It is precisely here – in the disparity between real (existing) institutions and those that are actual in Hegel's technical sense – that the possibility of social criticism is to be found. For the theory of *Sittlichkeit's* idealized account of modern social institutions provides us with the resources for seeing where existing institutions do not fully measure up to what they should be and for thinking about how they can be made to conform to their own (immanent) rational principles.¹²

Neuhouser envisions the employment of Hegel's social/political philosophy for a reformist agenda, relying on the claim that his account of modern social

institutions is *idealized*. This interpretation reduces the difference between Hegel's project and procedure in political philosophy and that of his predecessors to a vanishing point. If we see the "actuality" of modern social institutions, as Hegel articulates their structure in his *Sittlichkeit* chapter, as a normative ideal, guiding and governing our future political choices and actions, what remains of the cleavage in methodology between Hegel's political philosophy and those of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte? For example, could we not characterize the political society of Rousseau's social contract likewise, as the "actualized" concept of the free will, as that which is "posited by the concept," by virtue of the fact that this social structure expresses, according to Rousseau's argument, the rational requirements of the "realization" of the free will, despite the fact that the political society exists nowhere in that form?

I adduce three points in support of my claim that the construal of Hegel's political philosophy as suited for a reformist political function is incompatible with Hegel's insistence on the actuality of rationality, and vice versa. First, granted that Hegel's *Doppelsatz* does not imply that everything that exists is rational or good, it does imply that the good (or the rational) exists, in contrast to having the form of an unrealized normative ideal. The passages in which Hegel clarifies the relation of actuality and existence imply that the actual exists, though everything that exists is not actual. Second, part of what Hegel means when he claims that the rational is actual and vice versa is that the social world in which the free will is realized *is present* to us, is a present world, as opposed to being determined as a *future* world.¹³ Third, part of what Hegel takes to be contained in the claim that the rational is actual is that, contrary to the assumption implicit in the procedures of his predecessors, it is not *our task* to make the world rational or good through our choices; he repeatedly says that reason is not so impotent as to be incapable of realizing itself.¹⁴ On the reading according to which Hegel's account of modern social institutions is a normative ideal to serve us in the task of reforming existing social institutions, the task of realizing reason falls to us, not to reason itself.

In saying that Hegel's political philosophy does not articulate a normative or guiding ideal to be employed by us in realizing freedom in the world, I am not attributing to Hegel the view, which clearly he does not hold, that freedom is perfectly realized in the empirically existing Prussian state of his time. "Actualization" comes in degrees. I assume Hegel's view is that all European states actualize right and freedom *in some degree or other*, some more than others, none perfectly. Whereas actualization comes in degrees, the question of whether something exists or not, as a rule, demands a "yes" or "no" answer (at least in the way we tend to conceive the question of existence). In terms of the quotation from Neuhausser, either there is a "disparity between real (existing) institutions and those that are actual in Hegel's technical sense," or there is not. Though the disparity can be greater or lesser, either the conceptual

articulation in the theory is instantiated or not. Hegel opposes the standard conception of the relation of thought (or concept) to being according to which to exist is a matter of instantiating a general concept. Moreover, this opposition is implicit in Hegel's claims that the actual is rational and the rational actual and that right can only be known philosophically as actual. But when we defend Hegel against a conservative construal of his claim that right is known as actual by pointing to the disparity between what is "posited by the concept" in his account and the "real (existing) institutions," we deploy the conception of thought to being that his claim rejects. In the passage quoted, Neuhouser refers to the rational principles *immanent* to existing modern social institutions, though these institutions fail to measure up to the standard contained in these principles. Hegel's claim that the philosophical science of right is knowledge of the Idea, of the concept and its actualization, can be summarized in the claim that we know modern social institutions as the manifestation of rational principles, as reason manifest and present and effective in the existing social world. But, for Hegel, this is incompatible with political philosophy as the articulation of a normative ideal against which the existing social world is to be compared to determine how well it measures up to an ideal rational standard.

***Sittlichkeit*, the actualization of the free will, and political philosophy**

To emphasize that, for Hegel, the philosophical science of right comprehends right as actual is not yet, of course, to explain *why* Hegel holds this. To a great extent, the grounds for this claim lie in the presupposed background of the *Philosophy of Right*, namely, the *Logic* (and, more generally, Hegel's metaphysics).¹⁵ However, *within* the dialectical progression of the *Philosophy of Right*, there is a transition that constitutes the *actualization* of the free will. Although the concept of the free will is actualized to a degree already in both "Abstract Right" and "Morality," Hegel presents the transition from *Moralität* to *Sittlichkeit* as the *actualization* of the concept. Hegel emphasizes that this transition constitutes actualization in a number of passages, but that this transition requires occupying a different standpoint is especially explicit in the transition as it occurs in the *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Mind*. Hegel writes there that, in passing into the field of ethical life, "the standpoint of bare reciprocity between two independent sides – the standpoint of the *ought*, is abandoned" (EPM §512). My main claim – a way of putting it – is that the main stumbling block obstructing the appropriation of Hegel's political philosophy is that it requires abandoning the standpoint of the ought. Therefore, I end with an examination of this transition.

Sittlichkeit is the identity of two moments of the will and its freedom, a subjective and an objective moment, that are held apart and isolated from each other in the standpoint of morality. The two moments, in the terms of the

“Morality” chapter of PR, are “the good” and “conscience” (PR §§129–41). “The good” is the rational content of the will, the final aim of the world in which freedom and welfare are fully realized (cf. PR §129). (Hegel describes “the good” in PR §141 as “the substantial universal of freedom.”) In order to lose the form as abstract and as a mere “ought-to-be,” “the good” must be actually willed by subjects and thereby determined and realized. But in the standpoint of morality, the “abstract good which merely ought to be” is set over against “an equally abstract subjectivity which merely *ought to be good*” (PR §141R). The criticism of Morality that constitutes the “Transition from Morality to Ethical Life” is that each of “the good” and subjectivity (conscience) in separation from the other is an empty abstraction, something that “ought to be”:

But the integration of these two relative totalities into absolute identity has already been accomplished *in itself*, since this very subjectivity of *pure self-certainty*, melting away for itself in its emptiness, is *identical* with the *abstract universality* of the good; the identity – which is accordingly *concrete* – of the good and the subjective will, the truth of them both, is *ethical life*. (PR §141)

Thus, the key to grasping Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* is to see it as the unity of two “apparently quite distinct things,” as Allen Wood says, one objective and one subjective: first, “a certain kind of social order, one that is differentiated and structured in a rational way,” and second, “a certain attitude or ‘subjective disposition’ on the part of individuals toward their social life (PR §141R), an attitude of harmonious identification with its institutions.”¹⁶ Hegel writes: “Ethical life is accordingly *the concept of freedom which has become the existing [vorhandenen] world and the nature of self-consciousness*” (PR §142).

In *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, Neuhausser presents a rich and very helpful interpretation of Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit* as a unification of these two moments, picking up their characterization (at PR §258A) as “objective freedom” and “subjective freedom.” Though Rousseau does not use the terms “objective freedom” and “subjective freedom,” his notorious claim that citizens in the political society structured by the general will can be “forced to be free” indicates that the contrast between these two notions is present in his account.¹⁷ That citizens are free even through being forced to obey the laws of the polis structured by the general will expresses the fact that, according to Rousseau’s argument, the laws are *necessary conditions of citizens’ civil freedom*. If the wills of individual citizens were not governed by the general will and its laws, then people would be subject to “personal dependence,” which is incompatible with human freedom.¹⁸ Hegel’s distinction between subjective and objective freedom is understood in the same way, on Neuhausser’s interpretation. On Hegel’s account, we are *objectively free* in conforming ourselves to

the objectively existing laws, customs, and norms of the social institutions of *Sittlichkeit*, whatever our subjective disposition in relation to them, insofar as these laws and customs concretely embody the requirements of reason. These laws and customs embody these constraints insofar as they are “freedom-conferring,” that is, insofar as they embody the conditions necessary for the realization of freedom in other senses. In contrast, to be *subjectively free* is to voluntarily will these objectively existing laws and customs, or to be united with them in one's subjective dispositions. In Hegel's claim that the will wills the free will, the *object* is the free will insofar as the relevant laws, institutions, and customs objectively embody the conditions of the realization of the will's freedom, and a social member *subjectively* wills this content insofar as she is, in her conscious will, identified with this content.¹⁹

Reading Hegel's account of the way in which the institutions of *Sittlichkeit* realize human freedom, by unifying subjective and objective freedom, against the Rousseauian background, enables us to see Hegel in relation to the liberal tradition of political philosophy, especially that structured by the model of the social contract. As in Rousseau's account, so in Hegel's, individuals must, in order to realize their freedom, come to conceive of themselves as having a supreme will as a social member (citizen), a supreme will that is authoritative over their ends as private individuals.²⁰ Thus, Hegel errs, according to Neuhausser's argument, when he objects against the social contract tradition that it implies the conception of the state as having only instrumental value for its members.²¹ Rousseau's social contract has individuals willing the general will, not merely as an instrument for the protection of private ends, but as itself expressing their autonomy. According to Neuhausser, Hegel diverges from the liberal tradition, his account becomes unassimilable for us, *only* in the following relatively expendable doctrine: the state, as articulated in the *Sittlichkeit* chapter, is self-determining in a more complete sense than any individual will can be, because it exhibits the full organic structure of a self-sustaining and self-sufficient whole; Hegel claims that the state is the unconditional divine substance realized on earth and carries overriding authority as such.

Neuhausser's extraordinarily rich interpretation occludes the “abandonment of the standpoint of the ought” in the transition to *Sittlichkeit*. On Neuhausser's interpretation, Hegel's social theory is, like Rousseau's political theory, an articulation of what the social world “ought-to-be” in order to realize human freedom, not a cognition of reason in the present social world. This indicates that Neuhausser misses something of what Hegel means by the unification of the subjective and the objective moments of the will in *Sittlichkeit*. I believe that two elements of the social structures of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*, as the realization or actualization of the freedom of the will, come apart in contemporary

readings and appropriations of Hegel's political philosophy. The first is that human freedom is realized in *social relationships and structures*, and the second is that the freedom-realizing social institutions and relationships are "the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness," rather than something of the form of "ought-to-be" (PR §142).

The falling apart of these two elements is perhaps more obvious or explicit in Axel Honneth's important recent "re-actualization" of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* than in Neuhouser's interpretation. Honneth emphasizes in particular that the realization of human freedom within the structures of ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right* carries over a model of freedom as achieved in interpersonal or social relationships that Hegel developed in his early writings.²² According to this model, while the bond in interpersonal relationships (such as love and friendship) restricts one's freedom of choice, insofar as one is deeply affectively bonded or identified with the other persons in these relationships, such constraints are *self*-constraints, and hence manifest freedom. (These relationships are paradigmatic exemplifications of Hegel's general formula of freedom, namely, "being with oneself in another.") Relating this model to the distinction between objective and subjective moments above, such relationships exhibit both an objective and a subjective side: the objective side is the social union, as constraining individual choice, and the subjective side is each party's proper voluntary and affective relation to the constraints that manifest the objective side. In the *Sittlichkeit* chapter of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the objective side is articulated as a complex structure of social institutions and relations, but, as Honneth emphasizes, we see exhibited there the same basic philosophical notion of freedom as realized in social relationships from Hegel's early writings. As Neuhouser's interpretation shows, this basic notion is already present in Rousseau's political theory, and so Hegel's social theory does not in this respect represent a radical departure from the social contract tradition.

But Hegel explicitly departs from the procedure and standpoint of the *Vernunftrechtlern* (including Rousseau, of course) in the second element distinguished above, namely that the philosophical science of right is the cognition of reason *as present in the existing social world*. Honneth's re-actualization puts the first element at the center of Hegel's account of *Sittlichkeit*, but then construes Hegel's account of social institutions, much as in Rousseau, as a model for *the diagnosis* of what he calls "pathologies" in the present, existing social world. Hegel's philosophy of right, in Honneth's re-actualization, far from being the cognition of reason in the present, existing social world, becomes the vehicle for recognizing what is wrong with the present world, in light of what it ought to be.²³

The transition to ethical life, as the abandonment of the standpoint of the ought, casts us out of a practical attitude into a theoretical attitude, insofar as

it orients us to a reality (the social world) that it is our business, as philosophers, not to *make rational or create or construct*, but to *know* as rational. I find this thought implicit in a number of claims throughout the *Sittlichkeit* chapter. First, when Hegel claims that “the ethical appears as *second nature*” (PR §151), part of what he means is that the ethical world is an existing world, and that its laws have present reality as much as the laws of nature. (In the *Zusatz*, he compares nature to spirit as follows: “Just as nature has its laws, and animals, trees, and the sun obey their law, so is custom the law appropriate to the spirit of freedom. Custom is what right and morality have not yet reached, namely spirit” [PR §151Z]). Second, Hegel asserts that people easily discern their duties (what is to be done) in what is prescribed in their particular situation within ethical life (PR §150R; see also PR 11 [HW 7:13–14]). The philosopher cognizes what is to be done (duties) *as what is customarily done* – in contrast to constructing “what is to be done” as a normative ideal guiding choice and action in the practical point of view. Third, Hegel claims repeatedly, when he arrives at the state as the third and final form of ethical life, that the state constitution is not something made or constructed by us; rather it is our task to recognize or know the constitution of the state as rational, indeed, as reason manifest in our social world.²⁴

In all of these points, Hegel reinforces the general point that the transition to *Sittlichkeit* from *Moralität* is not merely a transition from a *moral* ideal to a *social* ideal – to “an idealized account of modern social institutions,” in Neuhaus’s words.²⁵ It is, rather, a transition from an *ideal* (from the standpoint of the ought) to the existing social world. If, in our transition to the ethical, we remain in the standpoint of the ought, and our construction remains a rational ideal for judging and reforming the existing social reality, then we fail to cognize the unity of subjective and objective that *is* ethical life, that is the realization of freedom of the will in ethical life. The gap between the ideal rational form and the existing social reality that characterizes the contemporary liberal appropriation of Hegel’s political philosophy expresses, in the terms of Hegel’s account, the continued dominance of the standpoint of the moral, or the standpoint of the ought, within political philosophy. Abandoning the standpoint of the ought, transitioning to *Sittlichkeit*, is a step so difficult for us to take because it implicates a metaphysics that we cannot share. A major task of contemporary political philosophy is to detach political philosophy from metaphysics altogether. Failing that, the task is to make the metaphysical presuppositions as thin as possible. But what can be done with a political philosophy that consists in the comprehension of the existing social world as rational? This is why the true scandal, the fundamental stumbling block in the contemporary context, is not the appearance of illiberal or conservative views in Hegel’s political philosophy, but rather the standpoint of his political philosophy as the cognition of reason as the existing social world.²⁶

Notes

1. In the context of motivating his attempt to “re-actualize” Hegel’s philosophy of right, Axel Honneth writes that “Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* has so far failed to exert the slightest influence on current debates in political philosophy,” despite its indisputable importance in the history of political thought. See Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel’s Social Theory*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.
2. Robert B. Pippin, “Hegel and Institutional Rationality,” in *The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, ed. Thomas Nenon, special issue of *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39, supplement (2001): 5.
3. In his editor’s introduction to the Cambridge edition of Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Allen Wood points out that the relatively recent defense of Hegel against the distorted image of him as “philosopher of the reactionary Prussian restoration and forerunner of modern totalitarianism” is the reassertion of a sympathetic tradition of reading Hegel that is a good deal older. Allen Wood, “Editor’s Introduction,” in PR, vii–xxxii, ix.
4. Frederick Neuhouser provides an extremely thorough, detailed, and sensitive interpretation of Hegel’s social thought generally that does justice to Hegel’s recognition of the rights and dignity of the individual, against the reading of him as a fundamentally illiberal thinker, in his *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
5. The divorce between the laws of nature according to which things in fact happen and the laws of freedom according to which they ought to happen is famously extreme in Kant’s philosophy. He claims in the *Groundwork* that we cannot know whether anyone has ever acted from the categorical imperative in the whole past history of the world, and that, whether anybody has or has not makes no difference to the validity of the pure principle of practical reason, to its authority to bind us, insofar as it is a principle that *commands* us in the practical standpoint, not a principle that *explains* our actual behavior (G 4:407–8).
6. Ludwig Siep shows how Hegel, in his much-misunderstood preface, stakes out his philosophy of right between the school of *Rechtsgeschichte*, on the one hand, and the Enlightenment tradition of *Vernunftrecht*, on the other. See his article “Vernunftrecht und Rechtsgeschichte: Kontext und Konzept der *Grundlinien im Blick auf der Vorrede*,” in *Aktualität und Grenzen der praktischen Philosophie Hegels: Aufsätze 1997–2009* (München: Fink, 2010), 25–43. Hegel himself does not use *Vernunftrecht* to characterize the procedure exemplified in particular by the political philosophies of Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte, but it is helpful and not misleading, I hope, to do so.
7. In Chapter 6 of *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory* (“Hegel’s Social Theory and Methodological Atomism”), Neuhouser explains how Hegel underestimates the potential of social contract procedure in political philosophy, particularly as exemplified in Rousseau’s account, to arrive at social goods and values that do not reduce to goods for the individuals as determined prior to their association in political society. Neuhouser goes on to explain how Hegel departs from Rousseau’s procedure, nevertheless, even when the latter is properly understood.
8. For Hegel, this second objection is not fundamentally distinct from the first, but, since I do not show here how these are two sides of the same coin, so to speak, I represent the second as a distinct objection.

9. *Dasein* – often translated “determinate existence” – and *Existenz* are themselves distinct notions for Hegel. But in the contexts in which Hegel is concerned to make the case that *Wirklichkeit* is a distinct logical notion, in clarification of his meaning in the *Doppelsatz*, he seems to contrast *Wirklichkeit* indifferently to *Dasein* and *Existenz*. So, in this context we can ignore the distinction between these latter notions.
10. Hegel makes the point in multiple places in the PR that the difficult thing is not to see what is wrong with existing reality, but to cognize its rationality, to discern *it* as right.
11. Robert Stern, “Hegel’s *Doppelsatz*: A Neutral Reading,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 2 (April 2006): 235–66. I follow Stern in opposing both the conservative and the progressive readings of the *Doppelsatz*, but, in my interpretation, these are wrong not because the *Doppelsatz* is normatively neutral but because both readings construe the *Doppelsatz* as practical, in its upshot.
12. Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, 257.
13. In the preface, Hegel speaks of recognizing reason as the rose in the cross of the present (PR 22 [HW 7:26]), and at the beginning of *Sittlichkeit*, he says that ethical life is “the concept of freedom which has become the existing [vorhandenen] world and the nature of self-consciousness” (PR §142).
14. See, for example, Hegel’s claim that philosophical science “has only to do with the idea, which is not so impotent that it is not real, but merely ought to be” (EL §6). *Wirklichkeit* is derived from *wirken*, which means “to effect,” and part of what Hegel means in saying that the rational is *wirklich* is that the rational is effective, that it causes effects. See also EL §142Z.
15. At the beginning of PR, where Hegel asserts that the philosophical science knows the concept and its actuality, he notes that “a familiarity with the nature of scientific procedure in philosophy, as expounded in philosophical logic, is here presupposed” (PR §2Z).
16. Allen W. Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 196.
17. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. D. A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 139–227. See bk. I, ch. 6.
18. Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, ch. 2, esp. 73–78.
19. See PR §147: “the subject bears *spiritual witness* to [the ethical substance and its laws and powers] as to *its own essence*, in which it has *self-awareness* [*Selbstgefühl*] and lives as in its element which is not distinct from itself. ...”
20. “It is clear that Hegel’s basic position is in agreement with Rousseau’s at least to the following extent: for Hegel fulfilling one’s vocation... is essentially linked to one’s social membership because *freedom*... constitutes one’s essential nature as a human being and because such freedom is fully realized only in the rational social order” (Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, 200).
21. Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory*, 204, 219.
22. Honneth, *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 14.
23. Honneth re-actualizes Hegel’s philosophy of right as a persuasive theory of justice in the contemporary context. He maintains that this project requires prying living elements of Hegel’s account away from their procrustean metaphysical bed, given that the latter cannot be re-actualized. But it remains unclear how Honneth’s project circumvents the obstacle presented by the fact that the transition to ethical life is, for Hegel, the abandonment of the standpoint of the ought. The transition to the

ethical life is particularly important in Honneth's account as well, insofar as he sees "liberation" in Hegel's transition: "'ethical life' frees us from social pathology by creating for all members of society equal conditions for the realization of freedom" (Honneth, *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, 49). Is this ethical life already present, or does it belong to our ideal future? When Honneth refers to "the therapeutic point of [Hegel's] entire ethics" (66), he suggests that the liberation Hegel speaks of comes through the philosophical cognition itself, not through a practical reform of ethical life itself. But this seems to me to clash with Honneth's representation of Hegel's social theory as a theory of justice, consisting of a set of "commands" or "requirements" that a just society must fulfill (49–54). Honneth notes that "the procedure Hegel adopts in the third part of his *Philosophy of Right*... must not be understood as a construction of an ideal theory; rather, it can be understood correctly only if it is interpreted as a 'social-theoretical' attempt to uncover, among the social conditions of modernity, precisely those spheres of action that seem to correspond to the [above stipulated criteria of a just society]" (56). But then where are the pathologies located, which the social theory helps us to recognize and thereby cure, if not in the social conditions of modern society?

24. See PR §258A: "The state is not a work of art." Also PR §273A: "But it is at any rate essential that the constitution should *not* be regarded as *something made*, even if it does have an origin in time."
25. Neuhaus, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 257.
26. Thanks to Miren Boehm, Hao Liang, and Julius Sensat for reading a draft and providing helpful comments.

Part VII

Alternative Traditions in German Idealism

Whoever has felt what it means to discover among our tragelaphine men of today a whole, complete, self-moving, unconstrained and unhampered natural being will understand my joy and amazement when I discovered Schopenhauer: I sensed that in him I had discovered that educator and philosopher I had sought for so long.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator” (1874)¹

German Idealism in manifold ways took up and carried the work of Kant, incomplete as it was and defaced by some grave blunders. But it was Fries who with surest touch maintained and applied the only valid method – the method of criticism, and by its aid sought to establish the principle that was the object of investigation. ... [T]he philosophy of Fries has immediate practical value. His teaching brings liberation from attempts to assimilate circles of ideas, strange to each other, through similar hazy and indefinite expressions, for it shows by the critical method what ideas and conceptions have their foundation in reason and what lack such a foundation.

— Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion, Based on Kant and Fries* (1931)²

Herbart’s philosophy clearly lacked the romantic appeal of the great idealist systems. In one sense it was out of date. That is to say, it looked back behind Kant, and its author was out of sympathy with the contemporary prevailing movement in Germany. But in another sense it was very much up to date. For it demanded a closer integration of philosophy and science and looked forward to some of the systems which followed the collapse of idealism and demanded precisely this integration.

— Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (1963)³

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 136.

² Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion, Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931), 17, 20.

³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7: *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century German Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), 255.

[I]f German idealistic philosophy is to be regarded as a systematic development, the true development after Kant is to be found, not in Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, but in the philosophical system of Friedrich Eduard Beneke. This is only to say in other words that in the philosophy of Beneke we have both in outcome and in method the profoundest metaphysical insight of our century.

— Francis Burke Brandt, *Friedrich Eduard Beneke, the Man and His Philosophy* (1895)⁴

⁴ Francis Burke Brandt, *Friedrich Eduard Beneke, the Man and His Philosophy: An Introductory Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), v.

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Schopenhauer's Transcendental Idealism and the Neutral Nature of Will

Robert Wicks

Schopenhauer is sometimes appreciated less for his philosophy than for his entertaining criticisms of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel as “humbugs,” “scribblers,” “windbags,” “sophists,” “charlatans,” and “philosophasters.” As a wealthy student from a prominent mercantile family, Schopenhauer listened to Fichte – at first, with great enthusiasm and conscientiousness – as one of his professors at the University of Berlin in 1811. Nine years later at the same university, he knew Hegel as a colleague, scheduling his philosophy lectures competitively to coincide with Hegel’s, and losing his audience to Hegel as well. Schopenhauer and Schelling did not cross paths, but both were acquaintances of Goethe and coincidentally lived into old age during the same time period. Of the three, Schopenhauer most respected Schelling, whose *Naturphilosophie* he regarded as a respectably concrete enhancement of Spinoza’s pantheism (P&P 1:24 [ASW 4:32]).¹

Given the personal and social distance that Schopenhauer drew between himself and Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, one might suspect that his philosophy stood squarely against this team of German Idealists. Understanding Schopenhauer’s place among them, however, is a more intramural affair, since he also characterized himself as a philosophical idealist, stating definitively that “true philosophy must at all costs be *idealistic*; indeed, it must be so merely to be honest” (WWR 2:4 [ASW 2:5]).²

Like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, Schopenhauer develops Kant’s transcendental idealism into an outlook that, contra Kant, maintains that metaphysical knowledge is possible for human beings. Despite this common ground, Schopenhauer rejects the hallmarks of German Idealism such as the centrality of self-consciousness and dialectical logic, as well as the metaphysical primacy of conceptual thought. Identifying more closely with the British empiricists, he relies instead upon the immediate experience or “intuitive perception” of one’s body’s inner being as the avenue to ultimate reality.

A curiosity of Schopenhauer's philosophy is how, although idealistically oriented, it invites a non-idealistic interpretation of ultimate reality, or the thing in itself. This stems on the one hand from Schopenhauer's lifelong interest in the natural sciences, which leads to his frequent descriptions of the human mind in physiological terms, and on the other, his identification of our ultimate being – the thing in itself – as being in itself nonconscious, nonrational, and beyond the subject-object distinction. This chapter aims to articulate this non-idealistic interpretation of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and assess its plausibility.

There are three possibilities to consider, each of which concerns how best to interpret Schopenhauer's understanding of ultimate reality, the thing in itself, which he often equates with Will. They are as follows:

1. [Metaphysical Idealism] The thing in itself is Will, or is mainly Will, and Will is in itself mind-like or consciousness-like, thus yielding a version of metaphysical idealism.
2. [Mysticism] The thing in itself is ineffable in its totality, and is in itself beyond the distinction between idealism and materialism, thus rendering it misleading to characterize Schopenhauer as a metaphysical idealist.
3. [Neutral Monism] The thing in itself is Will, or is mainly Will, but Will is in itself beyond the distinction between idealism and materialism, thus rendering it misleading to characterize Schopenhauer as a metaphysical idealist.

This chapter's position is that the third alternative presents the optimal rendition of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, since it effectively preserves Schopenhauer's characteristic pessimism, along with his surprising assemblage of scientifically motivated comments that reduce thought to brain functions.

Schopenhauer's transcendental idealism

On the face of things and as frequently regarded, Schopenhauer presents a straightforwardly idealistic philosophy. This arises from his acceptance of a Lockean representative theory of perception, the inherent problems and implications of which he interprets through Kant's transcendental idealism to generate his own outlook. According to Locke, mind-independent, material objects located in space and time stimulate our sense organs to produce in our minds a series of ideas, or mental images, which represent those objects. This representative theory maintains that we are immediately aware only of the mental images caused by those external objects, not of the external objects themselves, which we supposedly perceive through the images as their representations or substitutes. Never having stepped outside the immediate confines

of our minds, our main perceptual object, so to speak, resembles an internally situated, closed-circuit television screen which presents transmitted images from an external, independently existing material world of which we have only indirect contact via the screen.

This theory of perception quickly generates the problem of determining which qualities of our mental images accurately represent the mind-independent reality that causes those images, and which qualities of the images are misrepresentative side effects. Scientifically informed, the Lockean answer is that the extension, figure, and motion (i.e., quantitative aspects) represented by our mental images refer resemblingly to mind-independent qualities, whereas the colors, tastes, felt textures, and sound qualities are mind-dependent side effects which bear no resemblance to the external world's intrinsic features. If there were no eyes, for example, there would be no color experience, although the mathematically measureable physical energy that stimulates our retinas and invokes the experience of color would remain objectively real.

The first thing to notice is how this representative theory portrays our immediate experience as subjective, self-contained, and constituted by mental images. Difficulties arise because the theory does not ascribe any transparency or translucency to these images, through which we might otherwise directly perceive the external world. The images are instead assumed to be opaque, like photographs, paintings, or television screens, connecting us with the external world only through their representative features.

Upon this assumption, there is little recourse but to hold that, for me, "the world," or the totality of what I directly experience, is my set of mental images. What lies beyond these images remains to be philosophically determined. Both Locke and Kant believe that beyond my, or anyone's, set of mental images is a mind-independent reality which causes those images. Schopenhauer disagrees, but his interpretation of the self-enclosed situation sympathetically combines Locke's view with Kant's, as we shall see in a moment.

As noted, the Lockean representative theory of perception leads to a skepticism regarding the existence of an external, mind-independent material world, since the theory prevents us from directly perceiving the cause of our mental images. It keeps us privately isolated, each wrapped up within his or her own consciousness. Within this peculiar situation, one might ask open-mindedly what the cause of our ideas could in fact be. When seeking a model, if one draws upon the personal experience of imaginatively bringing new ideas to mind as the paradigm, the obvious conclusion will be that mental entities cause other mental entities. If so, then the main candidate for the cause of those ideas which we do not cause ourselves would not be a mind-independent material world, given how different in kind such a world is from either consciousness or ideas. The cause would be another mental entity or consciousness like our own, albeit one that is external to us, operating telepathically as it were.

Such is Berkeley's immaterialist solution to the skepticism inherent in Locke's theory of perception, convinced as Berkeley was that the cause of the ideas that we do not cause ourselves must originate from another, supremely powerful and intelligent consciousness. Berkeley, religiously motivated, argues that the external intelligence can only be God, who, upon our initially blank mind, implants for us the ideas of an objective, spatiotemporal world, along with the attendant colors, textures, sounds, and tastes. Here, as the ultimate cause of our ideas, a living and intelligent God replaces an independently existing, inherently lifeless, material world.

By rendering the objects of our experiences into collections of ideas, or "representations" as Schopenhauer refers to them, Berkeley's position has the advantage of being commonsensical in one respect: as merely collections of ideas, the tables, chairs, trees, and other such ordinary objects are now in themselves simply red, green, blue, and so on, contrary to how Locke describes them as being in themselves ghostly items, external to us, purely spatiotemporal, and colorless.

Writing in general appreciation of Berkeley's idealism, we should note how, for Schopenhauer, "idealism" specifically involves the denial of the material world's mind-independence:

Berkeley...arrived at *idealism* proper; in other words, at the knowledge of what is extended in space, and hence the objective material world in general, exists as such simply and solely in our *representation*, and that it is false and indeed absurd to attribute it, *as such*, an existence outside all representation and independent of the knowing subject, and to assume a matter positively and absolutely existing in itself. (WWR 2:4 [ASW 2:5])

Employing a different rationale, Kant concurs with the above. Realizing that the entire spatiotemporal world need not be conceived of as a large collection of ideas in our mind caused by God, Kant maintains that space and time are not empirically conveyed to us from without, but are intrinsic to us as forms originally within the human mind. As such, they necessarily shape our experience *a priori*, according to our own human parameters. Without the presence of the human mind, space and time would, as Kant explicitly states, be "nothing," just as without the existence of tongues, ears, and eyes, the experiences of sweetness, sound, and color would be nothing (A28/B24).

Accepting this Kantian rationale, while also retaining the Lockean theory of perception's assumption that ideas are opaque and merely representative entities, Schopenhauer refers to our daily world idealistically as a set of representations, akin to a dream, rainbow, phantasmagoria, or nightmare. He has yet to resolve the problem of how to determine the ultimate ground of our experience, assumed by Kant and Locke to be a mind-independent being. The

empty forms of space and time might be within us originally, but the source of the colors, textures, sounds, tastes, and other qualities which fill those forms with sensory content and generate the concrete world of daily experience remains a mystery.

Kant's own view is that since all human experience must occur in time, and since all external experience must occur in space (and time), and since space and time are only forms of human perception, there is no way to know independently of how these *a priori* forms regulate human experience, how things are in themselves. The ultimate ground of our experience is therefore unknowable as it is in itself. Just as Locke regards the material substance in which sensory qualities inhere as an "I know not what," Kant regards the ultimate ground of our experience, how things are in themselves, as unknowable in the sense of any strict proof. Frustrated by this Kantian skepticism, post-Kantian thinkers such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer turned against Kant, determined to know ultimate reality as it is in itself.

Schopenhauer's acceptance of the initial philosophical arrangement in Locke and Berkeley, wherein we remain self-enclosed and immediately aware only of our mental images, or representations, is encapsulated in the first sentence of his main work, *The World as Will and Representation*, which reads, "The world is my mental image [*Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung*]" (WWR 1:3, translation modified [ASW 1:3]). Since the immediate objects of awareness are all mind-dependent, opaque, mental images or "representations," it is self-evident to him that "objects" (i.e., ideas) are entities known by "subjects," and that there can be no object without a subject. Every idea, every possible object, can exist only in the mind of some thinker.

Schopenhauer accordingly maintains that the subject-object distinction is among the most fundamental templates of human knowledge, since subjects without something to think about cannot know anything, and since objects (i.e., ideas or representations) without a subject to think about them are non-entities.³ Extending Kant's view that space, time, and causality are only the forms under which human knowledge must appear, and do not reflect the intrinsic nature of things in themselves, Schopenhauer adds that as merely a template for human knowledge, neither does the subject-object distinction apply intrinsically to ultimate reality – an important point which we will reintroduce further below.

This implies that it is incorrect and misrepresentative to refer to some supposedly mind-independent reality as an "object," since all objects are representations or ideas in some thinker's mind, dependent upon that mind, coming and going with it. It would be doubly confused to state furthermore that a mind-independent object "causes" our ideas, since the relationship of causality – as Schopenhauer believes, following Kant – is valid for knowledge only within the sphere of possible human experience, that is, between representations. It

cannot be known to hold between that sphere and something beyond and independent of it. Kant inadvertently made this terminological and conceptual error himself, Schopenhauer claims, by using the terms “cause” and “object” to refer too determinately to things in themselves. Kant wrote:

The sensible faculty of intuition is really only a receptivity for being affected in a certain way with representations....The non-sensible cause of these representations is entirely unknown to us, and therefore we cannot intuit it as an object....Meanwhile we can call the merely intelligible cause of appearances in general the transcendental object, merely so that we may have something corresponding to sensibility as a receptivity. To this transcendental object we can ascribe the whole extent and connection of our possible perceptions, and say that it is given in itself prior to all experience. (A494/B522–23)

These considerations present Schopenhauer with two problems. The first is whether we can know the thing in itself, or the ultimate ground of our experienced world. The second is, if so, how we should describe this being’s relationship to us, if the terms “object” and “cause” are misrepresentative and inapplicable.

A third problem – important for our inquiry – is whether ultimate reality is for Schopenhauer some kind of subject, some kind of object, or neither subject nor object. We know that he rejects the proposition that ultimate reality is some kind of object. The remaining question is whether the thing in itself is best regarded as some kind of subject (or consciousness, mind, spirit, thinker, subjectivity, or conceptually constituted being), which would yield a version of metaphysical idealism, or not, which would render the label “idealism” misrepresentative within this metaphysical context.

Schopenhauer understands the first problem as that of solving the great riddle of the world’s inner nature: we apprehend the sky, moon, stars, trees, and surrounding world, and we wonder from where it all came, asking what could be “behind,” “underlying,” or “hidden within” that world as its unchanging basis or truth. Schopenhauer’s conviction that he discovered a satisfactory answer to this question is his claim to fame.

With respect to the second problem, he states that ultimate reality does not “cause” our experiences, but rather “expresses,” “manifests,” or “objectifies” itself as the world we experience, that is, as the world of representations. There is only one being. The relationship is analogous to how the single compound, H₂O, appears variably in the form of a gas, liquid, or solid. H₂O does not “cause” liquid water, steam, or ice. Water, steam, and ice “are” H₂O.

Schopenhauer regards theoretical reasoning – as exemplified in the traditional proofs of God’s existence, for instance – as useless for knowing ultimate

reality, which we can now appreciate as a kind of universalistic self-knowledge. He will settle for no less than a direct experience and intuitive perception of ultimate being. It is similarly clear to him that scientific investigation, which measuringly and calculatingly observes objects from an external standpoint, is unable to provide this metaphysical insight. His philosophical hope is somehow to “be” or to “become one” with the objects he perceives. The challenge seems impossible at first, for as we apprehend our mental images, there appears to be no way to transport ourselves to the “inside” of those images for the sake of apprehending, and indeed of coinciding with, the ultimate being within them.

Along the same frustrating lines, we might forever scientifically analyze a brain, weighing, probing, slicing, counting, comparing, and measuring that object, but Schopenhauer is convinced that a way to experience the consciousness presumably within that brain will never follow thereby. We are, as Schopenhauer observes, like a person who continually circles a castle, looking in vain for an entrance, sometimes sketching the facades in an effort to find a way in (WWR 1:99 [ASW 1:118]). Such is the limited scientific situation with all objects, not merely with brains, and with the scientific method in general.

Schopenhauer's transformation of Kant's view, and the solution to the riddle of the world, resides in the elementary experience of one's body as an object equally among other objects, that is, as a mental image among other mental images. However, unlike the other objects we perceive, whose inner nature remains inaccessible, Schopenhauer realizes – and the realization is generalizable and applicable to everyone in their own case – that he has a direct apprehension of the “inside” or “inner nature” of his own body. He sees from a distance his hand, arm, or leg among the many objects in his surroundings, while simultaneously experiencing himself on the inside of that hand, arm, or leg, unlike the other, cognitively impenetrable, objects.

Since his body is an object, representation, or mental image like all of the others, Schopenhauer reasons that his intuitive perception of the inside of his bodily image uncovers the inner nature of all other mental images, or bodies, and indeed of the entire spatiotemporal world:

To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word *will*. (WWR 1:100 [ASW 1:119])

Besides the will and the representation, there is absolutely nothing known or conceivable for us. If we wish to attribute the greatest known reality to the

material world, which immediately exists only in our representation, then we give it that reality which our own body has for each of us, for to each of us this is the most real of things. ... If, therefore, the material world is to be something more than our mere representation, we must say that, besides being the representation, and hence in itself and of its inmost nature, it is what we find immediately in ourselves as will. (WWR 1:105 [ASW 1:125])

That Schopenhauer characterizes the inner nature of all representations as “Will” is presently less important than the general point that he has succeeded, so he believes, in revealing the inner and ultimate nature of all representations, and of thus showing Kant to have been mistaken in his contention that human beings cannot have metaphysical knowledge. Accepting nonetheless Kant’s idealistic position that space, time, causality, as well as multiplicity are only features of the human mind, not of the thing in itself, Schopenhauer infers that the ultimate nature of the world can only be a single, undivided being – a “One” beyond the distinction between one and many (WWR 1:128 [ASW 1:152]).

Behind every representation resides this same ultimate being, manifesting itself as those very representations. Every idea, mental image, or representation is thus double-sided, like a piece of paper, with its outer being a body, or idea, spatiotemporal in form, and with its inner being an elementary drive, impulse, or will, ultimately the same in all. Such is the world as will and representation, considered with its complementary inner and outer aspects, as the universalized and supremely extended version of a conscious body’s basic two-sided structure.

With respect to Schopenhauer’s interest in idealism, with which we are here concerned, the main point is that so far we have seen him refer to “idealism” only in connection with asserting the mind-dependent status of the material world. For him, “idealism” means Kant’s transcendental idealism. Nothing has been said about whether his arguments imply that ultimate reality is itself a thinking or conceptual being, or a form of consciousness, spirit, or subjectivity, that is, whether or not Schopenhauer also advocates a version of metaphysical idealism to elaborate his claim that we can have metaphysical knowledge.

So far, then, we have a rendition of Schopenhauer’s view which is non-controversial, where we have shown that (1) he accepts, according to Kant, the transcendental ideality of space and time, (2) he nonetheless admits metaphysical knowledge of an ultimate reality beyond space and time, and (3) it remains an open question whether he is also a metaphysical idealist with respect to this metaphysical knowledge. At this point, we can say this much: according to Schopenhauer, ultimate reality manifests itself as a “world of representation” which at the spatiotemporal level is constituted by a set of individual subjects, all of whom are aware of ideas, or representations, which are objectifications of

this reality. Physical objects do not exist independently of our mental images; physical objects are themselves collections of mental images. In this respect, the physical world is an illusion, akin to rainbows, mirages, dreams, and nightmares. To recognize the physical world as indeed a mere and fleeting phantasmagoria is, for him, to be enlightened.

Schopenhauer's physicalistic references to brains

The above rendition of Schopenhauer's basic outlook – a standard one – would remain unproblematic, if Schopenhauer did not also astonishingly assert in a physicalistic way, and in apparent contradiction with his transcendental idealism, that thought, both conscious and unconscious, is a function of brain activity:

One might almost venture to put forward the physiological hypothesis that conscious thought takes place on the surface of the brain and unconscious in the innermost recesses of the medullary substance. (P&P 2:56 [ASW 5:64])

...the larger and more developed the brain and the thinner in relation thereto the spinal cord and nerves, the greater are the intelligence and also at the same time the mobility and suppleness of all the limbs. (P&P 2:639 [ASW 5:703])

For the same brain-function that conjures up during sleep a perfectly objective, perceptible, and indeed palpable world must have just as large a share in the presentation of the objective world of wakefulness. Though different as regards their matter, the two worlds are nevertheless obviously moulded from one form. This form is the intellect, the brain-function. (WWR 2:4 [ASW 2:4])

For time, space, and causality, on which all those real and objective events rest, are themselves nothing more than functions of the brain; so that, therefore, this unchangeable *order* of things, affording the criterion and the clue to their empirical *reality*, itself comes first from the brain, and has its credentials from that alone. (WWR 2:8 [ASW 2:10])

That of which we are immediately conscious is bounded by the skin, or rather by the extreme ends of the nerves proceeding from the cerebral system. Beyond this lies a world of which we have no other knowledge than that gained through pictures in our mind. (WWR 2:10 [ASW 2:12])

... all thinking is a physiological function of the brain, just as digestion is of the stomach. (P&P 1:46 [ASW 4:57])

Behind these scientifically grounded remarks resides a strong British empiricist influence that tempers the often-cited affinities which Schopenhauer's

philosophy bears to Plato's and Kant's. Relying upon a British empiricist theory of concept formation, Schopenhauer does not permit concepts which are abstracted from the contingencies of sensory experience to be elevated to first principles. He argues that the rationalistic methods of Kant and the German Idealists fall victim to this kind of abstractive procedure, as is evident in his criticism of Kant's transcendental logic, particularly in connection with how Kant enumerates (objectionably, for Schopenhauer, since he believes that they are not pure) twelve pure concepts, or categories, knowable *a priori*, that supposedly give a necessary form to our sensory experience.

Schopenhauer recognizes two kinds of representations, intuitive and abstract. The form and matter of direct perception constitute intuitive representations, which he associates with understanding, and which he believes is "in itself irrational, even in man" (WWR 1:25 [ASW 1:29]). Abstract representations are, as the name indicates, the products of abstraction from intuitive perceptions, all resting derivatively upon intuitive perceptions.

Like an empiricist, Schopenhauer accordingly asserts that "every concept has its value and its existence only in reference to a representation from perception" (WWR 1:65 [ASW 1:78]). He claims furthermore that "perception is the first source of all evidence," that we should reduce every logical proof to one of perception (WWR 1:69 [ASW 1:82–83]), that "the innermost kernel of every genuine and actual piece of knowledge is a perception" (WWR 2:72 [ASW 2:77]), and that "it must therefore be possible for us to go back from every concept...to the perceptions from which it has itself been directly drawn" (WWR 2:71 [ASW 2:76]).

Associating abstract representations with reason and logic, Schopenhauer rejects Kant's pure categories of the understanding, criticizing them as empirically derived. The only Kantian category he accepts is that of causality, which he reinterprets as an intuitive representation independent of reason, noting how animals think in causal terms as well. The knowledge of cause and effect "is *a priori* inherent in animals, because for them as for us it is the preliminary condition of all knowledge of the external world through perception" (WWR 1:23 [ASW 1:28]).

Despite his regard for perception as being more fundamental than conception, he adheres to the Kantian view that perception is determined by the *a priori* knowable forms of space, time, and causality. This modifies his empiricism with some *a priori* features. Less confusing, then, would be to refer to Schopenhauer as a "perceptionist" rather than empiricist, to accommodate his more nuanced theory of the mind, to express his antagonism to the rationalistic methods of the German Idealists, and to underscore his interest in perceptually grounded theorizing.

This perceptionist mentality extends to Schopenhauer's views on the apprehension of the thing in itself. Here as well, he emphasizes that knowledge of

things in themselves is *a posteriori*, that is, supplied by experience and not derivable logically, albeit with some background epistemological worries about how perception's *a priori* knowable forms might negatively affect that knowledge's transparency. We will address this concern below.

Schopenhauer's perceptionist respect for observation and sensory experience nonetheless helps account for his explanations of psychological phenomena in reference to brain structures and functions. Given his remark that the true philosophy must be idealistically oriented, however, we seem to be entering a realm of confusion where Schopenhauer is going so far as to reduce idealism itself to a brain function, speaking as if physical brains are more metaphysically foundational than the ideas within them:

the intellect is then led to a deeper insight which is denoted by the word *idealism*, namely that this objective world and its order, as apprehended by the intellect with its operations, does not exist unconditionally and therefore in itself, but arises by means of the brain's functions and so exists primarily in the brain alone. Consequently, in this form, it has only a conditioned and relative existence and is, therefore, a mere phenomenon, a mere appearance. (P&P 2:36 [ASW 5:42–43])

Before reflecting upon the conceptual commotion inherent in the above quote, we should note that in addition to this "brain talk," there is another reason why Schopenhauer's metaphysics invites a non-idealist interpretation: he states that "*thing in itself* expresses that which exists independently of perception through any of our senses, and so that which really and truly is" (P&P 2:91 [ASW 5:97]). If the thing in itself is in itself independent of perception, it might very well be independent of all subjectivity. If so, then concepts such as "mind," "idea," "spirit," "consciousness," "thinking," and so on, will not be appropriate to the thing in itself as it is in itself. Subjectivity might be the path to knowing the thing in itself, but this does not imply that the path's subjective quality extends to such metaphysical depths as to become an intrinsic quality of the thing in itself.

Such reflections notwithstanding, it does appear simply as if Schopenhauer is being inconsistent. If space, time, and causality – not to mention both conscious and unconscious thought – are brain functions, and if brain functions are empirically grounded and contingent, then space, time, and causality cannot be universal and necessary, as Kantian transcendental idealism requires. If the brain is in space, and if the space within which the brain is itself situated, is only inside the brain itself, then there is no space outside of the brain for the brain to be in, which is to say that the brain is not in space. If the brain is in space and if the brain is not in space, then we seem to have reached a point of unsalvageable confusion.

Within the context of Schopenhauer's philosophy, is there any way to make sense of these physicalistic remarks that thought, ideas, space, time, and causality are nothing more than brain functions? One way to do this is to recognize in these remarks a kind of "loop" which renders transcendental idealism dependent upon materialism, and vice versa. Let us explore this strange loop, along with three alternative interpretations of Schopenhauer's metaphysics which, as more philosophically fundamental than the idealism/materialism loop, illuminate Schopenhauer's relationship to the German Idealist tradition.

Three interpretations of Schopenhauer's metaphysics

Schopenhauer's reference to brains as the source of human thought appears initially as an intellectual blunder, explainable by his overenthusiasm for scientific thinking. This cannot be the full explanation, however, for he appears to be aware of the philosophical conflict involved without becoming troubled over the antinomy. We can extract his rationale from passages where he implies that the very distinction and opposition between idealism and materialism does not penetrate to the ultimate metaphysical level, since the distinction is a mere artifact of the subject-object distinction whose validity does not extend beyond the apparent or phenomenal world. In the chapter, "On the Fundamental View of Idealism," which initiates the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, he concludes with a dialogue between "the thinking subject" (also referred to as the "intellect") and "matter," whose final message is that neither subjects nor objects are metaphysically basic or self-sufficient:

So we [intellect and matter] are inseparably connected as necessary parts of one whole, which includes us both and exists through us both. Only a misunderstanding can set up the two of us as enemies in opposition to each other, and lead to the false conclusion that the one contests the existence of the other, with which its own existence stands and falls. (WWR 2:18 [ASW 2:21])

The following passage is more explicit, as it identifies matter and intellect as inseparable correlatives, and characterizes the primary reality, the thing in itself, as a being intrinsically different from, and more fundamental than, them both:

With me, on the other hand, matter and intellect are inseparable correlatives, existing for each other, and therefore only relatively. Matter is the representation of the intellect; the intellect is that in the representation of which alone matter exists. Both together constitute the *world as representation*, which is precisely Kant's *phenomenon*, and consequently something

secondary. What is primary is that which appears, namely the *thing-in-itself*, which we shall afterwards learn to recognize as the *will*. In itself this is neither the representer nor the represented, but is quite different from its mode of appearance. (WWR 2:1 [ASW 2:19])

These passages confirm how Schopenhauer's physicalistic descriptions of the mind occur within a relationship of mutual dependency and continual oscillation with his transcendental idealist descriptions of the external world, where neither mode stands to the exclusion of the other as self-sufficiently true. It remains telling, though, that Schopenhauer never commences his philosophizing from the scientific, external, or physicalistic standpoint, but rather rests his thought upon the first-person, introspective standpoint of inner experience and its attendant transcendental idealism. In this relatively slender sense, the idealism/materialism polarity orients itself toward transcendental idealism.

This idealism/materialism polarity goes a significant distance in explaining Schopenhauer's strange remarks such as: "The fact that his head is in space does not prevent him from seeing that space is nevertheless only in his head" (P&P 2:45 [ASW 5:52]) and "it is true that space is only in my head; but empirically my head is in space" (WWR 2:19 [ASW 2:22]), both of which Schopenhauer regards as expressing a fundamental "*antinomy* in our faculty of knowledge" (WWR 1:30 [ASW 1:36]).

The upshot is that insofar as Schopenhauer uses the term "idealism" to refer acceptingly and affirmatively to Kant's doctrine of the subjectivity of space and time, the transcendental idealistic standpoint is not ultimate in his view. Neither is that of materialism. Both are manifestations of the subject-object distinction, which is itself a root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and which remains relative to the human perspective.

The metaphysical question regarding Schopenhauer's idealism, then, does not directly relate to his accepted Kantian transcendental idealism. The question rather concerns whether, in relation to the thing in itself, he believes that this ultimate being has intrinsic qualities of a conceptual, thinking, conscious, spiritual, subjective, or mental kind which would imply some kind of metaphysical idealism. We can now recall the three alternatives with which we began, and consider them in sequence:

1. [Metaphysical Idealism] The thing in itself is Will, or is mainly Will, and Will is in itself mind-like or consciousness-like, thus yielding a version of metaphysical idealism.
2. [Mysticism] The thing in itself is ineffable in its totality, and is in itself beyond the distinction between idealism and materialism, thus rendering it misleading to characterize Schopenhauer as a metaphysical idealist.

3. [Neutral Monism] The thing in itself is Will, or is mainly Will, but Will is in itself beyond the distinction between idealism and materialism, thus rendering it misleading to characterize Schopenhauer as a metaphysical idealist.

The first alternative is closest to what most readers have taken to be Schopenhauer's view. He indeed states frequently that the thing in itself is Will, and he refers to Will as the inner nature of the physical world. Reaching this claim by expanding the relationship between one's consciousness and one's physical body, it stands to reason that we would also construe Will as a kind of mind-like universal consciousness, despite its rudimentary, dormant, irrational, senseless, and virtually "unconscious" quality as a blind urge.

The mind-like nature of the thing in itself is further suggested through the only avenue available for us to apprehend it directly, which is through subjectivity. By turning inward, we apprehend ultimate being through our conscious awareness, as it shines upward from the utter depths beneath our unconscious, as it were. We do not directly encounter it scientifically or externally in the spatial world as a measurable object, but must look within: "Therefore we must look for the innermost kernel of beings, namely, the thing-in-itself, certainly not outside us, but only within ourselves and hence in the subjective as that which alone is immediate" (P&P 1:78 [ASW 4:91]). With respect to the plausibility of the remaining two alternatives – both of which deny that Schopenhauer is best characterized as a metaphysical idealist – the proposition that we encounter a *non*-mind-like reality when we look within, is *prima facie* difficult to assert. How can one justify this position, if we are a manifestation of an ultimate reality found within, and if the manifestation of that being is the very subjectivity through which we become aware of it? Given the seeming continuity between ultimate being and subjectivity, it is tempting to regard ultimate reality as a mind-like being and to characterize Schopenhauer's outlook as metaphysically idealist. He has a remark about Spinoza supportingly to this effect:

Spinoza (*Epist.* 62) says that if a stone projected through the air had consciousness, it would imagine it was flying of its own will. I add merely that the stone would be right. The impulse is for it what the motive is for me, and what in the case of the stone appears as cohesion, gravitation, rigidity in the assumed condition, is by its inner nature the same as what I recognize in myself as will, and which the stone also would recognize as will, if knowledge were added in its case also. (WWR 1:126 [ASW 1:150])

Ascribing a metaphysical idealism to Schopenhauer nonetheless rests entirely upon how we construe the relationship between our individual subjectivity

and ultimate, universal being. As we have seen, Schopenhauer characterizes consciousness as giving a strong visibility to this ultimate being, as if the intensified presence of this being is none other than explicit consciousness itself. Considered in this manner, ultimate reality seems like the unconscious: it operates automatically without explicit consciousness, but its being is of the same kind as consciousness. That Schopenhauer describes will in people as a predominantly sexual energy supports the association between will and the unconscious, if we adhere to some basic Freudian hypotheses.

We should hesitate, however, before concluding that Schopenhauer is best described as a metaphysical idealist. The two alternatives in opposition to this claim mentioned above remain open, if we combine his undeniable position that everything has an inner being, with the independent recognition that at the deepest, most fundamental level, the relationship between this inner being and ultimate reality is vague. Consciousness trails off into unconsciousness, and unconsciousness trails off into an ultimate being devoid of humanity, feeling, personality, thinking, or ideas of any sort. Consider by analogy how red and green are colors of sharply opposing quality, even though they reside at the ends of a smooth continuity where red trails off into orange, orange into yellow, and yellow into green.

Given the extreme level of reduction and descent that has transpired by the time we reach ultimate being through the inner channel, the distinction-filled mental language associated with subjectivity, consciousness, reason, thinking, and ideas would not obviously reflect ultimate being as it is in itself. If so, then it might not be going too far to say that mentalistic language would be as non-representative of ultimate reality as physicalistic language. This standoff has a significant implication: it becomes less problematic thereby to characterize consciousness in reference to brains, or vice versa, since neither mentalistic nor physicalistic language would have the capacity to express how things are in themselves. Both modes of expression would be enmeshed in the language of "the world as representation," as Schopenhauer would say, equally valid within the world of representation and equally invalid in relation to ultimate reality.

As is well-known, Schopenhauer always sympathized with Indian thought, and it is revealing that the inscrutability of ultimate reality is expressed significantly in the *Māndūkya Upanishad* – one of the more important, succinct, and summarizing Upanishads, of which Schopenhauer had a copy. The text identifies four levels of awareness that define an inward path to enlightenment: (1) waking state [A], (2) dream state [U], (3) deep dream state [M], (4) ultimate state [AUM]. The Upanishad's characterization of the ultimate state is particularly relevant to our question of how to interpret Schopenhauer's conception of the thing in itself:

neither inward-turned nor outward-turned consciousness, nor the two together; not an indifferentiated mass of consciousness; neither knowing,

nor unknowing; invisible, ineffable, intangible, devoid of characteristics, inconceivable, indefinable, its sole essence being the consciousness of its own Self; the coming to rest of all relative existence; utterly quiet; peaceful; blissful: without a second: this is the Ātman, the Self; this is to be realised.⁴

We see that, upon attending to our inner being with ever-increasing depth, the Māndūkya Upanishad maintains that it becomes more and more difficult to characterize the ultimately encountered reality with ordinary language. Its metaphysically idealistic undertone notwithstanding, the Upanishad describes ultimate being as a linguistically resistant reality, as being neither this nor that, and so on, suggesting more strongly that it resides *beyond* fundamental dichotomies such as mind versus body, or, most importantly for our argument, inner versus outer.

If we adhere to this interpretive line, then the reasons to characterize Schopenhauer as a metaphysical idealist become less compelling, as they arise mainly from his references to the ultimate reality in individual bodies as “inner” rather than “outer.” Given the considerations so far, it seems more reasonable to ascribe to him the position that at the world’s core, an essentially non-mind-like being manifests itself in a double way, as subject and object, as thinker and thought, as inner and outer, but which in itself is neither subject nor object, thinker nor thought, inner nor outer. It so happens that with us humans, we can apprehend this thing in itself through our inner being, but that does not imply that ultimate being in itself is either “inner” or “outer.”

Upon accepting this, it will make no substantial difference whether we describe consciousness as a function of the brain, or the brain as a function of consciousness, since neither description is metaphysically ultimate. As we have seen, Schopenhauer employs both kinds of description in a strange loop, and in accord with this interpretation of the thing in itself as being neither mental nor material, he does so unproblematically, since the loop itself is only an appearance within the world of representation.

Supporting this interpretation is Schopenhauer’s claim that the subject-object distinction is itself only an artifact of the human perspective. As mentioned, this distinction is at the root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which he associates exclusively with the human way of knowing. Schopenhauer thereby rejects the metaphysical appropriateness of deriving objectivity from subjectivity, as if objects are projected or posited from subjects, as in an act of self-consciousness. He criticizes Fichte for having developed his metaphysics along these lines: “The idealism of Fichte makes the object the effect of the subject. Since, however – and this cannot be sufficiently stressed – absolutely no relation according to the Principle of Sufficient Reason subsists between subject and object, neither of these two assertions could ever be proved...”

(WWR 1:13 [ASW 1:15–16]). Schopenhauer maintains that will and representation are *toto genere* different, and that, for example, when one willfully moves one's hand, it is not that the willing causes, or creates, the hand's movement, where the willing is thought to be somehow prior to the movement. Rather, the same being is said to be presenting itself in two different ways, namely, as an inner feeling, or drive, and as an observed object.

One difficulty with this neutral monist interpretation of Schopenhauer's metaphysics is that we only infrequently find him writing as if the thing in itself, or ultimate reality, is neutrally beyond all talk of inner versus outer, or of subjectivity versus objectivity. His phrasing, that is, is structured less like a wishbone and more like a piece of paper, exclusively double-sided, associating the thing in itself primarily with the subjective perspective, despite his criticism of Fichte. In one noteworthy passage, however – an excerpt from his 1820–22 notebooks that, in 1844, he published in the second edition of *The World as Will and Representation* – Schopenhauer admits that the thing in itself could be more than Will:

the question may still be raised what that will, which manifests itself in the world and as the world, is ultimately and absolutely in itself; in other words, what it is, quite apart from the fact that it manifests itself as *will*, or in general *appears*, that is to say, *is known* in general. This question can *never* be answered, because, as I have said, being-known of itself contradicts being-in-itself, and everything that is known is as such only phenomenon. But the possibility of this question shows that the thing-in-itself, which we know most immediately in the will, may have, entirely outside all possible phenomenon, determinations, qualities, and modes of existence which for us are absolutely unknowable and incomprehensible, and which then remain as the inner nature of the thing-in-itself, when this ... has freely abolished itself as will, has thus stepped out of the phenomenon entirely, and as regards our knowledge, that is to say as regards the world of phenomena, has passed over into empty nothingness. If the will were positively and absolutely the thing-in-itself, then this nothing would be *absolute*, instead of which it expressly appears to us there only as a *relative* nothing. (WWR 2:198 [ASW 2:221–22])⁵

This potentially explosive quotation points to the second, mystical, interpretation of Schopenhauer's metaphysics on our threefold list above. The passage states that the thing in itself only appears to us as Will, that in itself, the thing in itself might be essentially other than Will, and that only the ascetic's mystical experience can provide access to its inscrutable dimensions.

Two reasons motivate Schopenhauer to recognize the possibility of a multidimensional and inscrutable thing in itself. The first is related to an epistemological

uncertainty that always worried him, to which we have alluded above. The second reflects his interest in identifying a metaphysical basis for the enlightenment that presumably follows upon radically reducing our desires.

The epistemological uncertainty stems from Schopenhauer's recognition that our apprehension of the thing in itself – whatever that being might intrinsically be – must happen at some time. If so, then we cannot apprehend the thing in itself as it is in itself, independently of the *a priori* knowable form of time. The question, then, is how much distortion the form of time introduces in our apprehension of the thing in itself. Kant's own transcendental idealism maintains that the distortion is total. Schopenhauer's above remarks come close to saying the same thing. Schopenhauer, however, often argues to the contrary that time introduces only a thin gap between ourselves and the thing in itself.

Schopenhauer's standard response to the difficulty (and with good reason in relation to his pessimism, as we shall see) is to argue that we apprehend the thing in itself through a thin veil – through time, admittedly, but not with any added distortion through space and causality – which conveys his confidence that our temporal apprehension of the thing in itself as Will is not significantly distortive. The distortion involved can be compared to apprehending an object through a transparent sheet of colored cellophane, or through colored glasses. Under such conditions, we apprehend well enough what the object fundamentally is, and Schopenhauer asserts this accordingly. He published the following summarizing remark in 1851, at age 63: "Thing-in-itself expresses that which exists independently of perception through any of our senses, and so that which really and truly is. For Democritus this was formed matter; at bottom, it was still the same for Locke; for Kant it was an *x*; for me it is *will*" (P&P 2:90 [ASW 5:97]).

There is a second reason why Schopenhauer suggests that the thing in itself might be more than Will, religiously minded and mystical as he was. The most common understanding of "being enlightened" is that the enlightened person achieves his or her profound insight by coming into contact with a higher, truer dimension of reality. However, if one maintains that the thing in itself is Will through-and-through, as he canonically does, there simply *are* no higher or profound dimensions available beyond blind and meaningless Will to inform an enlightened person. In the passage above, Schopenhauer ascribes to those who are capable of following his path to salvation by radically reducing their desires, a positive, penetrating, and mystical metaphysical insight into the core of reality.

As a condition for enlightenment, postulating such a metaphysical insight is not necessary, though. One can unproblematically and non-metaphysically interpret the Schopenhauerian, as well as the Buddhist, experience of enlightenment as involving (1) a peaceful state of mind that arises when

one is no longer dominated and driven by instinct and socially constructed desires, and (2) the recognition that the spatiotemporal world of desire and suffering is a terrible illusion generated by the objectification of Will. This can be enlightenment enough, as difficult, satisfying, unnatural, and rare as it is to achieve. Schopenhauer can preserve his position that the denial of the will leads to enlightenment, without hypothesizing within the thing in itself an extra dimension to serve as the mystical aim and legitimation of ascetic apprehension.

Independently of how enlightenment does not require mysticism, there is another, rather powerful, reason to reject this mystical interpretation of Schopenhauer's metaphysics: he cannot admit any significant and inscrutable dimensions to ultimate reality without introducing the possibility that they could run contrary to irrational and senseless Will, and in the worst-case scenario, be essentially rational and self-harmonizing, contrary to everything for which he stands. Moreover, since Schopenhauer maintains that ultimate reality is "One" and beyond the distinction between "one" and "many," he has no conceptual means to suggest that the thing in itself could be in itself many-dimensional.

In sum, Schopenhauer's philosophy cannot afford to deviate from the view that the thing in itself is either fully or substantially equated with Will. Otherwise, we lose the metaphysical basis for the existential and pessimistic aspects of his philosophy which emphasize how the spatiotemporal world condemns us to suffering. If, according to the mystical interpretation of ultimate reality, the thing in itself could have multiple and inscrutable dimensions, and if Will is only one of its appearances, then there is no reason to assert that our ultimate being is, in itself, a meaningless and irrational drive, and no reason why this thing in itself would descend into a nightmare of self-conflict and futile desire when it appears as a multitude of individuals.

Since any reasonable interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy cannot afford to mitigate or undermine the proposition that the spatiotemporal world is a desire-saturated, intrinsically irrational, suffering, hopeless, and essentially worthless scene, perpetually feasting upon itself in violence and self-destruction, the only way to preserve his most characteristic insight about the world is to admit that ultimate reality, or the thing in itself, is either wholly or predominantly Will, which is consistent with our first and third alternatives.

The third alternative, which unlike the first, allows us to account consistently for his paradoxical remarks that reduce thoughts to brain functions, does leave us with some loose ends. The main one is to elaborate how the distinction between subject and object, which resides exclusively in the realm of appearances or representation, relates to the distinction between inner and outer, which crosses the border between appearances and ultimate reality. According to Schopenhauer, every object has an inner being which is Will, and this being

transcends the subject-object distinction. As he states, the thing in itself as Will “is neither the representer nor the represented, but is quite different from its mode of appearance” (WWR 2:16 [ASW 2:19]).

Since the representer, or individual subject, nonetheless apprehends his or her ultimate being through direct introspection, there is, as mentioned, a pathway through individuated subjectivity to what is ultimately universal to all. One way to manage this situation in relation to the third alternative is to say that the distinction between inner and outer makes sense insofar as it extends from the standpoint of individuated subjectivity, but that if one were to arrive at the thing in itself as Will in some absolute sense, this distinction would dissolve along with all distinctions, since distinctions – that is, all instances of multiplicity – are themselves artifacts of the human intellect. This gives us an interpretation of the thing in itself as a single, neutral being, like the stem of a wishbone, which then gravitates in its manifestations into the dualities, among many, of mind versus matter, subjectivity versus objectivity, inner versus outer, and idealism versus materialism.

Even if we suppose, though, that this neutral monist interpretation of the thing in itself provides the best philosophical understanding of Schopenhauer’s outlook, there is a question about whether philosophical expression itself – rational, conceptual, and grounded as it is upon distinctions and multiplicity – is the best vehicle for expressing Schopenhauer’s vision of the world as Will. To communicate his transcendent vision to others in a philosophical form, and to articulate it to himself, Schopenhauer must enmesh himself in an illusion-filled world of linguistic representation. This is why he asks us to read his book twice, *da capo al fine*, noticing at even a mundane level how the linear, sentential structure of his manuscript conflicts with the circular and organic interdependence of the philosophical concepts he intends linguistically to embody.

Perhaps for such reasons, Schopenhauer seems to set philosophy aside at one point, suggesting that the visionary content of his philosophy might be conveyed more primordially in another medium, namely, through music – the art form he regarded as closest to reality:

music expresses in an exceedingly universal language, in a homogeneous material, that is, in mere tones, and with the greatest distinctness and truth, the inner being, the in-itself, of the world, which we think of under the concept of will, according to its most distinct manifestation. Further, according to my view and contention, philosophy is nothing but a complete and accurate repetition and expression of the inner nature of the world in very general concepts. ... Thus whoever has followed me and has entered into my way of thinking will not find it so very paradoxical when I say that, supposing we succeeded in giving a perfectly accurate and complete

explanation of music which goes into detail, and thus a detailed repetition in concepts of what it expresses, this would also be at once a sufficient repetition and explanation of the world in concepts, or one wholly corresponding thereto, and hence the true philosophy. (WWR 1:264 [ASW 1:312])

The association of metaphysical truth with the experience of music, which we see here, exemplifies the more general and pregnant proposition that artistic expression may be more effective for achieving fundamental insight than traditionally literalistic expression.

As it set the stage for twentieth-century theories that privilege literary expression over literalistic expression, Schopenhauer's theory of music as a direct copy of a nonconscious ultimate reality has been tremendously influential. Its influence compares to that of the German Idealists, whose innovative dialectical ideas impressed themselves upon Karl Marx so significantly that he developed a communal view of society that eventually stretched halfway across the world. Similarly, through creative individuals such as Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida, whose collective impact upon our contemporary belief systems and culture has been incalculable, we can appreciate the enduring legacy of Schopenhauer's philosophy of Will.

Notes

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974); hereafter P&P. German edition citations will be from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Paul Deussen (München: Piper, 1911); hereafter ASW.
2. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966); hereafter WWR.
3. Schopenhauer states: "For 'No object without subject' is the principle that renders all materialism for ever impossible. Suns and planets with no eye to see them and no understanding to know them can of course be spoken of in words, but for the representation those words are a *sideroxylon*, an iron-wood" (WWR 1:29–30 [ASW 1:35]).
4. Swami Krishnananda, *The Māndūkya Upanishad* (Shivandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1996), §§7, 12.
5. The original 1820–22 excerpt is in Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 3: *Berlin Manuscripts (1818–1830)* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), Reisebuch, 41.

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Two Traditions of Idealism

Frederick C. Beiser

The Hegelian heritage

Nowadays our concept of German Idealism is firm and fixed. We seem to know very well who the German Idealists were, and when their movement began and ended. Almost all of us would say that the movement lasted some fifty years, spanning the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It begins in 1781 with the publication of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, and it ends in 1831 with Hegel's death. The grand thinkers in this tradition are, most everyone would agree, Kant, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. It is a controversial question whether we include the Romantics in this tradition; but even if we do so, it only slightly alters the *dramatis personae*. Kant, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel remain the major players, while the Romantics are merely "transitional figures" or "minor players."

This concept of German Idealism has a venerable history, which we can trace back to the early nineteenth century. Its major source was an eminent thinker in that tradition: Hegel himself. In his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, which first appeared from 1833 to 1836, Hegel described the idealist tradition as a movement beginning with Kant, passing through Fichte and Schelling, and then culminating in himself (HW 20:314–462). Hegel saw his own system as the grand synthesis of all that came before it. The Romantics played a minor role in this self-aggrandizing tale of dialectical triumph – Hegel gave a page each to Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis – though they all fell under the patronizing rubric *Hauptformen, die mit der Fichte'schen Philosophie zusammenhängen* (Chief Forms Connected with the Fichtean Philosophy) (HW 20:415–19).

Hegel's account of the idealist tradition has been remarkably influential. It has indeed become the standard account, the prevailing paradigm. This is not least because it was reaffirmed later in the nineteenth century by two major philosophical historians, Johann Erdmann and Kuno Fischer,¹ who, not accidentally, were Hegelians themselves. It was then revived in the twentieth century by

Richard Kroner and Frederick Copleston,² who, though not Hegelian, followed Erdmann's and Fischer's precedent. Recent histories of nineteenth-century philosophy have, for the most part, followed in the Hegelian tradition.³

Although still the standard model, Hegel's account of the idealist tradition is very misleading and problematic. It is so for several reasons. First, it gives such short shrift to the Romantics, specifically to Hölderlin, Friedrich Schlegel, and Novalis, who were major innovators in the development of absolute idealism.⁴ Second, it leaves out Schopenhauer, who has always been regarded as an outsider, but whose philosophy, in fundamental respects, falls squarely within the idealist tradition. To leave out Schopenhauer, to regard him as "a maverick," is a major historical mistake, given that he was, with no exaggeration, the most famous and influential philosopher in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. Third, it assumes that the idealist tradition came to an end with Hegel's death, though there were major idealist thinkers after Hegel. I refer here to the late idealist tradition of Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–72), Hermann Lotze (1816–81), and Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), which flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century. Of course, Hegel could not have known about these thinkers; but there is no excuse for us, because the late idealist tradition has been thematized long ago.⁵ Such, however, has been the hold of the Hegelian model that most historians of idealism have simply ignored its existence.⁶

All these reasons are more than sufficient to abandon the Hegelian model. But here I want to add a fourth reason, one that has hitherto gone unnoticed in the literature on German Idealism. Namely, the Hegelian model omits another entire tradition of idealism, one that competed and was roughly contemporaneous with the tradition of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. When Hegel wrote his history of philosophy, he left out of the account three rival philosophers: Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843), Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), and Friedrich Eduard Beneke (1798–1854). These three thinkers formed – so I will argue – an alternative idealist tradition to that of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. So if we accept Hegel's account of German Idealism, we capture only one-half of the idealist topography from 1780 to 1830; we miss nothing less than the opposing or alternative half. Because this tradition has been almost completely ignored in the standard Hegelian history, I refer to it as "the lost tradition."

It is one of the old saws of historiography that history is a tale told by its victors, and that its losers are either forgotten or remembered in ignominy. Nowhere is this truer than in philosophical history, and especially in the case of Hegel's version of it. Hegel's omission of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke – whether deliberate or not – was highly strategic because it virtually wrote his competition out of history. Hegel did mention Fries in a single paragraph, though only to belittle him; and he did not mention Herbart or Beneke at all, though

both became major figures in the 1830s. It is no accident that Hegel was all too aware of these thinkers, who had been highly critical of him, and whom he viewed as dangerous rivals. Notoriously, he had vehemently denounced Fries in the preface to his *Philosophie des Rechts*; he referred to Herbart with contempt, refusing to respond to his criticisms; and he knew about, or had even connived in, the withdrawal of Beneke's *venia legend* (his permission to teach) in 1822.⁷

Fries, Herbart, and Beneke are three philosophers who have seldom been classed together and placed within a single tradition.⁸ I wish to show here, however, that there are many fundamental similarities between them, that they share so many attitudes, values, and beliefs that one is justified in regarding them as a distinct tradition. They were united on many fronts, and first and foremost in their opposition against the "speculative idealism" of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. They had in common an allegiance to Kant's transcendental idealism, a program for reforming epistemology through psychology, a mistrust of rationalism and speculative metaphysics, a belief in the methods of the empirical sciences, and a theory about the close connection between ethics and aesthetics.⁹ Although they did not form an organized and self-conscious movement, they still knew one another, corresponded with one another, and on one occasion even attempted to collaborate.

The clash of traditions

So, the general fact obscured by Hegel's history of philosophy is that there were two competing idealist traditions in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To give them general names, there was the *rationalist-speculative* tradition of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel; and there was the *empiricist-psychological* tradition of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke. The existence of these competing traditions, and the point behind these labels, will become fully clear only when we consider the many points of conflict between them.¹⁰ They were opposed in at least five fundamental ways, each of which deserves a little explanation.

1. *Empirical versus rational methods*

The rationalist-speculative tradition was "rationalist" insofar as Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel believed in the powers of reason to construct a system of philosophy and to reach substantive conclusions through pure thinking alone. This neo-rationalism is especially apparent in Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*, which attempted to base philosophy on a single self-evident first principle, and in the program of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, which followed Reinhold's method. It was also evident in Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, which would "construct" nature according to general *a priori* principles.

The empiricist-psychological tradition, however, questioned this belief in the powers of pure reason. Fries, Herbart, and Beneke insisted that philosophy has to begin from experience, that all reasoning has to be based on facts of observation, and that philosophy should imitate the inductive methods of the empirical sciences. They saw the confidence in reason of the speculative tradition as a relapse into the bad old ways of pre-Kantian rationalism.

Fries, Herbart, and Beneke sometimes formulated their complaint against the rationalist-speculative tradition along classical Baconian lines: philosophy should begin not with "the synthetic method," which proceeds from universal to particular, but with "the analytic method," which goes from particular to universal. They did not contest the value of the synthetic method, and they even stressed its role in the exposition and organization of knowledge; they insisted, however, that it should be employed only *after* the analytic method, which provides all the material of knowledge.

2. *Conflicting attitudes toward empirical science*

Corresponding to this rationalist/empiricist dividing line, the two traditions had opposing attitudes toward the empirical sciences. For Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, philosophy is the master science which should provide a foundation for the empirical sciences and give each of them a place in the general system of knowledge. For Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, however, philosophy should not lead the sciences but follow them. The empirical sciences are one and all autonomous, having the power to reach reliable results through their own methods independent of philosophy. While they maintain that psychology is the master science, because it follows the forms of knowing in all the other sciences, they insist that it too should follow an empirical method and be modeled around the other natural sciences.

These different attitudes toward the sciences become especially apparent in their opposing views of mathematics. Schelling and Hegel spurned the use of mathematics in their *Naturphilosophie*, and they saw the quantitative side of nature as its mere appearance. Fries and Herbart, however, agreed with Kant's maxim that there is only as much science in a discipline as there is mathematics in it. It was on these grounds that Fries employed mathematics in his *Naturphilosophie*, and that Herbart introduced it into psychology.¹¹

3. *Opposing idealisms*

The rationalist-speculative tradition rejected Kant's transcendental idealism in its original intended sense, that is, the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, the limitation of knowledge to appearances, and the existence of the thing in itself. This is true whether we are talking about

Fichte's "subjective idealism" or Schelling's and Hegel's "objective idealism." Both forms of idealism denied the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and both attempted to eliminate the existence of the thing in itself in the Kantian sense as an unknowable object beyond experience.

In this respect, the empiricist-psychological tradition of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke makes the most startling contrast to the rationalist-empiricist tradition. For Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, the thing in itself is not a flaw but a merit of Kant's philosophy. They affirm the existence of the thing in itself as an unknowable entity in the original Kantian sense. This concept marks the inevitable limits of all human knowledge, which is conditioned by the human forms of sensibility and understanding. They accepted, therefore, Kant's transcendental idealism in its original sense, that is, the limitation of knowledge to appearances and the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Fries and Beneke saw Kant's Copernican revolution as the culmination of the anthropological tradition of philosophy, according to which human nature is the measure of all things and we know only what conforms to it.

4. *Conflicting positions on dualism*

A favorite trope of the standard history is that idealism after Kant strives to overcome his notorious dualisms. Among these dualisms are those between understanding and sensibility, form and content, essence and existence. The idealist tradition from Fichte to Hegel has been called *Einheitsphilosophie* (Unity Philosophy) insofar as it attempted to find that point of unity in reason, nature, or the ego which would overcome Kant's dualisms.

While this trope is perfectly accurate for the rationalist-speculative tradition, the very opposite is the case for the empiricist-psychological tradition. Fries, Herbart, and Beneke were intent on upholding the Kantian dualisms because they mark inevitable limits upon human cognition. They serve as limits within the realm of experience just as the thing in itself serves to demarcate the entire boundary of human experience. They disapproved of the speculative tradition precisely because it attempted to transcend these limits.

5. *Clash over teleology*

In Schelling and Hegel, the rationalist-speculative tradition developed in the direction of an objective or absolute idealism, according to which all reality manifests ideas and is governed by purposes. A crucial and controversial aspect of this metaphysics is that it strives to transcend Kant's regulative strictures about teleology. It attempts to give teleology a constitutive status, that is, it assumes that nature and history *are* governed by ends, and that we should not just proceed in our enquiries *as if* it were so.

The empiricist-psychological tradition of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke staunchly opposes this teleological metaphysics. Following Kant, it insists that we give a strictly regulative status to teleology, and that we must investigate everything in nature according to mechanical methods. It was on these grounds that Fries, Herbart, and Beneke were opposed to Schelling's and Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*, whose teleological postulates they regarded as a violation of Kantian strictures on knowledge. By questioning the teleological concept of the world as a relic of an old metaphysics, Fries, Herbart, and Beneke were able to uphold another crucial Kantian dualism: that between theoretical reason and practical reason. They could find no norms or rules within nature itself; all were human creations, having their source in the human will and emotions.

The contested Kantian legacy

It is a striking and perplexing fact about these traditions that, despite all the differences between them, they shared a common Kantian legacy. Both invoked the name and authority of Kant, both claimed to represent "the spirit of the Kantian philosophy," and both strived to complete the Kantian Copernican revolution. The source of the differences between them lay indeed in their conflicting interpretations of Kant's main project.

The rationalist-speculative tradition understood Kant's philosophy as a foundationalist enterprise, as if it were Kant's aim to provide a basis for knowledge immune from skeptical doubt. Reinhold, Fichte, and the early Schelling maintained that Kant's philosophy contains self-evident first principles – namely, the unity of apperception, the possibility of experience, intellectual intuition, the concept of representation – and that from them it is possible to derive, through rigorous deduction, the entire system of human knowledge. Although they admitted that Kant did not realize this project, they still held that it was implicit in his texts and that it was his ultimate design. Realizing that project was the aim of Reinhold's *Elementarphilosophie*, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Schelling's *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*.

Flatly contrary to this interpretation, the empiricist-psychological tradition understood Kant's transcendental philosophy as a psychological or anthropological project whose chief aim was to describe human psychology, the basic faculties and activities of the mind. In their view, Kant's aim was to realize the old Enlightenment project for a science of human nature or anthropology. Although they too conceded that Kant's exposition fell short of his intention, they still insisted that his chief goal was to make epistemology into psychology. A critical epistemology was for them first and foremost based on experience, so that its foundation lay in empirical psychology.

Kant's philosophy was meant to be a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism, an attempt to combine the strong points of each position. Each tradition,

however, had taken hold of one side of Kant's legacy, putting his rationalist and empiricist aspects at odds with one another. Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel had latched onto Kant's rationalist side. Hence they stressed his demands for systematic unity, for strict demonstration and conceptual rigor, and for *a priori* principles in the foundation of the sciences. Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, however, had stressed Kant's empiricist side. They emphasized his demands that concepts get content from experience and that metaphysics stay within the limits of experience. Both traditions complained about the other side of Kant's philosophy, as if it should have no place in his system as a whole. Thus Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel reviled Kant's empiricist side, which, allegedly, was responsible for his lack of systematic rigor, for his failure to justify his table of categories, and for the general lack of unity in his system. Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, however, would grumble about Kant's rationalist side, which surfaced in the alleged "remnants of scholasticism" still lingering in his system, namely, his rickety faculty psychology, his rigid demonstrations, and his artificial distinctions. In sum, if Kant was too much of an empiricist for the rationalist-speculative tradition, he was too much of a rationalist for the empirical-psychological tradition.

In the battle over Kant's legacy, both traditions could put forward a strong case for why they alone were the true heirs. Fries, Herbart, and Beneke could make several arguments. First, they could point out that they advocated Kant's transcendental idealism in its original form, especially its limitation of knowledge to appearances, its distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and its postulate of the thing in itself. Second, they could maintain that they alone upheld Kant's regulative constraints upon teleology, which had been violated by Schelling and Hegel. Third, they could add that, true to Kant's teaching, they banished all appeals to intellectual intuition, which had been reinvented by Fichte, Schelling, and the young Hegel. Fourth, they could note that they too dwelled in "the fertile *bathos* of experience" (Pro 4:373n), that they followed Kant's warnings about remaining within the limits of experience while Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel dared to go beyond them. Fifth, they could stress that they reaffirmed Kant's dualisms, more specifically, his dualisms between understanding and sensibility, essence and existence, practical and theoretical reason, which are central to and characteristic of his critical teachings.

The rationalist-speculative tradition could also provide a strong defense. In stressing the foundationalist side of Kant's philosophy, Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling were attempting to show how it could be a response to skepticism, which had been Kant's intention all along. For had not Kant said that he was aroused from his "dogmatic slumber" by Hume (Pro 260)? And had he not made it clear that it was his intention to reply to the Scot's skepticism? It was in Kant's transcendental deduction, Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel claimed, that

one could find the true spirit of the Kantian philosophy, for it was the plain purpose of that deduction to legitimate synthetic *a priori* knowledge against skepticism. The demands for rigorous reasoning, strict systematic form, and a single first principle also seem sanctioned by Kant himself. For Kant had often insisted that reason is by its very nature systematic, that a system should be organized around a single idea and derive from one principle (B502, 673, 708, 862). Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were well aware that they were revising and reformulating Kant, and that in some respects they were violating the letter of his philosophy, for example, in abolishing the thing in itself, in appealing to intellectual intuition, and in casting aside regulative constraints on teleology. But for all these infractions of the Kantian letter, they could find reason enough in the Kantian spirit. After all, they were only trying to make Kant's philosophy consistent, to help him solve his problems from his premises. Since it transcends the limits of experience, the thing in itself is an untenable postulate. The concept of intellectual intuition, though contrary to the Kantian letter, is suggested and presupposed by Kant's teaching in several places: it is implicit in his theory of mathematical construction, in his conception of the self-awareness of our own cognitive activity, and in the fact of reason. And as for the regulative constraints upon teleology, Schelling and Hegel insisted that Kant himself had to infract them, for it is only by giving constitutive status to the idea of the organism that it is possible to overcome the Kantian dualisms, which otherwise pose an insuperable obstacle to explaining synthetic *a priori* knowledge.

Who, then, were the true heirs of Kant? Fortunately, we need not decide that question here. Since both sides have strong arguments, the question is probably irresolvable. Yet the battle was won – whether rightly or not – by the empiricist-psychological tradition. For, as we shall soon see, it was their arguments that were later adopted by the early Neo-Kantian movement.

Reclaiming the lost tradition

At this point we might well concede that there was a lost tradition in post-Kantian philosophy. But we might ask ourselves: Why bother with it? After all, who nowadays reads Fries, Herbart, and Beneke? No one, it seems, but a few historians. Here, in this final section, I would like to say a few words on behalf of the lost and forgotten. There are good philosophical and historical reasons to remember them.

Those who think that Fries, Herbart, and Beneke are unimportant because no one bothers with them today fails to heed the first lesson of history: that we should not measure the significance of the past by what we remember today. Though we have forgotten Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, they were in fact very influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Take the case

of Fries. His influence extended beyond the early 1800s and his lifetime. Few philosophers can claim two revivals in their name. But such is the case with Fries. In 1848, four years after his death, a Friesian school was formed in Jena under the leadership of Ernst Friedrich Apelt (1815–59), who had been a student of Fries. Among the members of that school were some of the most prominent scientists of the day, including the mathematician Oskar Schlömilch (1823–1901), the zoologist Heinrich Schmid (1799–1836), the botanist Matthias Schleiden (1804–81), and the mathematician Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855). The group formed a common journal, *Abhandlungen der Fries'schen Schule*, whose express purpose was to keep alive the spirit of the critical philosophy “as founded by Kant and developed by Fries.”¹² Though the first Friesian school soon dispersed, a Neo-Friesian school was formed in 1903 in Göttingen under the direction of Leonard Nelson (1882–1927). The group surrounding Nelson was equally distinguished, counting among its members the theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), the psychiatrist Arthur Kronfeld (1886–1941) and the Nobel Prize winner Otto Meyerhoff (1884–1951).¹³ In 1904 Nelson restarted the Friesian journal, rededicating it to “philosophy in the spirit of Kant as formulated by Fries.”¹⁴

Apart from his influence, Fries is important in the history of philosophy for at least two reasons. First, for his critique of the rationalist-speculative tradition. Fries's 1804 *Reinhold, Fichte und Schelling* is a compelling and persuasive attack on the foundationalist methodology of Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling. No one saw more clearly than Fries the problems with this methodology; as a critique of foundationalism, his book can still be read with profit today. Second, Fries is important because of his pioneering role in psychologism. Fries was among the first philosophers to advance a psychological interpretation of Kant's philosophy, which interpreted epistemology essentially as an empirical theory of mental activities. Thanks partly to Fries's influence, this became the dominant interpretation of Kantian epistemology for decades – it was adopted by Hermann Helmholtz, Eduard Zeller, Jürgen Bona Meyer, and Friedrich Lange later in the nineteenth century – and it was not questioned until the 1870s.

Of course, to many philosophers nowadays, to say that Fries is important for advancing psychologism is like saying quacks selling snake oil are important in the history of medicine. Since the work of Husserl and Frege at the beginning of the twentieth century, “psychologism” has been regarded as a basic fallacy, the simple conflation of logical rules of inference with natural laws of thought. Because of his association with psychologism, Fries was widely discredited in the early twentieth century. Yet the time is long overdue, I believe, for a reappraisal of psychologism, which we can now see in more detached and objective terms than our forebears.¹⁵ If we return to Fries's earliest programmatic writings,¹⁶ we can see that he never made the simple fallacies that his successors often

attributed to him. Fries never thought that knowing the causes and processes involved in thinking provided a justification for it; and he was careful to distinguish the *quid facti* from the *quid juris*, the question of the origin of knowledge from the question of its justification. His aim was not to provide a foundation for logic but to understand thinking as a mental process on the model of the natural sciences.¹⁷ It is chiefly by going back to Fries, I would suggest, that we can best understand the motivation and rationale behind psychologism.

Now take the case of Herbart. Although he scarcely gets a mention in recent Anglophone histories of philosophy, he was one of the most influential philosophers of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ There were Herbartians in philosophy throughout the German speaking world well into the twentieth century. A Herbartian journal, *Zeitschrift für exakte Philosophie*, was founded in 1860; and though it ended in 1875, it was rehabilitated in 1883. Two of Herbart's students, Franz Exner (1802–53) and Karl Lott (1807–74), taught Herbart's philosophy at Vienna, and virtually made it into "the official Austrian philosophy." One historian wrote of the Herbartian school: "In its methodological strictness, its moral earnestness and scientific sobriety, the Herbartian school excelled all other philosophical directions of the century."¹⁹ Apart from his influence, Herbart is important in the history of philosophy for at least two reasons. First, along with Fries, he led the charge against the rationalist methods of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, formulating a conception of philosophy as the analysis of concepts and the resolution of problems. Second, he was a founder of modern psychology, stressing the importance of observation, experiment, and measurement. His 1824 *Psychologie als empirische Wissenschaft* is one of the classic texts in the history of modern psychology.

Finally, there is the sad and more difficult case of Beneke. He had none of the influence of Fries or Herbart, and he had few disciples. This had much to do with his tragic life: deprived of his *venia legendi* in 1822, he had grave difficulty in finding an academic position; he never became an *Ordinarius* in Berlin, though he taught there for nearly three decades. Frustrated by his lack of recognition, Beneke (most probably) committed suicide in 1854. A very prolific author, most of his work was devoted to the development of empirical psychology, and much of it is very dated because of later advances in that discipline. Yet Beneke's early epistemological writings are interesting for their radical empiricism and naturalism.²⁰ And one product of his pen – the one that cost him his academic career – is still very much worth reading: his *Grundlegung zur Physik der Sitten*, which is an existentialist ethic *avant la lettre* and an interesting critique of Kant's moral philosophy.²¹

Quite apart from the contributions of its individual authors, there is another reason we should not forget the lost tradition. The main reason to remember it today concerns its founding role in one of the most important and influential philosophical movements of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries: Neo-Kantianism. Whoever were the true heirs of Kant, the battle for the Kantian legacy was ultimately won by Fries, Herbart, and Beneke. Whatever the merits of their case, history decided in their favor. For it was their arguments that were later adopted by the early Neo-Kantian movement. Their criticisms of the speculative-rationalist tradition laid the foundations for the Neo-Kantian position decades later. The first generation of Neo-Kantians in the 1860s – Kuno Fischer, Otto Liebmann, Eduard Zeller, Jürgen Bona Meyer, and Friedrich Lange – reacted against the neo-rationalism of Schelling and Hegel’s metaphysics much along the lines of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke decades earlier. The Neo-Kantians were writing in an age even more dominated by the empirical sciences, and to them it seemed all the more necessary that philosophy give up its pretensions to legislate for the sciences; its only feasible task seemed to be examination of the underlying “logic” of the sciences, that is, their methods, presuppositions, and standards of truth. The position of the empiricist-psychological tradition, which aligned philosophy more closely with the empirical sciences, therefore seemed prescient, providing the best advice for philosophy to go forward in a more scientific age.

These Neo-Kantians also adopted other basic contentions of the empiricist-psychological tradition: that Kant’s philosophy should be interpreted in psychological terms; that philosophy should remain within the limits of experience; that Kant’s concept of teleology should remain regulative; that it is necessary to accept Kant’s dualisms between understanding and sensibility, essence and existence, as inherent limits of the human understanding. So Fries, Herbart, and Beneke can well be regarded as the founders and fathers of Neo-Kantianism. It was mainly in the Neo-Kantian movement that their legacy lived on in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Though the lost tradition paved the way for Neo-Kantianism, its powerful influence has been scarcely recognized. Some Neo-Kantians acknowledged the importance of Fries,²² but later scholars of Neo-Kantianism have virtually ignored him. Recent works on Neo-Kantianism by-and-large ignore the figures of the lost tradition.²³ There are at least two reasons for such neglect. First, there was the reaction against the psychological interpretation of Kant in the 1870s and 1880s by the later Neo-Kantians, especially Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and Hermann Cohen (1842–1918). The argument that Kant’s transcendental philosophy is epistemology and not psychology made it seem legitimate to leave out of account a whole tradition of interpretation that had stressed the psychological aspect of Kant’s project. For this reason, it is common in Neo-Kantian scholarship to limit the movement to the Southwest and Marburg schools alone; even the Friesian school has been largely ignored. Second, though it has been widely recognized that Neo-Kantianism arose from a rejection of the methods and metaphysics of absolute idealism, they date

that reaction much too late, placing it in the 1840s after the collapse of Hegel's metaphysics. It is important to realize, however, that the reaction against speculative idealism took place much earlier, and indeed for very Kantian reasons. It arose as early as the 1790s when Fries and Herbart criticized the methods and metaphysics of Fichte's and Schelling's idealism.

Not the least reason to remember the lost tradition is that our philosophical affinities and allegiances are more with it than with the speculative-rationalist tradition. Few philosophers today are willing to adopt the *a priori* methodology or foundationalist program of Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling, still less the dialectical method of Hegel. Our reaction to the metaphysical excesses and methodological extravagance of speculative idealism are very much like those of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke in the early nineteenth century. Our conception of philosophy as an analytic, problem-solving enterprise, rather than as a foundationalist, system-building project, is also very close to that of the lost tradition. Our view about the relationship between philosophy and the sciences is no less that of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, who preached that philosophy should learn from the sciences rather than trying to provide a foundation for them. It is not too much to say that the great turn against the metaphysics and methodology of speculative idealism, which was so important for the development of positivism and analytic philosophy, had its sources in the lost tradition, in the early critiques of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke.

It should be a maxim that all good philosophy is self-critical, that is, aware of its basic assumptions and values. This means, though, that philosophy should be conscious of its past, which is the source of its assumptions and values. For just this reason, we should not forget the lost tradition, which has been very much part of our past. Our task as philosophers and historians should be to rediscover that tradition and make it lost no more. But need I add: we have scarcely begun?

Notes

1. Johann Erdmann, *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Spekulation seit Kant*, vol. 5 of *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1977), first published in 1834; and Kuno Fischer, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, 9 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1872–77), vols. 5–8.
2. Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921); and Frederick Copleston, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, vol. 7: *Fichte to Hegel* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).
3. See, for example, Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 23–72; Hans Jörg Sandkühler, ed., *Handbuch Deutscher Idealismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005); Brian O'Connor and Georg Mohr, eds., *German Idealism: An Anthology and Guide* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2006); and Emil Bréhier, *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 6 of *The History of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 111–203.

4. I have protested against this account of the Romantics in the idealist tradition in my *German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10–11, 350–51. But here I will leave these issues aside. My inclusion of the Romantics in the idealist tradition has been questioned by Manfred Frank. See his *Auswege aus dem Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 15–19. I have replied to Frank in “Romanticism and Idealism,” in *The Relevance of Romanticism: Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30–43. Recent work in the history of idealism is giving more recognition to the Romantics. See, for example, Charles Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” and Dieter Sturma, “Politics and the New Mythology: The Turn to Late Romanticism,” both in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 141–60 and 219–38, respectively; Walter Jaeschke and Andreas Arndt, *Die Klassische Deutsche Philosophie nach Kant* (Munich: Beck, 2012), 191–308; and Chapters 19 and 20 of this volume.
5. See Gerhard Lehmann, *Geschichte der Philosophie, VIII–IX: Die Philosophie des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1953), 2:4–30. The theme has been reaffirmed by Wolfgang Röd, *Geschichte der Philosophie XII: Die Philosophie des ausgehenden 19. und des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 2004), 234–38. I have taken up the theme in my *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
6. The only scholar, as far as I know, to anticipate my position is Kuno Fischer in his *Die beiden Kantische Schulen in Jena* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1862); reprinted in *Akademische Reden* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1862). Fischer contends that there were two Kantian traditions active in Jena in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the “metaphysical” tradition of Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel and the “anthropological” tradition of Fries. Fischer was on to something important. However, he does not mention Beneke at all, while he places Herbart in the “metaphysical” tradition. The anthropological tradition, on his reckoning, consists only of Fries and his followers.
7. On Hegel’s attack on Fries, see Jacques d’Hondt, *Hegel in his Time, Berlin, 1818–1831* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Broadview, 1988), 83–99. On Hegel’s attitude toward Herbart, see G. W. F. Hegel to Hermann von Keyserlingk, Berlin, January 1831 (BH 3:668). Regarding the withdrawal of Beneke’s *venia legendi*, it is widely accepted in Beneke scholarship that Hegel was indeed the culprit. For its part, as far as I know, Hegel scholarship has not discussed the Beneke affair. There is evidence for and against Hegel’s role. The evidence for it, which is only circumstantial, is Hegel’s willingness to use his influence on the government to silence his critics; thus he attempted to get the government to censure the *Hallesche Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* for its critique of his treatment of Fries in the preface to the *Philosophie des Rechts*. On this episode, see Karl Rosenkranz, *G. W. F. Hegels Leben* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1844), 336–37. The evidence against it is that Hegel himself, at least in 1831, had nothing against Beneke’s receiving a professorship in the Faculty of Philosophy in Berlin. See Friedrich Beneke to Karl Freiherr vom Stein zum Altenstein, Berlin, November 28, 1831, in Friedrich Eduard Beneke, *Ungedruckte Briefe*, ed. Renato Pettoello and Nikola Barelmann (Aalen: Scientia, 1994), 189. It could well have been, however, that Hegel had simply relented from his earlier stance.
8. Seldom, though not never. In his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Mittler, 1893), 2:476–583, Julius Bergmann noted the important affinities between Fries, Herbart, and Beneke as opponents of speculative idealism and devoted a whole chapter to them. And in his *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 9, pt. 1: *Die Philosophie*

der Neuzeit (Munich: Beck, 2006), 182–226, Wolfgang Röd treats Fries, Herbart, and Beneke together, though he adds Schopenhauer, who would have protested loudly from his grave to be placed in such company (he despised all of them). Röd maintains that Fries, Herbart, and Beneke deviate too much from transcendental philosophy to be regarded as Kantians; he ignores the fact that all three regarded themselves as Kantian.

9. It will be utter heresy to Herbart scholars to see him classified as a transcendental idealist. The standard reading of Herbart is that he is a realist opposed to all forms of idealism. Otto Flügel articulates this view when he writes in the very beginning of his book on Herbart: “Whoever knows only very little about Herbart still knows that he was a realist while his age mostly thought idealistically” (*Herbarts Lehren und Leben*, 2nd ed. [Leipzig: Teubner, 1912], 1). For a similar reading, see Walter Asmus, *Herbart in seiner und in unserer Zeit* (Essen: Neue deutsche Schule Verlagsgesellschaft, 1972), 11–15. Attributions of realism to Herbart suffer, however, from vagueness and prove ultimately untenable. When one becomes more precise, it is questionable whether Herbart is any more realistic than Kant. It is true that Herbart believed in the existence of a reality that exists apart from and prior to our representations, but so did Kant; that reality is the thing in itself, for both Kant and Herbart. It is also true that Herbart believed that sensations are given; but so did Kant, at least on one plausible reading. Herbart stressed that we cannot assume that our representations give us direct or immediate knowledge of reality itself, and he accepted Kant’s distinction between appearances and things in themselves. See his important statement in Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Ueber meinen Streit mit der Modephilosophie dieser Zeit* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1814), 19. Herbart also explicitly postulated the existence of unknowable things in themselves. See Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Hauptpunkte der Metaphysik* (Göttingen: J. C. Baier, 1806), §3, Anmerkung, 13–14. The idealism opposed by Herbart was the Platonic idealism of the speculative-rationalist tradition, the very idealism attacked by Kant in the *Prolegomena*. See the appendix, or *Beylage*, to Herbart’s dissertation, *De platonici systematis fundamenti comentatio* (Göttingen: Roewer, 1805), 51–63. The question of Herbart’s realism needs much more detailed examination, which cannot be provided here. See my *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), ch. 2.
10. The conflicts between these traditions became clear especially in some of the polemical writings of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke. The most important of these are Fries’s *Reinhold, Schelling und Fichte* (Leipzig: Reineicke, 1803); Beneke’s *Kant und die philosophische Ausgabe unserer Zeit* (Berlin: Mittler, 1832); and the first volume of Herbart’s *Allgemeine Metaphysik* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1828).
11. See Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Die mathematische Naturphilosophie nach philosophischer Methode bearbeitet* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Winter, 1822); and Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft neu gegründet auf Erfahrung, Metaphysik und Mathematik* (Königsberg: Unzer, 1824). Also see Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Ueber die Möglichkeit und Nothwendigkeit Mathematik auf Psychologie anzuwenden* (Königsberg: Bornträger, 1822).
12. *Abhandlungen der Fries’schen Schule*, ed. E. F. Apelt, Heinrich Schmid, and Oskar Schlömilch, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1847–49).
13. On the history of the neo-Friesian school, see Arthur Kronfeld, “Geleitworte zum zehnjährigen Bestehen der neue Friesschen Schule,” in *Das Wesen der psychiatrischen Erkenntnis* (Berlin: Springer, 1920), 46–65; and Erna Blenke, “Zur Geschichte der neuen Fries’schen Schule und der Jakob Friedrich Fries-Gesellschaft,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60, no. 2 (July 2009): 199–208.

14. *Abhandlungen der Fries'schen Schule, Neue Folge*, 6 vols., ed. Leonard Nelson, Gerhard Hessenberg, and Karl Kaiser (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907–37). On the purpose of the *Neue Folge*, see “Vorwort der alten Folge zugleich als Vorwort der neuen Folge,” *Abhandlungen der Fries'schen Schule, Neue Folge* 1 (1907): vii–xii.
15. For such a reappraisal, see Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995).
16. See Fries's early articles published in volume 3 (1798) of the *Psychologisches Magazin*. They are “Ueber das Verhältniß der empirischen Psychologie zur Metaphysik,” 156–202; “Propädeutik einer allgemeinen empirischen Psychologie,” 203–67; “Von der rationellen Seelenlehre,” 268–93; “Abriß der Metaphysik der inneren Natur,” 294–353; and “Allgemeine Uebersicht der empirischen Erkenntnisse des Gemüths,” 354–402.
17. Fries is careful to distinguish *demonstrative* from *anthropological* logic; the former deals with the formal laws of inference and the latter with inference as an activity of the mind. It is absurd, Fries notes, to prove the laws of logic on the basis of empirical psychology (Jakob Friedrich Fries, *System der Logik* [Heidelberg: Winter, 1837], 1–5).
18. On the Herbartian school, see Otto Siebert, *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Philosophie seit Hegel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1898), 136–83.
19. *Ibid.*, 136.
20. Friedrich Eduard Beneke, *Erkenntnißlehre nach dem Bewußtsein der reinen Vernunft in ihren Grundzügen* (Jena: Frommann, 1820); and *Erfahrungsseelenlehre als Grundlage alles Wissens, in ihren Hauptzügen dargestellt* (Berlin: Mittler, 1820).
21. Friedrich Eduard Beneke, *Grundlegung zur Physik der Sitten. Ein Gegenstück zu Kants Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Berlin: Mittler, 1822).
22. Thus Hermann Cohen and Jürgen Bona Meyer acknowledged Fries's importance in the development of the psychological interpretation of Kant. See Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1871), 125; and Bona Meyer, *Kants Psychologie dargestellt und erörtert* (Berlin: Hertz, 1870), 9–22. Otto Liebmann devoted an entire chapter each to Fries and Herbart in his *Kant und die Epigonen* (Stuttgart: Schober, 1865), 111–56.
23. Among these works are Hans-Ludwig Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979); Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); Klaus Christian Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986); Ulrich Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1994); Lewis White Beck, “Neo-Kantianism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols., ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 5:468–73; and H. Holzhey, “Neukantianismus,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 13 vols., ed. Joachim Ritter et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1984), 6:747–54. Though Köhnke has a valuable chapter on Beneke, he does not discuss Fries or Herbart.

Conclusion

The Legacies of German Idealism

Matthew C. Altman

It was said at the time that philosophers after Kant could agree or disagree with the critical philosophy, but no one could ignore it. One could say a similar thing about German Idealism as a whole. The movement had been so dominant and so influential that nearly every philosopher working in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found it necessary to engage it in some way. The two most important and still-active traditions in Western philosophy, analytic philosophy and phenomenology, began in many ways as responses to idealism. Bertrand Russell, the founder of analytic philosophy, developed his realism and empiricist methodology as an alternative to the idealism that was widespread in Britain at the time, rejecting the legacy of Kant and Hegel. Martin Heidegger, the most important philosopher in the continental tradition, devoted year-long lecture courses to Kant, Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel,¹ and he adopted some of their key insights while rejecting their lapses into metaphysics. Hardly any philosophical movement that succeeded German Idealism has been completely untouched by it, either directly or indirectly. Accordingly, this brief survey of the aftermath of German Idealism will proceed in broad strokes.

The response in nineteenth-century Europe

German Idealism as a philosophical movement was initiated by the greatest philosopher since Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and the dominant presence that Hegel and his followers had on the Continent, coupled with the historical narrative that Hegel himself gives (portraying his philosophy as the culmination of *Geist's* progress toward absolute knowing), makes it easy not only to ignore what Frederick Beiser, in the previous chapter, calls “alternative traditions” that happened alongside the four major idealists (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel), but also to neglect the so-called “late idealists” who carried on after Hegel, including Adolf Trendelenburg (1802–72) and Hermann

Lotze (1817–81).² Trendelenburg brought idealism back to its Platonic roots, claiming that thought is manifested in the physical world. Coupling this with Aristotelianism, he analyzed the motion of things in terms of the motion of thought or perception, and he claimed that the potential of the natural world is realized ultimately in the ethical world of the state. By contrast, Lotze followed Herbart rather than Hegel, claiming that knowledge of the physical world depends on observation and experiment, through which we discover facts and their mechanical laws. Ultimately, however, we connect these laws with moral and aesthetic values, which set the standards and limits of empirical inquiry and establish the purpose of nature: the creation of human meaning and value. Thus Lotze called his early philosophy “teleological idealism [*teleologischen Idealismus*].”³ The soul relates the mental and the physical, and it guides both toward an ultimate system of ethical goodness. The entire process, both mechanical and teleological laws, is guided by God. During Lotze’s lifetime and well into the twentieth century, many liberal Protestant theologians were drawn to his attempt to reconcile religion, specifically Christianity, with the methods and aims of empirical science. And Lotze’s claim that the coherence of mechanistic explanations of nature ultimately depends on the unity of consciousness influenced philosophers such as William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and George Santayana.

Although Trendelenburg and Lotze continued the idealist tradition after Hegel’s death in 1831, many of the major European philosophers of the latter half of the nineteenth century positioned themselves against Hegel specifically.⁴ Karl Marx (1818–83) famously attempted to “stand Hegel on his feet” with his dialectical materialism,⁵ according to which the material relations of production give rise to politics, religion, and philosophy, rather than vice versa, as Hegel (and the “Old Hegelians”) had claimed. Still, Marx retained the dialectical structure of Hegel’s philosophy of history and interpreted history as progressing in how we relate to the world and the products of our labor, eventually reaching an ultimate synthesis in the form of communism. In a different vein, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) rejected Hegel’s claim that we could achieve absolute knowledge through reason. For Kierkegaard, the separation between the finite and the infinite remains an unresolvable paradox. We strive to understand God, but God can never be understood, so we must embrace passion rather than reason and relate to the infinite through a leap of faith.⁶ Finally, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) would make something like Schopenhauer’s will a central tenet of his own work, and he admired Kant and Schopenhauer for pointing out how we can never get past our concepts, especially our language, to get at some absolute truth⁷ – even though he thought that our perspectivism disallowed even the distinction between appearances and the thing in itself.⁸ However, Nietzsche mostly criticized the German Idealists for a life-denying asceticism or nihilism that he traced from Platonism

to Christian theology and finally to classic German philosophy. We see this attitude, for example, in Kant's categorical imperative, which privileges the formal demands of reason over the instincts ("the categorical imperative smells of cruelty");⁹ Hegel's teleological view of history, where reason allows us to comprehend the past and reach absolute freedom and truth;¹⁰ and Schopenhauer's ethic of renouncing the will and the achievement of nothingness (or "weak pessimism").¹¹ All three of these thinkers – Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche – reflect the loss of faith in the power and priority of reason that began (perhaps) with Jacobi and the German Romantics, and reached its culmination during World War I, when Kant's and Hegel's beliefs in progress toward a rational world order began to seem like impossible pipe-dreams.

Neo-Kantianism: Marburg and Baden

Although Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche all responded in their own idiosyncratic ways to the decline of the Hegelian philosophy – and indeed, helped to bring about that very decline – the broad movement that initially filled the void was scientific materialism, a backlash against idealism whose epistemology and metaphysics seemed untouched by the previous fifty years.¹² Representative of the scientific materialists is Heinrich Czolbe (1819–73), who propounded what he called *Sensualismus* (sensualism or sensationism, as opposed to *Idealismus*), according to which the facts of the world – ultimately, only matter and motion – are discovered empirically, as they actually are, by the senses. The materialists were supported in their views by the wealth of scientific advances at the time, but they faced a perennial problem that the German Idealists, especially Fichte, had posed for realists: How could they explain consciousness in terms of matter and motion? The scientific materialists treated consciousness as a "given" that needed no explanation – which is philosophically unsatisfying and which left an explanatory gap to be filled by idealism.

The philosophers who eventually called themselves Neo-Kantians rejected the explanatory sufficiency of scientific materialism, but they also did not want to return to Hegel (and Fichte and Schelling), who, they claimed, had wrongly jettisoned Kant's empirical realism. Within the movement, however, there was a struggle for what that meant. Friedrich Albert Lange (1828–75), a precursor to Neo-Kantianism, wrote in his *Geschichte des Materialismus* (*History of Materialism*, 1866) that Kant's transcendental idealism overcame the recurring conflict between absolute idealism and materialism. Lange claimed that, according to Kant's transcendental idealism, only the formal constraints on experience are contributed by the understanding; the matter of experience is given by the thing in itself. Although materialism is the best explanation of the existence of phenomena, Lange claimed that our experience of it depends

on our aggregation of sensations by physiognomic processes, specifically the sense organs and the brain, which themselves are only apprehensible as representations. Thus there is no standpoint from which to discover what things are like in themselves, and even ethical norms are attributable not to some autonomous faculty of reason but to the brain as it has developed through natural history.

A student of Trendelenburg, Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) is usually considered the founder of the so-called “Marburg school” of Neo-Kantianism, and, although many individual philosophers returned to Kant after Hegel’s death, Cohen marks the beginning of a unified movement devoted to Kantian principles. For Cohen, Kant’s aim is to explain how the laws of thinking make objective representations possible. He carefully distanced himself from the empiricist-psychological tradition of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke, claiming that Kantian philosophy is not an empirical investigation into the actual functioning of the human mind, and rejecting the psychologistic account of Kant by which the categories were transformed into contingent brain functions. Instead, using what Cohen (following Kant) calls the “transcendental method,” he begins with mathematical natural science and seeks to discover the conditions for its possibility by appealing to the *a priori* (necessary and universal) laws of knowledge. We discover through the transcendental method that the formal rules of mathematics structure experience, and that the categories of the understanding get their normative force from the mathematical principles that are constitutive of experience in general. Cohen concluded that the self is nothing but the act of thinking logically and mathematically, and natural science, informed by mathematics, discovers what the world must be like as an expression of consciousness. He differed from Lange, then, in concluding that the *a priori* laws of thinking create the content of experience as objective things for us: as Cohen puts it, through the process of logical construction, “Thinking itself produces that which is held to be [*Nur das Denken selbst kann erzeugen, was als Sein gelten darf*].”¹³

The Marburg school was not a monolithic entity, however. Paul Natorp (1854–1924), ostensibly while defending Cohen’s Neo-Kantianism, claimed not only that logic constrained and informed scientific inquiry, but also that empirical science could elucidate the activity of reason because it is the paradigmatic activity of achieving knowledge. Thus he undertook a critique of science as his central philosophical project. Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) introduced a historical element to this epistemic progress, understanding our intellectual history as a series of attempts to make sense of the world and learn from our failures. Like Hegel, Cassirer saw history as progressive, but not through the lens of *a priori*, philosophical history. Rather, natural science, informed by mathematics, achieves greater and greater knowledge of the world through empirical investigation. Thus, Cohen, Natorp, and Cassirer emphasize the role

of mathematics and logic in comprehending objects, and they see natural science as an important enterprise that reveals the world (of representations) to be a reflection of conceptual processes, or a manifestation of thinking.

The “Baden school” or “Southwest school” of Neo-Kantianism was less interested in keeping Kant’s epistemology within the strict boundaries of science and logic. For example, Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915), a student of Lotze, claimed that one must go beyond Kant (and the Marburg Neo-Kantians) in applying his theory of concepts not only to logic, math, and the natural sciences, but also to the so-called “cultural sciences [*Kulturwissenschaften* or *Geisteswissenschaften*]” of sociology, history, philology, the humanities, and the arts. The two kinds of sciences use different but equally rigorous methods of investigation: the natural sciences use “nomothetic” explanations to make sense of the world in terms of general laws, with particular events (including experiments) as examples of these laws; whereas the cultural sciences use “idiographic” descriptions to identify the unique and contingent aspects of human existence. Among other things, Windelband was attempting to guard against naturalism, specifically psychologism, in the cultural sciences; he claimed that human activities could not be explained by empirical psychology alone. Windelband’s defense of the methodology of the cultural sciences and his claim that they should remain in dialogue with, rather than trying to appropriate the methods and aims of, natural science influenced the work of Max Weber, among others.

Windelband’s student Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) continued this line of thinking and applied it in more detail to the analysis of history. In fact, Rickert insisted that history was superior to the natural sciences because it does not rely on abstract generalizations. Instead, the facts of history, which are discoverable like physical facts, are related through the process of interpretation and value judgment, thus explicitly relating history to subjective human cognition in a way that empirical scientists resist, given their ideal of objectivity.

The Neo-Friesian school: Returning to the subject

Although not strictly part of Neo-Kantianism, the Neo-Friesian school was closely related to it, sharing some of its philosophical interests and methodology while also serving as a critic and rival. It included, most notably, Leonard Nelson (1882–1927), who founded the movement, and Rudolph Otto (1869–1937). Nelson followed Fries in developing a critical method to investigate cognition, and he rejected the Neo-Kantians’ overemphasis on objective experience and corresponding diminution of the subjective activity of cognition. According to Nelson, the mind receives data empirically and relates that data through the act of cognition. The function of the critical philosophy is to reveal how the mind functions *a priori* in making sense of experience,

by discovering the philosophical principles that the mind uses through the process of introspection and the methods of psychology.

Otto continued this critical analysis of the mind and the activity of cognition, but he focused specifically on the phenomenology of religious experience. According to Otto, religious beliefs are put forward as claims about reality, but such claims are grounded in neither reason nor the senses. Instead, we base these claims on an immediate knowledge of reality beyond the senses – the noumenal world – an encounter with the “numinous”¹⁴ that is revealed to us through the “feeling of truth.”¹⁵ Although Nelson’s influence was short-lived, Otto’s work had a profound influence on phenomenology and related movements, including the work of Max Scheler, Paul Tillich, and Martin Heidegger.

Phenomenology: The ego and the imagination

There are direct lines of descent from the Neo-Kantians to the phenomenological tradition. Husserl had an extensive correspondence with Natorp, who is credited with prompting him to develop a transcendental phenomenology. Heidegger was a student of Rickert, who was a student of Windelband, who was a student of Lotze.¹⁶ Heidegger and Cassirer’s famous Davos debate in 1929 over how to interpret the Kantian imagination inaugurated the ascendancy of phenomenology in Europe. And Heidegger and Rudolf Carnap, a Logical Positivist and member of the Vienna Circle, engaged in a years-long dispute over Neo-Kantianism following Heidegger’s inaugural lecture, “What Is Metaphysics?” in 1929. They both opposed metaphysics, but for different reasons: Carnap drew on the Marburg school and its appeal to the physical sciences, while Heidegger aligned himself with the Baden school and its focus on the historically specific contingencies of human existence that are best investigated by the human or cultural sciences. Therefore, Neo-Kantianism played a pivotal role at the birth of both analytic and continental philosophy.¹⁷

Despite these clear historical connections, phenomenology has perhaps the most complicated and difficult relationship to German Idealism. Superficially and linguistically, the focus on phenomena would seem to hearken back to Kant’s transcendental idealism and his claim that we can know only phenomena and never things in themselves, as well as Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, where he chronicles the ways in which *Geist* appears to itself historically. Phenomenologists study how things appear to consciousness, or how we experience things from the first-person perspective, and that may involve a process of interpreting perceptions in ways that have meaning for us. On a deeper level, however, what *Phänomene* means in phenomenology is quite different from what it means for the German Idealists. For phenomenologists,

there is no separation between the world as it appears to us and the world as it is in itself. Even the separation between “mere appearances” (Bxxix, A49/B66) and how the world really is makes assumptions about our experience that are characteristic of what Husserl calls “the natural attitude [*die natürliche Einstellung*],” which goes past our immediate experience to posit an opposition between subject and object.¹⁸ Our distinction between subject and object arises out of a more organic unity of consciousness, and it is only one way of making sense of the world – but it is assumed by the idealists at the outset. Phenomenology places in brackets all of the assumptions about a world outside of us (or not outside of us) and focuses on experience itself.

The tangled convergences and divergences between German Idealism and phenomenology is most apparent in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas. In much of his work, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) bypasses German Idealism and turns instead to Descartes as a philosophical forebear. Husserl begins the *Méditations cartésiennes* (*Cartesian Meditations*, 1931) by claiming that “one might almost call transcendental phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism,” in the sense that Husserl both hopes to establish philosophy on a new foundation and begins his investigation of knowledge by focusing on the immediate self-certainty of the *cogito*.¹⁹ Husserl is attempting to understand the conditions for the possibility of empirical knowledge, describing how consciousness constitutes or “bestows sense” upon experience (or the world, understood as one pole within experience),²⁰ rather than grounding those conditions, as Kant does, in *a priori* categories of the understanding. Husserl diverges from German Idealism in rejecting the equation of consciousness with the subject in the traditional subject-object dichotomy. In other words, while the object is, for the German Idealists (Kant and Fichte especially), dependent on the activity of the subject; for Husserl, consciousness, as consciousness *of* things, is “intentional” experience, or being directed toward what is given in experience, rather than being a subject that stands over and against the object.

Husserl does not entirely break with German Idealism, however. He calls his later philosophy a kind of “transcendental idealism,” in the sense that he is locating the foundation of all knowledge in subjective experience, which constitutes a meaningful world. With Kant, then, Husserl argues that the empiricist is failing to consider the conditions that make experience possible – and that those conditions arise in consciousness itself. Both Husserl and the German Idealists investigate the process by which an object comes to be an object in experience. In fact, Husserl sometimes draws on the work of Kant to stave off the tendency to underestimate the role of subjective activity in the having of experience. Both Kant and Husserl describe the transcendental ego as a formal condition for unified experience and something that cannot itself be a phenomenon, a substance in the world. In *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*

und phänomenologischen Philosophie (Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, 1913), for example, Husserl claims that the “pure Ego,” which he equates with Kant’s apperception, is for the most part – that is, except when it is considered in “its immediate, evidently ascertainable essential peculiarity and its givenness” – not “a phenomenological datum,” and thus that it can remain “exclu[ded]” or “in suspenso” for most phenomenological analyses, even as it makes experience possible.²¹ In his later work, Husserl also draws a strong connection between transcendental subjectivity and time consciousness – the activity that unifies or constitutes the world that I experience.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) also appreciates Kant’s approach to how we are situated in time. Heidegger embraces the Kantian imagination because, he claims, the essence of the imagination is temporality. According to Kant, the imagination forms expectations about our experience based on what we require of it conceptually; it relates the sensory manifold to conceptually possible future representations (A118–26). Heidegger says that this discloses an open future. Specifically, Kant’s focus on the activity of projecting representations toward the future reveals, as only finitude can, the predicament of Being in time and resists our tendency to see the world as a static object that stands against the activity of the subject. Schelling too points the way beyond metaphysics in his appeal to revelation, or a disclosure of Being that precedes conceptual thinking and predication. Thus, in their own ways, both Kant and Schelling address the facticity of Being.

Heidegger also brings a kind of Aristotelian focus on praxis to idealism, however, claiming that we do not exist in the world merely as knowers, perceivers, or conscious beings. We are immersed in a world as embodied beings with practical concerns, already in concrete kinds of relationships with it. We find ourselves “thrown” into a world. This becomes crucial for thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Michel Foucault: classical idealism remains obsessed with a conscious subject at the core or foundation of knowledge, metaphysics (such as it remains), and moral thought. But this assumption distorts the complexity of our subjective experience, in which we do not first show up as disembodied, detached individuals who then have to figure out what the world is. With Heidegger, there is an attempt to displace this subject-centered vision, where the subject is equated with an autonomous, conscious being. Heidegger often accuses German Idealism as a whole, especially in its systematic aspirations, of making consciousness the ultimate arbiter of the world we inhabit, so that “thinking understands itself as the court of judgment over Being.”²² Despite his praise of Kant’s theory of the imagination, Heidegger criticizes Kant for ultimately subordinating the imagination to the understanding, insofar as the imagination is merely a function of the understanding in organizing our sensations and bringing them to the categories.

In doing so, Kant – and the other German Idealists largely follow him on this path – avoid an inquiry into the ground of beings in Being, and put forward a metaphysical system as a complete analysis of what is.

More recently, Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95) uses German Idealism as a foil against which to define his phenomenological ethics. Levinas criticizes Kant and Fichte for their overemphasis on the atomistic, liberal subject, and he criticizes Hegel for valorizing an Absolute in which the other is synthesized within consciousness. According to Levinas, the epistemic impulse to establish the other as a person “just like me” frustrates (rather than justifying) our moral duties. The ethical relation is established immediately by my encounter with the face of the other (*le visage d'autrui*), so that I am passive with regard to the moral demand that is made on me. By beginning with the rational agent (Kant) or the self-positing I (Fichte), or by absorbing any challenge to *Geist* so that ultimately my activity is not threatened (Hegel), the German Idealists cover over the passivity that makes ethical subjectivity possible in the first place: “The detour of ideality leads to coinciding with oneself, that is, to certainty, which remains the guide and guarantee of the whole spiritual adventure of being. But this is why this adventure is no adventure. It is never dangerous; it is self-possession, sovereignty, ἀρχή [*arche*].”²³ I am indebted to the other simply in the encounter, but the German Idealists cover this over.

Unlike Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas does not qualify his negative judgment of German Idealism. However, recent reassessments of German Idealism in light of Levinas’s criticisms have shown that German Idealists also struggled with the prehistory of the autonomous subject, as in Fichte’s account of the summons (*Aufforderung*) and Hegel’s theory of recognition (*Anerkennen*) and intersubjectivity.²⁴ Although Levinas explicitly rejects Hegel’s theory of recognition – he claims that Hegelian recognition involves assimilating the other and thus denying them of their alterity – we must resist the caricature of their positions that has Fichte or Hegel committed to a subject that is only contingently and incidentally related to others.

In addition to Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas, most of the other major phenomenologists adopted, revised, or positioned themselves against tenets of German Idealism: for example, Max Scheler challenged Kant’s theory of value, Paul Ricoeur resisted Fichte’s return to the Cartesian *cogito*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty drew on Schelling in his later ontology of the flesh, and Jean-Paul Sartre attempted to synthesize his existentialism with a kind of Hegelian-Marxist account of the collective movement of history. Clearly the complex relationship between German Idealism and phenomenology deserves a more thorough treatment – several secondary sources have attempted to fill in this story²⁵ – but even from these brief descriptions, it is clear that phenomenologists have deeply engaged the German Idealist tradition in ways that inform their core philosophies.

Neo-Hegelianism, the first wave: British Idealism

In continental Europe, there is a clear line of descent from the late German Idealists and scientific materialism to Neo-Kantianism, and eventually to phenomenology in the twentieth century. But at the same time in Great Britain and North America, the aftermath was quite different. Although the presence of idealism on the Continent gradually waned during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it migrated to Great Britain, where Thomas Hill Green (1836–82), F. H. Bradley (1846–1924), and Bernard Bosanquet (1848–1923) rejected the empiricism of Locke and Hume, and the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, and founded the movement known as British Idealism. In general, the British Idealists contended that both thinking and objects are ultimately grounded in an Absolute that can be accessed by, or is identical with, rational activity. The classic statement of their metaphysics is Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* (1893), where, like Parmenides, he studies the plurality of appearances and, by identifying inconsistencies in the idea that there are separate objects, concludes that plurality is unreal. To overcome these contradictions, we must reject the realism upon which a pluralistic view of reality is based and instead adopt an idealism according to which qualities exist in relation to one another through an all-encompassing mind:

Sentient experience, in short, is reality, and what is not this is not real. We may say, in other words, that there is no being or fact outside of that which is commonly called psychological existence. Feeling, thought, and volition (any groups under which we class psychological phenomena) are all the material of existence, and there is no other material, actual or even possible.²⁶

Bradley's holism identifies the all-inclusive unity as the Absolute. And, like Plato, he says that, just as our beliefs have degrees of truth, appearances (as ideas themselves) have degrees of reality, depending on their coherence and comprehensiveness – that is, to the extent that they approximate the Absolute.

Other British Idealists concentrated on the relation between mind and nature, and between the individual and the whole. Green claimed that an “eternal consciousness” organizes nature into a purposive whole and unites both singular things and the consciousness of individuals, which can only perceive reality in a limited way: “There never can be that actual wholeness of the world for us, which there must be for the mind that renders the world one.”²⁷ We reflect this eternal consciousness in our own understanding of the world: while we synthesize our various perceptions into what Kant calls the empirical manifold of sensibility (A99), the eternal consciousness relates subjective experiences into a unified system of nature, a “many in one.”²⁸ Bosanquet attempted to synthesize realism and idealism, or Darwin and Hegel, in what he

called “speculative idealism.” According to Bosanquet, the mind develops from a purpose-driven nature in which individuals are sacrificed (through natural selection) for the sake of the whole and its development toward the highest perfection – namely, consciousness and thought, through which nature becomes aware of its rational purpose. This is Bosanquet’s version of Hegel’s absolute knowing.²⁹

Green and Bosanquet also developed their own Hegelian political theories, and it is here that the British Idealists had the most lasting impact on the history of philosophy. Both Green and Bosanquet adopted Hegel’s conceptions of the ideal state as the culmination of *Geist* and of the ideal ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) accomplished in community with others. Positioning himself against the natural law tradition, Green says that the law is supposed to promote the achievement of a shared moral end; it is supposed “to establish those conditions of life in which a true, i.e. a disinterested or unselfish morality shall be possible.”³⁰ The law facilitates moral behavior, but because it cannot force us to act with the right motives, the right habits are instilled in us through local customs and social expectations. Bosanquet claimed that individual wills form an organic whole in the state, an ethical idea or general will to which particular individuals are subordinated. Because of their conception of the individual’s place in the legal context and the relation between morality and legality, Green and Bosanquet are considered forerunners of communitarianism, including the work of Charles Taylor, one of the so-called “Canadian Idealists.”³¹ And Green, especially, deeply influenced John Dewey and many liberal British politicians in the twentieth century.

Analytic philosophy and the rejection of idealism

The metaphysics of the British Idealists was subject to fierce criticism by British philosophers at the turn of the century. In fact, analytic philosophy as a philosophical method and tradition was born out of the reaction against idealism. G. E. Moore’s “Refutation of Idealism” (1903) is the key text here, marking a turn away from idealism and back to the empiricism of Hume, or at some points even a naive realism according to which the world is exactly as we perceive it. Moore (1873–1958) defines the key claim of all idealist philosophies in Berkeleyan terms: “wherever you can truly predicate *esse* you can truly predicate *percipi*” – to exist is to be perceived, and nothing more.³² According to Moore, the problem with this position is that it fails to distinguish my consciousness or perception of something, and what I perceive or am conscious of. In other words, it conflates representations with what is represented. In our language, and conceptually, we make the distinction between our experience and what exists. If the idealist maintains that *esse est percipi*, however, then the terms “yellow” and “the sensation of yellow” mean the same thing. The

idealist has to treat the two terms as distinct while also claiming that this distinction is illusory. So, Moore concludes that idealism is grounded in a self-contradiction.

The second major objection to idealism is not based on our use of language, but our experience of ourselves sensing or thinking about the world. Moore claims that when we experience something blue, then we have as the object of our awareness something blue; blue is the “target” of our consciousness. But this means we can distinguish between the blue thing and our consciousness of the blue thing. Moore admits that it is difficult to isolate consciousness itself: consciousness never appears on its own – a point that Husserl also makes. But from the very fact that we can ask whether there really is a dagger in front of Macbeth, or he just perceives a dagger, this tells us that the object of consciousness is not the same as the thing itself. What we are doing as we experience something is reaching out beyond our minds. Compared to the idealist account of why this is so (Fichte’s positing, Hegel’s othering, etc.), the more plausible explanation is that sensations get me beyond consciousness to something that exists apart from consciousness.

This is not the place to assess Moore’s arguments. What is important for our purposes is that his criticisms, both in the “Refutation of Idealism” and in the work preceding it, inaugurated a kind of philosophical revolt in Great Britain. Reflecting back on this period later in life, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) credited Moore with prompting a new turn in his own philosophy and in British philosophy more generally:

It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps.... I felt it, in fact, as a great liberation, as if I had escaped from a hot-house on to a wind-swept headland. I hated the stuffiness involved in supposing that space and time were only in my mind. I liked the starry heavens even better than the moral law [a reference to CPrR 5:161], and could not bear Kant’s view that the one I liked best was only a subjective figment. In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naïve realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass really is green, in spite of the adverse opinion of all philosophers from Locke onwards. I have not been able to retain this pleasing faith in its pristine vigour, but I have never again shut myself up in a subjective prison.³³

Although Russell’s particular kind of realism would shift, throughout his career he remained a thoroughgoing empiricist, distinguishing only two kinds of knowledge: knowledge by acquaintance (obtained by direct perception of an object as it affects the senses) and knowledge by description (obtained indirectly, usually by means of the testimony of someone with knowledge by

acquaintance). Skepticism about the reality of the external (material) world and about the existence of other minds are like parlor games that philosophers use to amuse themselves but which they cannot consistently hold in their own lives: Russell called skepticism “an insincere philosophy”³⁴ and solipsism “psychologically impossible.”³⁵ We cannot help but respond to the world as an external thing that we track, more or less accurately, with the senses: “I have come to accept the facts of sense and the broad truth of science as things which the philosopher should take as data, since, though their truth is not quite certain, it has a higher degree of probability than anything likely to be achieved in philosophical speculation.”³⁶ This trust in empiricism would change the course of Anglo-American philosophy and give rise to naturalized epistemology, among other things.

The (re)turn to realism and empiricism was especially crucial for Logical Positivism, also known as Logical Empiricism. Although it oversimplifies things, the Positivists attempted to define as precisely as possible what philosophical terms mean (including “person,” “mind,” “good,” “beautiful,” “law,” etc.) and elaborated the logical relationships between those concepts. The only statements that are meaningful – and therefore the only questions worth pursuing – are those that can be adjudicated empirically. All other claims are nonsense and ought not to be philosophically investigated. For example, according to A. J. Ayer (1910–89), the libertarian who claims that we are absolutely free and the hard determinist who says that our every action is set by prior causes both rely on unquestioned assumptions. The libertarian assumes that our feeling of freedom indicates that our actions are uncaused, rather than merely that we are ignorant of their causes; and the hard determinist assumes that our actions are absolutely necessitated by prior events, even though science has been unable to predict all natural phenomena, including human actions, by appealing to causal laws. This debate cannot be resolved because there is no empirical method of adjudicating between them – even Fichte claims as much (IWL 18 [GA I/4:194]). Ayer concludes that the real distinction to make, one that is amenable to empirical investigation, is between freedom and constraint rather than freedom and causality: I am free when my decision arises out of my character; and I am not free when my action is compelled or coerced.³⁷ This is very different from the methods of Kant, who appealed to our immediate sense of moral constraint (the fact of reason) to justify the practical reality of freedom for us; and Fichte, who saw my commitment to freedom as the result of a founding act of faith (*Glaube*). It is also a more modest philosophical aim than Schelling’s and Hegel’s attempts to demonstrate the systematic unity of freedom and necessity. Analytic philosophers reacted against the speculative system-building of the German Idealists to focus on specific problems, analyzed conceptually and solvable through empirical methods. One could even say that they intensified the reaction against metaphysics that

precipitated Kant's critical philosophy, to the point where even Kant's work gets classified as metaphysics.

Neo-Hegelianism, the second wave: Pittsburgh

A group of American philosophers, led by John McDowell (b. 1942) and Robert Brandom (b. 1950) from the University of Pittsburgh (hence "Pittsburgh Neo-Hegelianism"), have more recently used Hegel in an effort to rebut the naturalistic realism that dominated analytic philosophy for most of the twentieth century. In *Making It Explicit* (1994), Brandom gives a critique of the semantic theory that has been assumed by most analytic philosophers, including Frege, Russell, Carnap, and Tarski. Brandom rejects what he calls their "platonistic model-theoretic approach to meaning," according to which there is a mind-independent world about which we form concepts.³⁸ This is "platonistic" because it conceives of the physical world and ideas (or concepts) to be separable in principle. By contrast, Brandom argues that our world is always already conceptually structured – any representation must be in the "space of reasons" – so thinking and the objects to which it refers are ultimately the same kind of thing.³⁹ Furthermore, Brandom claims that concepts are necessarily defined by language. Because it is through language that we make sense of the world and make our way around in it, we not only know the world through the understanding, but reason about it practically. That is, we make claims about the world that commit us to certain ways of acting, or have normative force, and thus we become responsible for both our ontological ("is") and deontological ("ought") judgments. Brandom defines himself as a pragmatist in these terms: "what attributions of semantic contentfulness are *for* is explaining the normative significance of intentional states such as beliefs and of speech acts such as assertions."⁴⁰ Semantic concepts are defined by the function they play in the conduct of life. We are spiritual (*geistige*) beings rather than mere biological things, in the sense that our thinking is the activity of judging what we experience, which means that the attempt at naturalization by the empiricists is doomed to failure, since it cannot capture the normativity of meaning-making.⁴¹

Like Brandom, McDowell rejects the idea that nature can be distinguished from the concepts we use to make sense of nature, as the realist claims. We experience nature as people who are already living and acting in the world, so the nature that we graft concepts onto (on the realist's model) is already a conceptually defined nature. This is the basic Kantian claim that for something to be objective experience for us, it must be subject to our ways of thinking. Just as Kant says that "up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts... have, on this presupposition, come to

nothing" (Bxvi), McDowell says that "if the space of reasons is alien to the space of nature, the idea that conceptual capacities could inform sensibility seems incoherent."⁴² Although McDowell embraces the Copernican turn, he rejects Kant's distinction between the so-called real world (the thing in itself) and objective representations, or nature as experienced; that reifies the very distinction that the empiricist wants to maintain. Instead, following Fichte and Hegel, McDowell claims that the world itself, to be conceived as a thing, would also have to be subject to our ways of thinking. Thus there can be no world apart from our thinking. We are, as claim-makers, responsible even for so-called nature itself.

Conclusion: The continuing presence of German Idealism

Admittedly, this brief summary of nearly two hundred years of philosophical history oversimplifies the positions that are covered and leaves out a number of important figures who have explicitly engaged the German Idealist tradition, including the Frankfurt School's appeal to Kant and Hegel to resist deterministic materialism, P. F. Strawson's use of transcendental idealism to rebut skepticism, and Michel Foucault's adaptation of Kant's critical method in his genealogy of power relations, to name only a few. For the most part, this chapter also fails to address the ongoing work of philosophers who are inspired by German Idealism. Kant's ethics remains one of the live positions in ethical theory, with innovative defenses by Christine Korsgaard, Barbara Herman, and Allen Wood. Dieter Henrich claims that Fichte, by rejecting the reflection theory of self-consciousness, can correct a fundamental misconstrual of what it means to be a subject. Wolfram Hogrebe uses Schelling to show that we cannot give a complete account of semantic meaning, but that rational articulation is ultimately groundless. Appealing to Kant and Hegel, Charles Taylor attempts to demonstrate, against the naturalist, that knowledge depends on a set of practices, or an unarticulated background against which we make sense of the world. And Slavoj Žižek draws on the entire German Idealist tradition to dissect the modern subject, especially our unconscious fantasies that sustain the myth of free consent to social and political control. These philosophers, along with McDowell and Brandom, are only a sample of the ways that German Idealism is still with us.

Meanwhile, historians of philosophy continue to explore and interpret the work of the German Idealists. Journals are devoted to individual idealist philosophers and idealism as a whole, and international philosophical societies have been established to study and celebrate their work. All of this is to say that German Idealism remains a vibrant tradition, a source of philosophical inspiration and historical study. By engaging the tradition, the contributors to this book have developed philosophical insights over a wide range of topics. This too is testament to the persisting legacy of German Idealism.

Notes

1. Heidegger's lecture series on German Idealism and German Romanticism include: *Phänomenologische Interpretation von Kants "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"* (1927–28), *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929), *Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (1930–31), *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1936), *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (1936–68), *Die Metaphysik des deutschen Idealismus. Zur erneuten Auslegung von Schelling* (1941), and *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"* (1942). These are in addition to individual chapters that Heidegger wrote on these subjects.
2. Beiser has also attempted to recover Trendelenburg and Lotze from the dustbin of history. See Frederick C. Beiser, *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
3. Hermann Lotze, *Metaphysik* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1841), 329.
4. Ironically, Schelling fits into both camps. Almost ten years after Hegel's death, Schelling took over his chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin. He continued to develop his own idealism, in public lectures and in writing, until his death in 1854. Schelling criticized the Hegelian philosophy as trapped in pure thought and alienated from nature; the identity of essence and being cannot be known within thinking, because thought is only one side of the relation. In addition, Schelling had become increasingly politically conservative in his later years, and the terms of his appointment called on him to "stamp out the dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism in Berlin" (King Friedrich Wilhelm IV to Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, Hubel, August 1, 1840, *Christian Carl Josias Freiherr von Bunsen: Aus seinen Briefen und nach eigener Erinnerung geschildert von seiner Witwe*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1868–71), 2:133; quoted in Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 258).
5. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 102–3.
6. Kierkegaard never uses this phrase, "leap of faith," but the idea appears throughout his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in "*The Birth of Tragedy*" and "*The Case of Wagner*", trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), §18 (p. 112).
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), §354 (pp. 299–300); and Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), §569 (pp. 306–7).
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, in "*On the Genealogy of Morals*" and "*Ecce Homo*", ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), Second Essay, §6 (p. 65); and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in "*On the Genealogy of Morals*" and "*Ecce Homo*", "Why I Am a Destiny," §7 (pp. 332–33).
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Daniel Breazale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57–125.
11. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," in *Birth of Tragedy*, §1 (pp. 17–18). For Nietzsche's blanket indictment of the pessimism of German Idealism, and especially of Kant, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in "*Twilight of the Idols*" and "*The Anti-Christ*", trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968), §§8–12 (pp. 131–35).

12. For a historical overview of this period and this philosophical approach, see Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977).
13. Hermann Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1914), 81.
14. Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).
15. Rudolph Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion, Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931), esp. 58–59, 86.
16. In fact, Heidegger's first lecture series in 1919, published in translation as *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* (trans. Ted Sadler [London: Continuum, 2002]), was largely an analysis and critique of the Baden school of Neo-Kantianism, specifically Windelband and Rickert.
17. See Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000); Gottfried Gabriel, "Carnap's 'Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language': A Retrospective Consideration of the Relationship between Continental and Analytic Philosophy," trans. Andrew Inkpin, in *Logical Empiricism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Paolo Parrini, Wesley C. Salmon, and Merrilee H. Salmon (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 30–42; and James Luchte, "Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Carnap: Radical Phenomenology, Logical Positivism and the Roots of the Continental/Analytic Divide," *Philosophy Today* 51, no. 3 (fall 2007): 241–60.
18. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), §27 (pp. 51–53).
19. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 1.
20. *Ibid.*, 106.
21. Husserl, *Ideas*, §57 (p. 133).
22. Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), 32.
23. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 99.
24. See especially Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Simon Lumsden, "Absolute Difference and Social Ontology: Levinas Face to Face with Buber and Fichte," *Human Studies* 23 (2000): 227–41; Matthew C. Altman, "The Significance of the Other in Moral Education: Fichte on the Birth of Subjectivity," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (April 2008): 175–86; and Matthew C. Altman, "Fichte's Anti-Hegelian Legacy," in *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 275–85.
25. See, for example, O. K. Wiegand et al., eds., *Phenomenology on Kant, German Idealism, Hermeneutics and Logic: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Thomas M. Seebohm* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000); Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger, German Idealism, and Neo-Kantianism* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity, 2000); Marc Maesschalck and Robert Brisart, eds., *Idealisme et phenomenology* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007); Violetta L. Waibel, Daniel Breazeale, and Tom Rockmore, eds., *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); and Tom Rockmore, *Kant and Phenomenology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

26. F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*, 2nd ed. (London: Sonnenschein, 1897), 144.
27. Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. A. C. Bradley, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890), esp. 70–79.
28. *Ibid.*
29. It is a matter of some dispute whether British Idealism, with its clear commitment to monistic metaphysics, is more indebted to Schelling or Hegel. The British Idealists themselves saw Hegel as their philosophical guide, with Herbart and Lotze as lesser inspirations, and they are usually called Neo-Hegelians (as are another group of philosophers that we will discuss later). However, recently many Hegel scholars have claimed that the concept of an all-encompassing Absolute misinterprets Hegel's philosophy and is more in keeping with Schelling's idealism.
30. T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation, and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Harris and John Morrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), §19.
31. British Idealism influenced a number of prominent philosophers in Canada, including George Paxton Young (1818–89) and John Watson (1847–1939). Both Young and Watson used idealism to support their theology, claiming that the Absolute (or God) is expressed historically in human beings' rational comprehension of the world and its meaning. Young and Watson are sometimes classified together with more recent philosophers such as C. B. Macpherson (1911–87), George Grant (1918–81), and Charles Taylor (b. 1931) as representatives of Canadian Idealism. However, the latter three philosophers can more justifiably be considered members of a historically distinct, Neo-Hegelian movement. See Robert Meynell, *Canadian Idealism and the Philosophy of Freedom: C. B. Macpherson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).
32. G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Mind* 12 (1903): 436.
33. Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Unwin, 1959), 48.
34. Bertrand Russell, "Project of Future Work," in *Last Philosophical Testament, 1943–68*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, ed. John G. Slater (London: Routledge, 1997), 117.
35. Bertrand Russell, *Bertrand Russell's Dictionary of Mind, Matter and Morals*, ed. Lester E. Denonn (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 225.
36. Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, 153.
37. A. J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity," in *Philosophical Essays* (New York: St. Martin's, 1963), 271–84.
38. Robert B. Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7.
39. Robert B. Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 97–98.
40. Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 143.
41. Robert B. Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 217.
42. John McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 185. See also John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

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