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Kant and the Historical Turn

Philosophy as Critical Interpretation

KARL AMERIKS

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Introduction: On the Very Notion of a Historical Turn in Philosophy

Plainly put: the idea of science is research; that of philosophy is interpretation [*Deutung*]. In this remains the great, perhaps the eternal paradox: philosophy, ever and always and with the claim of truth, must proceed interpretively without ever possessing a key to interpretation: nothing more is given to it than fleeting, disappearing traces within the ciphers [*Rätselfiguren*] of what is and their wondrous entwinings. The history of philosophy is nothing other than the history of such entwinings. That is why it reaches so few 'results', why it must always begin anew, and why it cannot do without the slightest thread which earlier times have spun, and which perhaps completes the literature that might transform the ciphers into a text.¹

I. BACKGROUND

1. An Old Dichotomy on History

The steady growth of interest in historical development, and in the historical dimension of philosophy in particular, is a phenomenon that calls for explanation. Even more than the exact sciences, philosophy has generally striven to be a discipline that escapes the contingencies of time, or at least the limitations of particular historical frameworks and empirical disciplines. This is true not only of ancient and medieval philosophy but also of the modern philosophical systems that came with the rise of the 'new physics' in the era of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. Very much the same kind of commitment to ahistorical procedures and indubitable first truths can be found at the beginning of each of the main phases of modern philosophy: in the programs of the rationalists and empiricists, of the

¹ Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), i. 334. Cited in Fred Rush, 'Conceptual Foundations of Early Critical Theory', in Fred Rush (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

Kantians and the post-Kantian German Idealists, and of the first positivists, phenomenologists, and analytic philosophers.²

In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, there arose a very different perspective, a historicist position that was generated in large part by a popular interest in the radical diversity of cultures and a growing sense of the limitations of modernity. This perspective began to affect philosophy in a fundamental way through the idea that the history of thought is too diverse to be regarded as exhibiting either a linear and quasi-providential pattern of progress or a structure that simply parallels social and geographical differences (which might merely reflect an eternal cycle of limited options). This historicist perspective was largely shaped by the work of figures such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who stressed the notion of a ‘spirit of the age’ and the idea that philosophy should begin from the recognition that history takes the form of a sequence of ‘spirits’, each expressing the thought of its own distinctive era. According to this perspective, earlier ‘ages’ in history are especially valuable precisely because they can be very much unlike current times. They are not to be understood ‘whiggishly’ as mere anticipations of the present age, and yet it is also important to recognize that they may have influenced later thought in a variety of underappreciated ways. On this view, the main value of philosophy turns out to lie not in the discovery of ‘eternal truths’ or a path toward a quasi-scientific convergence on one natural system, but in the appreciation and display of a sequentially related multiplicity of highly varied and often incommensurable insights.

In principle, the descriptive belief that there is a wide variety in the history of thought might be accompanied by a normative belief in a set of underlying substantive standards that could still make it relatively easy to explain and evaluate philosophical changes throughout the different ages leading up to our own time. In practice, however, the modern philosophical emphasis on history has come to be understood largely in terms of the historicist view that the more we learn about the past, the more sensible it seems to give up any confidence that there are substantive standards by which we can judge (and build our own philosophy on the basis of) the most remarkable intellectual achievements of earlier cultures—with respect to either their own time or their complex, and often subterranean, long-term effects. Even if, for many modern readers, writers such as Locke or Voltaire, for example, may seem obviously superior to Old Testament ‘authors’ or ‘pre-Socratic philosophers’, for a typical historicist a comparison like this may not even make much sense. This view can lead to a relativistic attitude across the board. Our own favorite philosophy (aside from its purely formal elements) can appear to be little more than the expression of a particular age, an age that is dependent on others in countless hidden ways and is but one of

² ‘Idealism’ will be capitalized in references specifically to the movement of German Idealism; similarly, ‘Critical’ in references to the Critical philosophy of Kant, and ‘Romanticism’ in references to German Romanticism.

numerous ‘equally valid’ ages. One then might even begin to wonder why, if one is to be consistent, any special weight should be given to the very historicism that largely defines our own age’s perspective. But even if historicists cannot find an Archimedean point from which to resolve this question, they can still reply that they cannot help but hold on to their own historicism, for it is simply a fact that they do not see how they can commit themselves to any positive alternative.

2. A New Post-Kantian Option

The positions on history noted so far might seem to exhaust the main options on the table since the eighteenth century, including the era of German philosophy from Kant through Hegel. On this issue, this period is in fact generally approached in terms of two directly opposed positions: the classical and largely ahistorical tradition, which culminates in Kant’s (1724–1804) system of ‘pure reason’, and the post-Kantian tradition, which is defined by an insistence (for example, in Schelling, Hegel, and Friedrich Schlegel) on very close attention to history and the limitations of so-called pure reason. This stark contrast, however, covers over a nest of highly relevant complications.

For example, although a merely chronological perspective might seem to make Kant (who was Herder’s teacher) the obvious starting point here, the culmination of Kant’s Critical work and most of his writings concerning history were in fact preceded in an important way by Herder’s publications. Kant entered the controversy at a relatively late date, through a review in which he expressed a sharply negative reaction to the first installment of Herder’s ‘non-scientific’ *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784), a work that had been prefigured by earlier writings by Herder such as ‘This, Too, a Philosophy of History’ (1774).³ These publications reflect the fact that from early on Herder’s career was remarkably open to many different traditions. From Kant’s early lectures in Königsberg (1762–4), Herder learned the largely scholastic and ahistorical philosophy of the Leibnizian tradition (as expressed in the texts of Wolff and Baumgarten), but his early career also revealed to him a very different side of the world. Unlike Kant, Herder ventured to other lands, and during his early stay in Riga (1764–9)

³ For a review of the controversy, see Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 291–301, and cf. 129–30, 208–9, and 223–4. The November 1784 *Berlinsche Monatschrift* published an article by Kant entitled ‘Idea [rather than Ideas] for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View’, trans. in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11–26. The controversy began, however, after Kant’s reading of Herder’s *Ideas* resulted in his harsh reviews of the book in the January and November 1785 *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (Jena), translated as ‘Reviews of Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*’, in *Kant on History*, 27–52. In an anonymous article, ‘Schreiben des Pfarrers zu *** an den Herausgeber des T.M. über eine Recension von Herders “Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Menschheit”’, *Der Teutsche Merkur*, 2 (Feb. 1785), 148–73, Reinhold defended Herder (who had presided at his wedding) against Kant’s first review, but soon thereafter he converted to Kant’s philosophy.

he was deeply impressed by the astounding variety of the ancient folksongs of the local Latvian population and by the philosophical significance of the phenomenon of folk culture in general. He moved on to become directly familiar with French culture, and by the time he had befriended Goethe and settled in Weimar he was thoroughly steeped in the cosmopolitan and historical strand of Enlightenment thought expressed in works such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729–81) *The Education of the Human Race* (1778).

These points are a reminder of a significant fact, namely that by the time that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* first became a significant influence—right after Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* of 1786–7 but before the first writings of Hegel and his generation in the mid-1790s—German philosophical readers were *already* familiar with two very different orientations: the largely ahistorical and systematic orientation of modern metaphysics from Descartes and Leibniz through Kant, and the new historicist orientation arising from relativist readings of work by Lessing, Herder, and others fascinated by newly discovered complexities in the development of classical and Judeo-Christian culture.⁴ Both these orientations left some mark on every great thinker of the time. Kant was influenced not only by Newton and the seemingly apodictic results of the scientific revolution but also by Rousseau's writings (for example, *Emile* (1762)) on the interrelation of morality, culture, and education. Although the notion of an eternal and transparent moral law 'within' pure reason itself defines the most fundamental layer of Kant's practical thought, influences such as Rousseau's call for a new world of political freedom, the rise of the Enlightenment in Germany, and the enduring tradition of 'salvation history' all combined to give Kant's final system a shape that resembled Lessing's in several ways.⁵ For both thinkers, the chief interest of humanity requires for its fulfillment a long and painful development through several specific stages of culture, morality, and religion. On the one hand, these stages increasingly satisfy the inherent rational potential of human nature; on the other hand, their actual development requires working through a sequence of events and conflicts that cannot be fully experienced or properly explained by reason alone.

Hegel and the other main figures in the German Idealist tradition all picked up on attractive features common to the views of Rousseau, Lessing, Herder, and Kant, and they each in their own way worked out a philosophy oriented

⁴ See Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Assman investigates the general notion that 'we are what we remember', and he stresses eighteenth-century uses of history, especially by figures such as Reinhold, who emphasized traces of rational religion even in the earliest mystical strands of 'Western' thought. Cf. Sabine Roehr, 'Reinholds *Hybräische Mysterien* oder die älteste religiöse Freimauerey: Eine Apologie des Freimauertums', in Martin Bondeli and Alessandro Lazzari (eds.), *Philosophie ohne Beynamen. System, Freiheit und Geschichte im Denken Karl Leonhard Reinholds* (Basle: Schwabe, 2004), 147–65.

⁵ See Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: his Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), and Allen W. Wood, *Kant* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 6.

towards the notion of a fulfillment of 'reason in history'. Despite the complexities of this notion, however, and the many deep similarities in some kind of commitment to it in all the German Idealist philosophies, there remain understandable grounds for ultimately contrasting Kant and the post-Kantians on the issue of history. Kant and his orthodox followers are generally understood as oriented toward what is still a primarily ahistorical and optimistic vision of reason and philosophy (albeit one that extends its ultimate rational optimism to the structure of history as well), whereas post-Kantians (such as especially Hegel and his main followers) are usually read as oriented toward what is ultimately a much more historical conception of reason and philosophy, one that can *seem* to have become ever more popular precisely to the extent that it resembled a form of historicism.⁶ Although a few 'orthodox' Hegelians may have maintained a heavy stress on reason 'over' history, Hegel's most influential followers have done the opposite, especially when they have become advocates of radical versions of movements such as socialism and pragmatism. The most interesting philosophers among them have usually had little sympathy for Hegel's *Logic* and those aspects of his thought that seem to be defined by an underlying ahistorical system of metaphysical concepts, one that appears to leave only an incidental or largely symbolic role for all talk of contingencies and radically alternative developments in spirit.⁷

For these reasons it might seem that most of the significant ideas concerning history that contemporary philosophers have tended to associate with Hegel and the Hegelian tradition might just as well be identified with the historicist views suggested by the work of earlier figures such as Herder.⁸ Nonetheless, and without in any way minimizing Herder's significance,⁹ I believe it is important

⁶ See, e.g., Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁷ For a helpful reconstruction and evaluation of historical elements in Hegel's presentation of his system, see Robert Brandom, 'Sketch of a Program for a Critical Reading of Hegel: Comparing Empirical and Logical Concepts', *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 3 (2005), 131–61, and 'Responses to Pippin, Macbeth and Hauge-land', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 13 (2005), 432. For other Hegelian perspectives on this issue, see Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 2; and George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 296: 'he [Hegel] is in fact operating with Reinhold's explanation of the genesis of the idealistic model of experience.'

⁸ For an extremely sympathetic discussion of Herder's significance, see Michael Forster, 'Introduction', in Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); and Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 5.

⁹ To some extent, it may be largely an accident of history that, for those in Anglophone philosophy who are interested in historical considerations, Hegel's work has dominated discussion at Herder's expense. Before their resuscitation by writers such as Charles Taylor, Herder's ideas were acknowledged by major philosophers only implicitly if at all. See Taylor, 'The Importance of Herder', in Edna Margalit and Arishai Margalit (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 40–63. Herder's work may have been left in relative obscurity

to distinguish (what I take to be) the kind of historicism often associated with Herder from the *non-historicist* but genuinely philosophical kind of deep interest in history that arose somewhat later with Reinhold and Hegel—and *immediately after* the effect of Kant's highly systematic Critical philosophy (which had no effect on Herder). More generally, I am proposing a fundamental contrast between historicism as such—as a radical new way of thinking that ultimately undermines the whole notion of systematic philosophy as a distinctive and progressive enterprise—and a more complex and moderate invocation of historical considerations, a 'historical turn' that involves drastically modifying philosophy with respect to the style of its expression while still leaving room for a permanent and non-relative value in many of its systematic claims.

To be more precise, there are at least four different kinds of phenomena, all playing an especially significant role in late-eighteenth-century German thought, that must be kept distinct: (*a*) a growing and detailed *interest in historical facts* as such, but one that may leave no mark on philosophy other than to provide incidental examples for illustrating various ideas; (*b*) a *strongly optimistic view* that history functions in philosophy largely as in science and therefore (given a fairly simple model of scientific progress) has a transparent progressive form whose core rational content could be adequately expressed even without direct recourse to historical considerations; (*c*) a relativistic use of history for philosophical purposes, that is, *historicism*; and (*d*) the complex presumption of a *historical turn*—that is, a philosophical position that goes beyond (*a*) and (*b*), but holds back from (*c*), in stressing that historical considerations are a crucial part of the effective presentation of at least some arguments central to philosophy as a developing systematic discipline.

3. Reinhold's Role

Even with all these distinctions in hand, it is by no means easy to explain exactly what it is about post-Kantian philosophy in general that allows it to be defined in this way—that is, as involving a historical turn that is philosophically fruitful and not a mere bundle of contradictory tendencies. This is a problem with implications for understanding not only the first generation of post-Kantian thought but also the whole broad sweep of its influence throughout the work of left-wing Hegelians, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger, and all their French and Anglophone followers into the present era. Does their kind of intense concern with history define a position that ultimately has to amount to a kind of anti-philosophy, or can it have roots in a position that instead allows for (and may even require) a

in English because to some readers it seemed tainted with proto-fascist irrationalism and was difficult to classify in traditional systematic terms, whereas Hegel's work at least had a clearly philosophical form and a direct connection with progressive movements such as Marxism. See Isaiah Berlin's influential work on the so-called Counter-Enlightenment, e.g., *Vico and Herder* (London: Hogarth, 1976).

genuinely productive combination of historical and non-historical philosophical considerations?

I believe that a significant new angle on this question can be found by considering the highly influential but relatively forgotten writings of Kant's first major interpreter, Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1757–1823). Reinhold was not only responsible for turning the *Critique of Pure Reason* into a surprising popular sensation (and for turning Jena into the birthplace of German Idealism); he was also a writer who became obsessed, especially during the period of his interaction with Kant, with overcoming the threat of historicism precisely by developing a style requiring 'a productive combination of historical and non-historical philosophical considerations'.

There is a reason why this style needed to be developed at this time. The first edition of the *Critique* in 1781 was the major intellectual event of its day, but it completely perplexed even its best-prepared readers—until the appearance in 1786–7 of Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* in the well-known Weimar journal *Der Teutsche Merkur*. Reinhold succeeded in making the main 'results' of the *Critique*, namely its hint of a moral proof of God and immortality, seem understandable and highly relevant to an extraordinarily wide-ranging audience. Reinhold ignored most of the body of Kant's very long book and simply presented the *Critique* as a positive resolution to the long history of religious conflicts that he took to be the defining factor of the 'spirit of the age'.¹⁰ By focusing effectively on the sketchy but appealing practical doctrines discussed briefly at the end of the *Critique*, Reinhold succeeded in arousing a keen interest in the Critical system in both popular and academic circles. This success, however, came at a significant cost: it was only by forgoing any attempt to explain the complex details of the theoretical 'grounds' of the Critical system that Reinhold's *Letters* managed to make Kant's philosophy appear so easily comprehensible and historically relevant. Moreover, when Reinhold eventually turned in detail to theoretical philosophy as such, he at first expressed himself in terms of a questionable but highly influential foundationalist 'theory of the faculty of representation' that deviated in several ways from Kant's own system. Reinhold originally introduced his foundationalist modifications without significant revisionist intentions and simply because he believed that they would make a universal acceptance of the 'spirit' of the Critical philosophy all the easier (and more stable), given the historical character of the modern 'age', which called for readily graspable concepts. To the annoyance of Kant and orthodox Kantians, something very unexpected happened instead: a whole generation of philosophers soon began to leave Kant's work itself behind. A succession of remarkable Jena professors immediately devoted themselves to extensive disputes

¹⁰ See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, ch. 8, and my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

with Reinhold and one another about ever new ways to justify post-Kantian systems of their own by showing how they did an even better job of satisfying the ‘needs of the age’.

The astoundingly productive chaos of interpretive conflicts that ensued in German philosophy in the 1790s, even after the *Letters*, surprised Reinhold as much as anyone else. He had long prided himself on his work as a clear synthesizer and mediator, and he had hoped to bring about a quick consensus. Reinhold was an ally of groups such as the Illuminati, and he had long been devoted to a radical Enlightenment program that aimed at thoroughly altering European culture by finally reconciling its popular and ruling classes. After reading the *Critique*, Reinhold believed he had found the ideal instrument for accomplishing this project, an apodictic systematic philosophy that could be universally administered by a new class of enlightened educators. The extensive social and political dimensions of this project have become fairly well exposed by historical research.¹¹ What has not been adequately appreciated so far, however, is the fact that Reinhold was especially well prepared for this project because his own work, *prior* to his encountering Kant’s philosophy, was distinctive in being deeply rooted in *both* of the two philosophical traditions discussed earlier. From Leibniz, and the ‘scholastic’ tradition in general (which he studied while training as a priest, before turning against Catholicism), Reinhold learned the importance of dissecting and ‘clearing up’ (a phrase that in German signifies *Aufklärung*, Enlightenment) key terms, and hence, unlike Herder, he was deeply attracted to the belief that philosophical analysis could systematically resolve disputes—outside as well as inside the university. From Herder, however, Reinhold learned that human development had gone through a wide variety of historical stages, and that, looking back, philosophers must pay very close attention to the specific ‘spirit of the age’ at each step, for this is the crucial precondition for the creation and reception of significant philosophical work even of an analytic kind. Hence, in both his initial confident presentation of Kant’s system as well as his later frustrated accounts of its ‘fate’ of being repeatedly misunderstood (even after, as well as before, Reinhold’s own efforts), Reinhold’s work took on a highly distinctive dual form. He maintained an underlying systematic and ‘suprahistorical’ optimism even in his constant focus on the historical task of uncovering the decisive underlying human ‘need’ at each stage of philosophical development, for these needs determined what could count as a proper acceptance or crucial misunderstanding of rational philosophy in a particular context. (It is typical that Kant speaks of a single fundamental and eternal ‘need’ of pure practical reason, whereas Herder, Reinhold, and Hegel stress the notion of basic but plural historical needs of reason.) Reinhold’s focus

¹¹ See above, n. 4, and ‘Further Reading’ in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. xxxix–xlii.

on history in this way was unusual and especially significant because, especially after he had studied Kant, it was not the result of any attachment to historicism but was rather part of a very well-thought-out attempt to maintain the ideal of a universally valid systematic philosophy even while vividly emphasizing the significance of the development of a host of competing traditions and schools.¹²

These points help explain the remarkable fact that Reinhold was the first to devote an essay to a genuinely modern and philosophical treatment of the nature of the history of philosophy itself. They also explain the enormously influential style of Reinhold's writing, especially once he became entangled in ever intensifying battles over what he called the 'fate' and true 'spirit' of the Critical philosophy. Instead of writing merely in the popular Enlightenment mode of an analytic 'Leibnizian' (focused merely on the clarification of common concepts), or in the technical mode of a theoretical philosopher laying down a rigorous foundation for a new deductive system, or even in the historicist mode of a colorful weaver of narratives, Reinhold began to make more and more clear that it is crucial to the very nature and future success of philosophy that it present itself explicitly as the solution to a systematically comprehended *sequence* of prior (and often deeply misunderstood) philosophical developments, and especially those of the main works of the most recent period. It is the emphasis on this particular *style* of writing, as initiated and exemplified by Reinhold's work at this time, that I mean to signify above all by the phrase 'the historical turn in philosophy'.

4. Some Preconditions of the Historical Turn

At first, it can seem trivial and self-evident that philosophers should present their work in a way that shows how it seriously addresses the sequence of discussions that other philosophers have offered. Aristotle, Kant, and others proceed in a fashion that can certainly look as though it has this kind of historical form. This appearance, however, is deceiving. It is not at all clear that before the Reinholdian period there was anything very like the 'history of philosophy' in our contemporary sense,¹³ let alone the extremely unusual and influential style of philosophical writing that arose with the late-eighteenth-century historical turn

¹² Cf. Marion Heinz, 'Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und System der Philosophie in Reinholds Fundamentschrift', in Bondeli and Lazzari (eds.), *Philosophie ohne Beynamen*, 334–46; cf. Martin Bondeli, 'Von Herder zu Kant, zwischen Kant und Herder, nach Kant gegen Herder—Karl Leonhard Reinhold', in Marion Heinz (ed.), *Herder und die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus, Fichte-Studien Supplementa*, 8 (1997), 203–34.

¹³ See Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes: Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), and *Philosophie und Universität: Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000); and my 'Response to Ulrich Johannes Schneider', in J. B. Schneewind (ed.), *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Center for the Study of Human Values, 2004), 295–305, 383–5. Cf. Frederick Beiser's helpful overview, 'Introduction to the Bison Book Edition', in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy/Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, vol. 1, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. xi–xl.

in Jena. After starting from an engagement in the extensive debates over interpreting Kant's extraordinarily difficult Critical work, writers in the Reinholdian period moved on quickly to deal in the very same way with their own immediate predecessors and then the whole course of the history of philosophy.¹⁴ Even when their later writings did not always rehearse these debates, a narrative style that at least implicitly incorporated an understanding of them continued to dominate their thought. Hence, it is no accident, for example, that to this day the broadly historical structure of Hegel's early works, and especially his *Phenomenology*, is used as the main road into his system, as the ladder that is never thrown away, no matter what the later 'encyclopedic' writings might suggest.¹⁵

A precondition of this development was the fact of the near incomprehensibility of Kant's own presentation of his complex Critical system and its remarkable claims—for example, to introduce a philosophy that is revolutionary and yet, at the same time, a matter of 'simple acts of reason' (A xiv).¹⁶ For a highly motivated and sympathetic reader such as Reinhold, a natural way to respond to the initial very strong resistance to Kant's system was to point out—as Reinhold repeatedly did—the intricate way in which the *Critique* had to overcome a whole sequence of entrenched philosophical confusions. Explaining this situation truly effectively required expository talents that went beyond Kant's own considerable capacities at that time. One key difference, therefore, between work in the Reinholdian period and work of the earlier modern period is simply the fact that, prior to the *Critique*, there was no equally pressing occasion for a recognition of the distinctive difficulty and significance of the historical form of philosophical works—that is, of the fact of their existing within a complex struggle of historically conflicting interpretations. When Aristotle and Kant review their predecessors, they are 'condescending' in an obvious way; they clearly believe that the grand validity of their own secure and eternal results would be ill served by stooping to distract readers by offering a *detailed* account of the specific arguments of earlier thinkers, and of how the historical details of these early arguments form a tight chain leading to the present day. (There is a short 'history of reason' at the end of the *Critique*, but few readers manage to make it through the 700 pages leading

¹⁴ For an indication of the immense magnitude of the early literature devoted to interpreting Kant, see Erich Adickes, *German Kant Bibliography* (Würzburg: Liebing, 1968). I am focusing almost entirely on the German philosophical scene, but it should be noted that in Britain historical considerations (in the sense of a truly detailed refutation of a sequence of earlier positions) did play a role at the end of the modern period in Thomas Reid (see below, Ch. 5), and also earlier in Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part, Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted and its Impossibility Demonstrated* (London, 1678; 2nd edn., London, 1743).

¹⁵ On the continuing systematic relevance of Hegel's historical considerations, see Bill Bristow, 'Bildung and the Critique of Modern Skepticism in McDowell and Hegel', *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 3 (2005), 179–207.

¹⁶ References with 'A' and/or 'B' are to the first and/or second edition of Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1781, 1787). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are from the Norman Kemp Smith edition (London: Macmillan, 1929).

up to this section, and it remains dominated by abstract stereotypes rather than detailed engagements with particular writers.) The underlying assumptions of pre-Reinholdian writers is still basically either Leibnizian or Herderian. That is, their guiding thought is that either an ahistorical presentation in terms of basic eternal options should be adequate by itself, or that the full variety of historical detail can be attended to, but that hope should then be abandoned of finding any genuinely convincing universal results in this manner.

There is another possible strategy, however, one that holds that there is a 'pathway of spirit' that is crucial to philosophy and is fundamentally historical and rational at once. This is the 1790s Reinholdian option, developed immediately, and with many remarkable innovations, by Hegel, Schelling, and their followers. In a sense, the 'success' of this option was so overwhelming that not only was its initiator soon forgotten but also the very innovativeness of its approach came to be taken for granted. After a meteoric rise, however, this option quickly lost popularity with the mid-nineteenth-century collapse of German Idealism and the rise of movements such as positivism. Nonetheless, by the end of the twentieth century, the Reinholdian option surprisingly recovered a very prominent place as a major position in many mainline branches of philosophy. Even though the original historical turn did become, for a long while, a 'merely historical' phenomenon, in our own time it has returned as an option that is more influential than ever before, capturing advocates who descend from the very schools that had intended to put its first version away forever.

On the Reinholdian option, what distinguishes most of philosophy and its history is a structure that manifests neither timeless clarity nor sheer chaos, but rather a complex kind of hermeneutical progress, one wherein each generation has a chance of genuinely advancing from previous philosophical discussions by enriching them with concrete improvements that are introduced through an *explicit* reconsideration of their precise relation to a sequence of actual past alternatives. As in a legal or historical debate (the disciplines of art history and the history of biblical interpretation are especially relevant here, both as catalysts for philosophy in the late eighteenth century, and, at least indirectly, as structural models for the philosophy of the future), these discussions are genuinely argumentative and progressive. They proceed in a manner that is extremely difficult to specify except by example, but they clearly aim to avoid sophistry and dogmatic intuition, even though they lack the comfort provided by anything like typical experimental procedures in science. In paying close attention to constructing a tight argumentative narrative, these discussions display their own latest interpretation of a philosophical issue in as compelling a way as possible in light of a detailed new account of the development of prior alternatives. To be sure, at first these kinds of narratives were introduced by Reinhold and the early Hegel with disturbing immodesty and a presumptive air of finality. One can look beyond the irritating incidental details of the language and content of their systems, however, and still acknowledge that they introduced a very useful new turn in

philosophy. Their work provided an especially vivid and influential paradigm, revealing a way in which (at least a large part of) philosophy can thrive not as a literal 'rigorous science' but as a rationally convincing set of detailed advances over previous systems and their latest interpretations.¹⁷ Whatever their own substantive disagreements, more and more contemporary philosophers are following in the footsteps of the original Idealists by showing that there is something deeply rewarding and uniquely philosophical in the process of rationally determining one's own intellectual situation in precisely this way, even without any guarantee of certainty or 'approximation' to a close endpoint.

5. Contemporary Options

The option of this kind of a post-Kantian historical turn can be distinguished not only from historicism and classical ahistorical versions of philosophy but also from other historically sensitive but relatively *limited* modifications of philosophical systems after Kant. For example, a contemporary 'orthodox' Kantian might well be tempted by the work of philosophical historians of science, such as Michael Friedman, to substitute for Kant's own ultimately ahistorical system a more flexible successor to the *Critique* that would rely on substituting, with each new 'age of science', the latest basic scientific principles for the specific principles of nature that Kant happened to believe were irreplaceable.¹⁸ In addition, one could make slight amendments to the *Critique* that would be motivated by contemporary 'purely' philosophical developments rather than scientific discoveries such as non-Euclidean geometry. The 'spirit' of Kant's work could then be said to be maintained even after many such changes, as long as some philosophically defended and systematically related set of *constitutive core principles* for different basic types of experience is provided. It can also be argued that there are contemporary philosophies that start from their own original position but are still recognizably Kantian in their broad systematic ambition of reconciling what is best in the historical development of the traditions of both modern empiricism and rationalism. In the twentieth century, Roderick Chisholm and Wilfrid Sellars (and their many students), each in his own way, may have come closest to this kind of an updated 'parallel' to Kant's enterprise even if, in their unusually wide-ranging writings, they did not also extend their work, in the manner that Kant did, to areas such as religion and aesthetics. All these different ways of incorporating *some* attention to history, even while continuing

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., the genealogical 'method' of Husserl's late *Crisis* with his original quasi-mathematical model for philosophy. See David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History: A Study of Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); and Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Michael Friedman, 'Kantian Themes in Contemporary Philosophy', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 72 (1998), 111–29.

the mainline analytic tradition of contemporary philosophy, are clearly worth further exploration. Nonetheless, it should be obvious that all these different contemporary approaches do not involve the kind of *thoroughgoing* historical (but not historicist) orientation that is clearly the main concern in the tightly woven accounts of the ‘pathway of spirit’ given by philosophers such as Reinhold and Hegel.

In this volume my aim is not to explain these specific accounts in detail but to provide a sympathetic discussion of the distinctive notion of philosophical procedure that lies behind them. In part, this will involve presenting something that is itself a historical investigation, a reconstruction of key stages in the development of the deeply historical but non-historicist approach to philosophy in the post-Kantian tradition, especially at the time of its origin and in the work of the current philosophers who are now most attracted to it. (I also argue, in Part I, that appreciating the value of such a historical approach to philosophy can be valuable in understanding specific philosophical issues that concern relations between Kant and his *predecessors* and not only his successors.) This investigation can be regarded as a positive complement to what might seem to be an overly negative account of post-Kantian developments in my earlier work. My intention all along has not been to rewrite history for the sake of returning to a ‘pure Kant’, forever valid and complete, once his system has been shorn of illegitimate Idealist accretions. Rather, the aim has been to find a way to avoid distortions of Kant’s thought while also uncovering, in the most promising suggestions of the post-Kantians, alternative ways to do justice to Kant’s own deepest ideals and especially his overriding concern with autonomy. My underlying worry has been that unease with overly ‘Cartesian’ versions of Critical philosophy (for example, certain types of Reinholdian or Fichtean foundationalism and their successors) can lead all too quickly to the thought that the only alternative (for those concerned with Kant and post-Kantian philosophy) to orthodox Kantianism must be an ultimately historicist and relativist approach to philosophy in general. To help avoid these extremes and still preserve the ideal of rational self-determination, I believe it is especially useful to explore the phenomenon of the historical turn in those writings of the first post-Kantian philosophers that give the best indication of why and how historical considerations should be given a central place in a philosophy’s mode of presentation without making the content of philosophy itself into a matter of mere history.

Whatever its long-term systematic value, a historical exploration of the original historical turn may also shed some light on the peculiarities of our current philosophical situation. Certainly some explanation is needed of how—after decades of intense ahistoricism in philosophy—we could have come to a point where such a diverse range of outstanding late-twentieth-century philosophers as Williams, Rawls, MacIntyre, Taylor, Cavell, Schneewind, Wolterstorff, Darwall, and

Brandom¹⁹ all turned to largely historical investigations without giving up their distinctively philosophical and highly analytic approach. It is a noteworthy fact that, whatever their other primary interests, almost all these philosophers have been concerned with history in a way that has a lot to do with what they see as at least a need to respond specifically to the German tradition. However much the content of their philosophy (for example, Williams's attack on Kant's ethics) may in some cases sharply contrast directly with that of the German philosophies I have been emphasizing, it still appears that the common and striking historical form of their work is anything but incidental and owes much (whether they realize it or not) to the influence of the style of Reinhold, Hegel, and their narrative-oriented successors, from Heine to Nietzsche and Heidegger.

The philosophical project of coming to terms in this way with one's own history can itself be understood as one more way of preserving philosophy as a distinctive and autonomous enterprise. Hence it seems only fitting that this kind of project appears to have received its original impetus from the hectic very first attempts (especially by Reinhold) to interpret the implications of Kant's extraordinarily difficult philosophy of autonomy. Part of the difficulty here comes from the fact that the general Critical interest in autonomy is extremely wide-ranging. It should not be understood as restricted to such familiar themes as the normative meaning of autonomy within politics and ethics, or even to its theoretical and methodological significance in designating a system of philosophy that aims to be based on a rational examination of experience rather than on 'external' sources such as mere sensibility or abstract concepts. Although it is a remarkable feature of Kant's time that the question of the autonomy of philosophy itself became a central issue, this issue must also be understood as closely entwined with other striking new phenomena such as the self-proclaimed autonomy of art and aesthetics, of historical studies, and of writing in general, as well as the explosive development of the movements of German Idealism and Romanticism.²⁰ If the guiding hypothesis of this volume is correct, all these remarkable phenomena need to be explored more closely (and in connection with each other) in relation to the specific difficulties that immediately arose in interpreting

¹⁹ See especially the following already classic books: Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought', 1640–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁰ See my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–17.

the significance of Kant's philosophy, and to the historical turn in philosophical method that these difficulties generated at the end of the eighteenth century.

II. OVERVIEW

Analysis and hermeneutics—or rather the 'analytic principle' and the 'hermeneutic principle'—arose in music history (or at least attained historical significance) as opposite ways of unraveling the difficulties posed by the reception of Beethoven.²¹

The chapters that follow are arranged chronologically with respect to the authors that they discuss. They are also sorted into four parts to reflect the four main stages of the historical turn: a stage-setting Kantian prehistory, a two-stage early post-Kantian 'founder's era', and a current stage, which is still spreading throughout the contemporary philosophical world by means of invocations of moves made in the earlier stages. More specifically, Part I focuses on the crucial precondition of the turn, which lies in the numerous interpretive difficulties of Kant's Critical system and its relation to modern philosophy in general. Parts II and III then focus on the historical turn proper, and they trace its origin to the distinctive philosophical methodology that figures such as Reinhold and Hegel created as a way of reacting to (even if not literally 'unraveling') the extraordinary initial 'difficulties posed by the reception of' Kant. The genius of these Jena writers lay not so much in the tactics of their specific Kant interpretations as in their strategy of combining, rather than strictly opposing, 'analytic' and 'hermeneutical' approaches in general, and of practicing a style-setting form of writing that constantly emphasizes the extremely close relation between advancing one's own systematic philosophy and interpreting argumentative sequences within the history of philosophy. This relation has now also become a focus (either explicitly or implicitly) of much of the most interesting work in current philosophy, and especially in the remarkably widespread reappropriation of the classical German tradition; hence Part IV concludes with assessments of examples of some of the most extensive research projects carried out by contemporary advocates of this tradition.

Most of the chapters are devoted to a detailed comparative focus on one specific issue and its treatment by a number of modern philosophers, one of whom is usually Kant. In other chapters (especially Chapters 1, 8, 12, and 13), however, the 'microscopic' focus on first-level issues and individual figures gives way

²¹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 11. The comparison I am implying with regard to music in the aftermath of Beethoven is not intended to go beyond the fact that about the same time, after Kant, philosophy also divided into 'analytic' and 'hermeneutic' camps.

to more general, ‘macroscopic’ (and, at one point, literally ‘telescopic’) reflections on history and philosophical interpretation. It is primarily these chapters that directly articulate the main theme of the study as a whole, and they might well be read together in sequence. The first and last chapters present the most wide-ranging considerations. Chapter 8 plays a pivotal role and concentrates on Hegel’s early *Differenzschrift*, whose rarely cited full title reveals that it is explicitly designed as a response to Reinhold’s characterization of the philosophical situation at the turn of the nineteenth century.²² Hegel craftily relegates his treatment of Reinhold to an Appendix, to make room for his own *Auseinandersetzung* with Fichte and Schelling, whose Critical ‘advances’ on Kant and Reinhold in the 1790s Hegel means both to exalt and to sublimate by his own new approach. This chapter gives the most concrete account of what I mean by the phenomenon of the historical turn and my grounds for tracing its origins back to Reinhold’s distinctively historical reaction to Kant. Chapter 12 and sections of other chapters (especially Chapter 9) discuss two other ‘turns’—the ‘subjective’ and the ‘aesthetic’—that I also believe are central to late modern philosophical writing, especially in the era of German Idealism and the present age. These turns are closely related to the historical turn, and, just like that turn, need to be distinguished from similar-sounding but much more extreme phenomena, such as aestheticism and subjectivism (the natural partners of historicism).

The chapters in *Part I* compare and contrast Kant’s philosophy with several of its immediate competitors (Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Reid, Jacobi, and German Idealism in general), and they repeatedly stress the importance of presenting Kant’s work within its own full historical context. On numerous fundamental systematic issues, this approach leads to sharp contrasts with some of the more anachronistic tendencies in interpretations by twentieth-century philosophers, tendencies that are still very influential in Anglophone contexts. In the course of invoking a variety of often neglected historical details, these chapters also build on and supplement the broadly metaphysical and yet ‘common-sense’ approach to Kant (and much of his era) that I have argued for in earlier work.²³ Although they usually do not engage explicitly with the theme of an historical turn, they are meant to provide case studies of the importance of trying to understand and evaluate philosophical arguments by first placing them in close relation to the often forgotten or misunderstood controversies, options, and key terminological presumptions of their own era.

²² The full—and very rarely cited—title of Hegel’s book is: *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie in Beziehung auf Reinhold’s ‘Beyträge zur leichtern Übersicht des Zustands der Philosophie zu Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. 1stes Heft’* (Jena: Seidler, 1801); trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris as *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977).

²³ See my ‘Introduction: The Common Ground of Kant’s *Critiques*’, in *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1–48.

Chapter 1 offers a general introductory argument for maintaining an authentically historical perspective on the main issues arising from the key texts of modern philosophy, and for approaching even the briefest subsections of these texts with sensitivity to their full historical context. The occasion for this essay was a conference in Germany that was planned in part as a reaction to serious reservations that had been expressed (by German philosophers themselves) about the continental tendency to teach and discuss philosophical issues within a framework defined almost entirely by traditional texts rather than contemporary systematic questions. Without denying the need for developing some kind of corrective to the overly historical approaches that still dominate continental philosophy, I argue that it is important to counter stereotypical views of Anglophone philosophy and to try to explain why, after decades of neglect, historical considerations have also become central components in the writing of many leading late-twentieth-century analytic philosophers.²⁴

This phenomenon becomes especially clear when one examines developments in the work of highly influential analytic philosophers such as Bernard Williams, whose writing strikingly illustrates (and in part was a significant cause of) the widespread changes that have occurred in our own age in the treatment of the history of philosophy and especially the re-evaluation of modernity. Already in the 1970s, Williams had begun to focus in a new and appreciative way on the ‘bookend’ figures of the modern period, Descartes and Nietzsche. These epoch-defining thinkers rarely received any positive analytic attention in the decades from the 1930s through the 1960s. Soon afterwards, however, they suddenly attracted much more careful treatment from a wide range of contemporary philosophers, as a whole new generation of scholars helped to free these figures from the standard reproach against modern philosophers, that they are irredeemably subjectivist in their orientation.²⁵ Williams’s turn to writing

²⁴ See above, n. 19. It is also striking that top contemporary metaphysicians such as Robert Adams have published extensively on Berkeley and Leibniz, and that some of the best studies of Kant have begun to detail his close relations to the rationalist tradition. See, especially, Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Eric Watkins, *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ On Descartes and Cartesianism, see, e.g., books by Harry G. Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes’s ‘Meditations’* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970); Edwin Curley, *Descartes against the Skeptics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Desmond Clarke, *Descartes’ Philosophy of Science* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982); Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Daniel Garber, *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Tad Schmaltz, *Malebranche’s Theory of the Soul: A Cartesian Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); on Nietzsche, see, e.g., Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Raymond Geuss, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); John Richardson and Brian Leiter (eds.), *Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Robert B. Pippin, ‘Introduction’, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Robert B.

about modern philosophy can also be understood as in part an expression of his special interest in challenging the continuing effect of Kant's work,²⁶ which grew considerably in influence when analytic philosophy moved into a new and more systematic phase toward the end of the twentieth century (that is, as it shifted away from the 'linguistic turn' and back toward substantive ethics and traditional metaphysics). I conclude that, however one evaluates Williams's specific criticisms, the ongoing debate about Kant's most basic notions can be regarded, above all, as evidence of the philosophical fertility and continuing value of his work and the broad tradition that it represents. Our difficulties in deciding how to read Kant on autonomy, for example, cannot be reduced to either a strictly historical matter of textual exegesis or a strictly systematic issue in contemporary philosophy, because what we are trying to understand in each one of these contexts is now, more than ever, fundamentally influenced by the other.

Until the 1970s, Descartes's philosophy tended to be read in such an extremely subjectivist and psychological or skeptical manner that in many circles the term 'Cartesianism' became irreversibly (and inaccurately) attached to an entirely negative phenomenon, a dismal trend that supposedly left almost all modern (that is, pre-twentieth-century) philosophy, including Kant's system, hopelessly infected. In *Chapter 2*, I offer an apologetic interpretation of the most basic features of Kant's central doctrine of apperception, and argue that this doctrine reveals that Kant's view of the self is in fact largely the opposite of the so-called Cartesian subjectivism that has been so often ascribed to him. For Kant, the subject of apperception is 'non-Cartesian' in key epistemological as well as ontological senses: its determinate knowledge of itself, as of all other things, depends basically on spatial intuition, and it has no theoretically demonstrable existence as a pure spirit. The project of clarifying Kant's position in this way has much more than a merely exegetical significance, for it also reveals that his ultimate Critical doctrine of the self remains in many ways as worthy of consideration as the best contemporary theories.²⁷ Nonetheless, while some interpreters have been willing to grant that Kant avoids the traditional perils of so-called Cartesianism, they continue to raise extreme worries of another kind: that Kant absurdly denies that the self exists, or that we can know it at all (at least as anything more than a completely

Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vi–xxxiv. This is, of course, not to deny that there are elements in the thought of Descartes and Nietzsche that can lead to forms of radical subjectivism and some of the problems stressed by interpreters such as Heidegger, Maritain, MacIntyre, and Taylor.

²⁶ The appearance of John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), is obviously the most influential event here. Also significant is the fact that the Festschrift by his students is entitled *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, ed. Barbara Herman, Christine Korsgaard, and Christine Andrews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²⁷ See my 'Postscript: Kant and Mind: Mere Immaterialism', in Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 303–21.

meaningless and entirely ‘noumenal’ entity, or an absurd being that is its own incomprehensible creation). I argue that all these negative interpretations overlook the deep and coherent structure of Kant’s account of the epistemological interconnection of apperception and sensibility (the ‘epistemic subject’) and its relation to the subtleties of his relatively indeterminate but still meaningful Critical metaphysics of the self (the ‘existing subject’).

Chapter 3 critically examines the most common way in which Anglophone philosophers have offered a subjectivist reading of Kant’s own metaphysics—namely, by characterizing it as a system very similar to Berkeley’s phenomenal-ist idealism. Numerous terminological complications, along with the infamous difficulties of Kant’s doctrine of transcendental idealism, make it understandable that many readers would attempt to give at least some kind of familiar meaning to Kant’s thought by interpreting it in terms of other well-known theories, such as Berkeley’s, that at least share the term ‘idealism’. Nonetheless, I argue that there are numerous exegetical and systematic reasons why this popular interpretive move, ‘from Kant to Berkeley’, should be strongly resisted. The fundamental error here, the presumption that Kant, like Berkeley, is committed to an equation of existence and representation, expresses an unfortunate idea that can also be found in Reinhold and was highly influential in post-Kantianism and after. I characterize Reinhold’s approach here in terms of the notion of a ‘short argument to idealism’—that is, one that contends that something becomes ideal simply by being representable at all. This kind of argument bypasses Kant’s express limitation of his idealist metaphysical claims to matters that are determined by very specific features of space and time (and hence not by more general considerations alone, concerning features such as conceptuality, intuitability, activity, or passivity—let alone bare representability). Whatever the influence and appeal of this argument, it severely distorts the course of reasoning in the *Critique*, and it makes incomprehensible Kant’s key notion that there are coherent thoughts of non-ideal things in themselves—for example, the all-important notion of our absolute freedom. Nonetheless, interpretative views with similar consequences were expressed by other highly influential German interpreters, such as Friedrich Jacobi, who contended that, because the Kantian notion of a thing in itself is supposedly altogether incoherent, there is nothing in Kant’s system other than internal (that is, psychological) representations (see also Chapters 5, 6, and 11). I argue that the details of Kant’s discussions of idealism refute these uncharitable views, as well as the efforts of sophisticated neo-Berkeleyan interpreters (such as James Van Cleve) to reconstruct Kant’s ontology, or at least his theory of determinate empirical objects, in strictly phenomenalist terms. Moreover, once it is recalled that one of the most basic aims of the *Critique*’s carefully constructed Paralogisms is the rejection of all assertions of spiritualism (the doctrine that there are theoretical grounds establishing that—leaving God aside—our minds are wholly independent beings), it should be clear that Kant’s philosophy

is properly and fundamentally aimed against Berkeley's system, rather than in agreement with it, despite whatever incidental beliefs they may share.

Chapter 4 contrasts Humean theories of moral motivation with Kant's Critical account. It argues that standard objections to Kant fail to take heed of his general theory of action and the intrinsic difficulties in finding, on any sensible theory, a fully satisfactory 'explanation' of moral motivation. Kant's account of motivation must be understood in the context of his general theory of human subjectivity. Unlike contemporary quasi-Humean accounts, which depend on a two-part theory of belief and desire, Kant's theory presupposes a classical three-part distinction between cognizing, willing, and feeling. Although the second *Critique* is devoted specifically to what is called the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*), this faculty is not to be understood simply in terms of feeling, let alone the mere determinations of pleasure and pain. Instead, for Kant this faculty primarily designates the power of choice, which presupposes cognitive and affective components but is distinct from them. The Critical theory implies an irreducible ability to select between alternatives that are rationally understood as such, and it incorporates the thought that our wills can freely opt for even an immoral end. Standard caricatures of Kant have assumed that he holds that all human actions are either necessitated purely by reason, in which case they are moral, or necessitated entirely by sensibility, in which case they are not moral. In fact, Kant takes human action to be in all cases a free process, involving a selection between intentions. This process requires judgmental attitudes that cannot be understood in terms of the non-normative events of mere psychological association that define Humean 'belief' states and responses to such beliefs. In providing an alternative to Hume's mechanistic model—and even while emphasizing the pure, rational, and real content of moral action—Kant can allow that for human beings morality always in fact involves a motivating feeling that mediates between judgment and action. Just as his theory of aesthetic appreciation reserves an ineliminable but ultimately contingent role for the feeling of taste, which depends on but is not the same as proper aesthetic judgment, so his theory of moral evaluation and decision reserves an ineliminable but ultimately contingent role to the feeling of respect, which depends on but is not the same as proper ethical judgment. In this way Kant can avoid the difficulties of overly intellectualist 'internalist' accounts of moral motivation, while not leaving proper moral motivation to be determined by forces that would undermine the strict universality and necessary validity of its core content. This is not to say that Kant's account of action, freedom, and motivation is without its problems, but it does indicate that a proper understanding and assessment of his account needs to begin by approaching him from within his own tradition.

Chapter 5 builds on the contrast between Hume and Kant by showing how the Critical philosophy can be understood as an ally of Reid's critique of empiricism and the whole tradition of the 'way of ideas'. The general 'anti-Cartesian' and realist approach of Reid's common-sense philosophy has

gained many distinguished adherents, but most analytic philosophers have continued to assume that this approach is the very opposite of Kant's. By building on extensive research by Manfred Kuehn on the role of common-sense philosophy in eighteenth-century Germany, I argue that there has been a deep misunderstanding concerning passages that have been repeatedly taken to prove that Kant's philosophy completely opposes Reid's. Moreover, I argue that common sense plays a crucial role in the first stage of Kant's system (in his theoretical and practical philosophy as well as his aesthetics), and that historical research has established that this fact was clearly recognized by a significant circle of early Kantians who worked in Jena right before the full development of German Idealism. This recognition was quickly eclipsed by the meteoric rise of German Idealism, a development that can be explained in part by a sequence of misunderstandings that parallel several of the dismissive interpretive tendencies found in contemporary analytic discussions of Kant. I also document an extensive list of substantive points of agreement between Reid's and Kant's systems. These go beyond the similarities in their critiques of earlier modern philosophers and extend to deep parallels in their accounts of perception as a fundamentally interpretive rather than inferential process. Despite the complexities of Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism (which I argue is consistent with a general position that most philosophers could now call realist) and the undeniable presence of differences between Kant's transcendental arguments and Reid's procedures, I conclude that there remain fundamental similarities between Kant and Reid. In their final view of the self, and of knowledge in general, both philosophers leave room for processes that cannot be accounted for by reasoning but are nonetheless rationally acceptable and of overriding importance.

Chapter 6 combines an analysis of the structure of Kant's critique of earlier metaphysics with a historical account of how this critique could have had as its fate the remarkable rise of a new kind of metaphysics in the era of German Idealism. I begin with the general observation that the Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* does not attempt, let alone accomplish, the kind of complete destruction of metaphysics that many of its readers have supposed. Many traditional transcendent metaphysical ideas are allowed to be not only coherent but also assertable, once the demands of regulative and practical reason are allowed to supplement the thoughts of constitutive theoretical reason. Moreover, the *Critique's* stress on notions such as idealism, things in themselves, and the 'unconditioned' created (as William Hamilton noted) a 'spectre' that 'haunted' and stimulated German Idealism's new metaphysics of the 'absolute'. Although Kant offers a radical critique of all earlier systems of a spiritualist or materialist kind, he also believes that something metaphysical should be affirmed beyond the spatiotemporal features of our experience. I argue that for both Kant and German Idealism this metaphysics is at least not any kind of subjectivism, and it need not present a special threat to most of our common realist beliefs. Kant's view

can be contrasted with many of the Idealist systems that come after him, however, because he denies that our reason can determine an unconditioned being that is a demonstrably necessary and monistic whole, and (contra Jacobi) he also rejects the option of characterizing our affirmation of anything unconditional in terms of non-rational 'faith'. Kant's metaphysics limits itself to affirming only those specific and not empirically derived features of existence that he assumes are found in (or implied by) the core commitments of 'sound common sense'—for example, that there is a given plurality of beings, including persons, with moral and absolutely free characteristics.

The last part of Chapter 6 offers a very brief sketch of the main immediate reactions to Kant, and the chapters that follow it explore in more detail the most influential of these reactions. *Part II* begins with a chapter characterizing the context and content of Reinhold's epochal first version of the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. A second chapter explains how Reinhold's long-term dual concern with the notions of popularity and systematicity led him to combine his interest in Kant with a focus on history and, in particular, on the need for philosophers to take a historical turn by writing in a narrative style that shows in detail how only a philosophical system in the Critical 'spirit' can provide genuine rational satisfaction for the latest stage of the truly popular (that is, genuinely universal) needs of humanity.

Chapter 7 explains how Reinhold's *Letters* took the form of a 'short' *Critique* that immediately after its publication was much more influential than the complex details of Kant's lengthy original. In the *Letters* Reinhold simplified matters enormously by not venturing at all into the complexities of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic. He jumped ahead to the moral and historical implications of the end of the Dialectic, arguing that Kant's espousal of a Critical and moral form of rational religion was the ideal solution to the battles between supernaturalism and naturalism that were raging in Germany after Jacobi had ignited the Pantheism Dispute. Jacobi created a sensation by arguing that the development of modern philosophy forces a choice between a theoretical monism that makes individuality and absolute freedom a mere myth, and a non-rational faith-based attitude that reveals one's supernatural being and the divine. Even before reading Kant, Reinhold had been engaged in numerous efforts to show how one might avoid such a choice, and how a proper Enlightenment philosophy could provide a systematic, long-term way to meet the 'popular' but still rational needs of sound common sense. Upon reading Kant, Reinhold believed that he had found the 'new Immanuel' and the perfect system for this project. Reinhold presented the *Critique* as the solution to the Pantheism Dispute and thereby the satisfaction of the most pressing spiritual needs of the era. The dilemma that Jacobi had posed could be escaped by means of the Critical strategy (developed by Kant even before the publication of Jacobi's work) of defending the universal and rational core of common-sense morality on the basis

of a Critical metaphysics that curbs the dogmatic pretensions of both traditional philosophical schools and their ‘anti-philosophical’ opponents. Admitting that he was not yet tracing Kant’s notion of pure practical reason and rational religion back to its ‘grounds’ in the first *Critique*, Reinhold satisfied himself and his audience with the claim that the ‘results’ of the *Critique* met the fundamental ‘need’ of the time (fully to satisfy popular Enlightenment morality through a hope in a ‘highest good’ warranted by rational religion)—just as Jesus had satisfied the ‘common sense’ of his time by turning dogmatic religion into rational morality.

Reinhold’s *Letters* leaves only a promissory note backing the claim that Kant’s analysis of the subjective structure of our faculties provides an apodictic grounding for the Critical system. The main hint that the *Letters* gives as to how this note might be redeemed involves an unfortunate suggestion that it rests on Kant’s moral argument for God being ‘as certain’ as the *cogito*. The first half of the *Letters* does not, however, defend this argument in detail, and the second half, with its extensive account of how Kant’s theory of mind avoids the dogmatic epistemological and metaphysical extremes of ancient and modern philosophy, works against the expectation of any kind of ‘Cartesian’ foundation for philosophy. This section clearly displays the tendency toward a historical turn in Reinhold’s methodology, and his optimistic rationalist reformulation of Herder’s notion of a succession of spirits of the age. It does not, however, provide anything like the rigorous ‘Cartesian’ grounding of the Critical philosophy that Reinhold implied could be easily given. And yet, when objections to Kant continued to be raised, Reinhold used the next version of the *Letters* not to retreat from ‘Cartesian’ notions (as I argue, in Chapter 2, that Kant himself did) but to shift attention to a new ‘Elementary-Philosophy’ of his own, which allegedly does provide an absolute foundation for philosophy in a basic ‘faculty of representation’ and an apodictic ‘principle of consciousness’. It is no wonder that, immediately afterwards, numerous post-Kantian systems appeared, one after the other, with criticisms of and substitutes for this principle. It is unfortunate, however, and somewhat surprising, that many of these substitutes continued to involve a search for some kind of quasi-Cartesian foundation rather than a full appreciation of the more modest common-sense strands of Kant’s work. (Reinhold was thus both the catalyst of the ‘Cartesian’, non-historical strands of post-Kantianism, which repeatedly led to a dead end, and the initiator of the non-Cartesian, historical strands of post-Kantianism, which provided a fruitful new paradigm for philosophical writing.)

Chapter 8 explores the way in which the historical turn provided an ever more relevant fallback position for Reinhold as he continued to run into difficulties in accounting for the ‘fate’ of the far from universal acceptance of the Critical philosophy—even after the publication of the *Letters* and his much more systematic Elementary-Philosophy. The first section of this chapter offers an account of the features central to the distinctively historical character of philosophical texts in general, and of how this makes philosophical writing both like and unlike science

and art. In a second section I argue that the specific features of the initial historical turn in philosophy are not to be found very much earlier or later than Reinhold's Critical phase. I also note that, although several systematic features of Reinhold's work can make it appear as if history is a secondary interest for him, this presumption is easily overcome by a closer look at his full career and his deep involvement with radical social change ever since his early years in the Austrian reform movement (prior to his flight from Catholicism and his pursuit of more radical change in Germany). Moreover, in addition to building a lengthy historical component into the first version of his *Letters*, Reinhold soon issued a series of works focusing on topics such as the 'spirit of the age', 'the history of the idea of spirit', 'the correction of previous misunderstandings of philosophers', 'the systematic presentation of all possible prior systems of metaphysics', and 'an overview of the condition of philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. This list does not even include Reinhold's other major contributions in this area: his path-breaking essay 'On the Concept of the History of Philosophy' (1791), the historical organization of the second volume of his *Letters* (1792), and his contribution to the Academy competition on 'progress in metaphysics' (1796).

All this historical work had an immediate and significant effect. Research has disclosed that Reinhold was an especially strong influence on Schelling's earliest work as a student in Tübingen. It is no surprise that Schelling placed an extraordinary emphasis on history,²⁸ and his early essay 'General Overview of the Latest Philosophical Literature' (1797–8) can be regarded as one of the first significant variations of the genre that Reinhold had invented. Because Schelling's work is still not very well known in English,²⁹ however, the rest of Chapter 8 focuses on Hegel and his response to Reinhold in the *Differenzschrift* (1801). Under the guise of an advocacy of Schelling's position over Fichte's, this early work by Hegel contains numerous very close but unacknowledged methodological parallels to Reinhold's work. Hegel goes so far as to charge Reinhold with a version of historicism that does not appreciate the rational elements hidden in past systems—precisely the position that in fact Reinhold clearly shows himself to have left behind. Rather than presenting a radical alternative to Reinhold's historical turn, Schelling and Hegel develop what is simply a more ambitious version of it, and one that is therefore much more questionable, for they are

²⁸ See Dieter Jähnig, *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie* (2 vols.; Pfullingen: Neske, 1966–9); Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz (eds.), *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975); Hartmut Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus: Ein kritischer Versuch* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzlar, 1993); and Axel Hutter, *Geschichtliche Vernunft: Die Weiterführung der Kantischen Vernunftkritik in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996).

²⁹ See, however, Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993); Manfred Baum, 'The Beginnings of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature', in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199–215; Rüdiger Bubner, *The Innovations of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman (eds.), *The New Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2004).

committed to trying to show that the stages of the history of thought parallel stages inherent all at once in consciousness, nature, and logic. I therefore conclude that (despite the limitations at that time of Reinhold's own foundationalist view of mind) the best example from this period of a philosophical approach that makes history central without extravagantly exaggerating our ability to know its ultimate structures with confidence is to be found not in the systems of German Idealism but in Reinhold's relatively modest essay 'On the Concept of the History of Philosophy'.

The two chapters of *Part III* are devoted primarily to Hegel, but, as might be expected in this context, the focus is not so much on his system in its own right as on the issue of how he presented his thought in relation to other philosophers, and on how later philosophers reacted to him in turn. One chapter discusses Hegel's critique of Kantian and Early Romantic aesthetics as overly 'subjective'; the other explains the enduring influence of Hegel's work on the philosophies of later thinkers such as Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, and Marx, and especially on the notion of historical materialism.

Chapter 9 considers Hegel's claim that earlier aesthetic theory was not adequately 'objective', and Jean-Marie Schaeffer's contentions that the differences between Hegel's aesthetics and others in the classical German tradition are relatively insignificant because the tradition as a whole suffers from an overly unified 'speculative' and 'ontological' orientation. I argue that both Hegel and Schaeffer overlook significant and defensible 'objective' strands in the aesthetics and general philosophy of Kant and the Early Romantics. The first step in this argument involves clearing away numerous presumptions (due in large part to Hegel's long-term influence) against German Romanticism as a monolithic, reactionary, and otherworldly movement, as well as misunderstandings of German Idealism as a subjectivist philosophy. Whatever the weaknesses of Late Romanticism, the philosophy of the Jena Circle (von Herbart, Erhard, and Niethammer) and the Early Romantic writing of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) is marked by starting from a common-sense realist orientation, and it aims to radicalize rather than reverse Kant's philosophy and his commitment to Enlightenment values such as autonomy.³⁰ I argue that German Idealism is also best understood as a form of realism (as the term is usually used in analytic metaphysics), and so the division between the Early Romantics and the Idealists does not concern subjectivism

³⁰ See, e.g., Jane E. Kneller, 'Introduction', in Kneller (ed.), *Novalis: Fichte Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. ix–xxxiv; Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2004); Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, *In Media Res: Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); and Fred Rush, *Irony and Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

on either side. It has to do instead with the fact that the Romantics go beyond even Kant in emphasizing restrictions on how much the structure of reality has a strongly systematic and rational form that we can actually determine.

I build on these points in assessing Hegel's aesthetics, which illustrates the historical turn in its own way by beginning with a criticism of earlier theorists such as Kant and Schlegel, and by offering a 'historical deduction of the true idea of art' in modern philosophy. In his 'deduction', Hegel links these theorists closely to Jena Romanticism in general as well as Fichte's philosophy and the notion of a 'bad infinity'—that is, an abstract and theoretically unfulfilled sense of rationality. Hegel contrasts this notion with the equally one-sided, because merely finite (even if concrete and 'fulfilled'), relation to art and reality that he finds in the beautiful but non-speculative achievements of Weimar classicism. Much of the dispute between Hegel and the others therefore turns on his distinctive but immodest speculative claim to know that the world as a whole (that is, in its intelligible 'true infinity') has a thoroughgoing purposive form, and on his familiar but questionable interpretive presumption that aesthetics in the Kantian tradition must do injustice to both the immediate sensory and underlying conceptual aspects of art and reality. From Hegel's perspective, the 'modest' Kantian and Romantic view of the relation between our mind and reality leads to a sense of fundamental limitation and ignorance that needs to be overcome rather than acknowledged.³¹ I agree that this overly speculative perspective leaves Hegel vulnerable to Schaeffer's critique, but I conclude by noting that the Romantics' more modest view protects them (if not others in the German mainstream) from Schaeffer's objections of ascribing to art a 'compensatory' role—that is, an extravagant 'foundational' and 'salvific' function that does injustice to philosophy and other dimensions of experience.

Chapter 10 explores the impact of Hegel's work in relation to three influential successors—Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard—who accept much of his general story of the stages of the history of philosophy but believe, for different reasons, that it has an all too idealistic shape. Feuerbach feels a need to stress the importance of sensory experience, and he goes into much more psychological detail than Hegel in explaining the structures of the phenomenon of unhappy consciousness—that is, alienated religiosity, especially in dogmatic Christianity. Insofar as he develops an original philosophical perspective, however, Feuerbach's major contribution probably lies not in new epistemological or metaphysical insights, but in his historical presumption that, if philosophy has already moved through the stages that Hegel has outlined, then the 'philosophy of the future' should not take the form of a redundant philosophical refutation of the religious dogmas of the past but instead should offer a concrete

³¹ For an argument that Hegel's aesthetics suffers from an inadequate appreciation of history, see Gregg Horowitz, 'The Residue of History: Dark Play in Schiller and Hegel', in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 4 (forthcoming).

anthropological diagnosis of the modern loss of conviction as a natural step in humanity's return to itself from the projection of its own 'species being' onto the idea of a transcendent power.

Hegel's and Feuerbach's notion of alienation is thematized by Marx in terms of the concrete economic (capitalist) phenomenon of our forfeiting our 'species being'—that is, our capacity for acts of unfettered production for the sake of humanity as a whole. The early Marx gives an impression of turning Hegel 'upside down' by claiming to explain errors in the history of thought through distorting pressures in the concrete social history of humans as natural and economic beings, rather than vice versa. It is not clear, however, that Hegel denies the dependence of the 'superstructure' of human institutions and the development of particular forms of thought on the 'basis' of more concrete natural forces. The crucial question is how we can have confidence now in claiming to know the most fundamental structures here, and especially the specific nature of historical development. Although Marx emphasizes that at this point he turns to 'real science' and economics rather than the fanciful laws of philosophy, his own account of the fundamental features of historical materialism bears such an uncanny resemblance to the fundamentals of Hegel's metaphysical system that the differences between the two approaches appear to concern not general philosophical principles but rather the evaluation of contingent (albeit very important) aspects of the effectiveness of concrete contemporary institutions. Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all appear to agree on a fundamental historical turn in philosophy, even if they may differ on what particular phenomena are to be emphasized now in the expression of this turn.

Kierkegaard seems implicitly willing to accept much of the historical and teleological story that Hegel has to tell about traditional philosophy as such, but he is most interested in something that this story leaves out: the concern with individual freedom and the possibility of a relationship to a personal God that dominates traditional Christianity and the work of figures such as Kant, Hamann, Jacobi, and the later Schelling (whose final lectures Kierkegaard briefly attended in Berlin). Nonetheless, even if Kierkegaard does not provide a standard example of the historical turn by presenting a philosophy that takes its main calling to be a systematic historical comprehension of its predecessors, he still does incorporate in his own way most of the specific stages and dimensions of Hegel's narrative of spirit. He turns Hegel's dimensions of 'objective' and 'absolute' spirit into the main theme of his philosophical writings, the dialectical account of the 'stages on life's way' that each individual has to confront, while insisting that the ultimate religious stage include an irreducible appreciation of the event of revelation as such. In this way, Kierkegaard—like later thinkers such as Nietzsche, Rosenzweig and Heidegger—goes much further back than modern philosophy in an attempt to find something primordial in history and interpretation that contemporary subjects have to respond to above all else: the paradoxical claim of literally sacrosanct texts.

Part IV contains assessments of the work of three scholars who have presented some of the most detailed research on the whole period of the historical turn. *Chapter 11*, a brief discussion of Frederick Beiser's massive *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781–1801*, focuses mainly on the treatment of Kant and concerns about subjectivism. I agree with Beiser that, contrary to still common presumptions, the philosophy of Kant and the later Idealists is primarily oriented against, rather than toward, a position of subjectivism. I go somewhat further than Beiser, however, by arguing that, rather than speaking of a 'diminishing role' of subjectivism in this era, it can be held that with Kant the era was solidly anti-subjectivist from the start (see Chapters 2 and 3). Hence, I dissent from Beiser's largely neo-Hegelian account of the period, which (in its own version of something like the notion of a historical turn) credits the later Idealists with making philosophical progress precisely through a heroic 'de-subjectivizing' of allegedly subjectivist elements in Kant himself (which is not to deny that he has a basic interest in the phenomenon of subjectivity). I conclude by arguing that the Hegelian dismissal of the notion of a 'thing in itself' actually threatens a new 'quasi-subjectivism' of its own, for it seems to rule out even the possibility of any reality that is unlike what is determinable through the specific sensory and determined forms of our experience. In this way, it can become too 'Promethean' in implying that the human subject in general is the absolute measure of what is. Here Kant and the Romantics seem open to a more defensible realist position.

Chapter 12 concerns Manfred Frank's work, and especially his recent study *Selbstgefühl*. With its very careful systematic and historical focus on the peculiar phenomenon of immediate self-awareness, this work is a paradigm of the kind of detailed reconstruction of early phases of the Idealist era for which Frank is especially well known. The phenomenon of this kind of awareness suddenly became a main topic in the late eighteenth century, and now it has become a center of attention throughout continental philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy as well. Although it has several epistemological and metaphysical peculiarities, it also has an obvious special connection with aesthetic experience. It typically concerns matters of inner feeling that can become expressed aesthetically in a particular style that reflects one's distinctive individuality. For this reason, I characterize the ever-growing philosophical literature that emphasizes these features for their own sake—and especially apart from traditional moral, religious, and scientific agendas—as involving both a 'subjective turn' and an 'aesthetic turn'. I take these turns to be distinct but closely related movements, and to define a major feature of modernity's 'spirit', especially in the period immediately after Kant and in the strong revival of post-Kantian approaches in contemporary philosophy. After distinguishing these turns from the extreme positions of subjectivism and aestheticism, I argue that their growing significance can be connected with the continuing phenomenon of the historical turn, which, not coincidentally, began in the same era. It is only natural that at precisely the time that philosophy seemed to be becoming an increasingly autonomous form

of writing, not beholden to other fields such as theology, natural science, or mere *belles-lettres*, it needed to secure its own special subject matter and style. Philosophical writers began more and more to fulfill themselves distinctively by accepting the need to be convincing in a broadly aesthetic (that is, as opposed to moral, scientific, religious, sophistic, and so on) manner, a manner that expresses their individual style and concerns general features of subjectivity not properly treated anywhere else (consider not only the focus of Frank's work but also that of the best of figures such as Schleiermacher, Sartre, Beckett, Foucault, the Deconstructionists, Cavell, and so on). Given the abundant mysteries of its own earlier tradition, and the need for its writing to avoid descending into mere expressionism, and hence to maintain a progressive cognitive character, it is not surprising that so much philosophical writing, especially after Kant, took on a hermeneutical and historical style of this type. This is not to rule out the possibility that many parts of the discipline of philosophy—or, some day, perhaps even the whole of it—may instead finally take on the form of something very much like the rigorous science that Kant had projected. If one looks at the actual practice of the most interesting philosophers of our own time, however, it surely appears that this day is very far off. For now, there is much to celebrate in the fact that current philosophers are productively repeating, in a myriad of creative and insightful ways, the subjective, aesthetic, and historical turns that started in the era of German philosophy immediately after Kant.

Given the argument of Chapter 12, it is no wonder that writers within this stream of contemporary philosophy have given renewed attention to the task of making sense of the main developments of the 'founding' era of Idealism in late-eighteenth-century Jena. In *Chapter 13* I discuss methodological issues concerning the most extensive research on this era, the massive 'Jena Project' directed by Dieter Henrich (who, along with Hans-Georg Gadamer, was one of Manfred Frank's teachers). After decades of very productive traditional scholarship on Kant and Hegel, Henrich turned to devoting most of his energy to guiding a detailed exploration of the various 'constellations' out of which the best-known German philosophies developed. Historical research has revealed that, in addition to relatively prominent writers such as Jacobi, Reinhold, Hölderlin, and Novalis, there are numerous obscure figures such as Diez, Leutwein, Sinclair, and Schmid who played a major role in these constellations. The methodology of the Jena Project reflects three central features of the study of constellations in general: it emphasizes groups, rather than isolated individuals, it works to identify stars of enduring significance, and it aims to discern patterns that are at first hidden.

The Jena Project not only studies the historical turn within its original Jena setting but it also aims at a philosophical 'reactivation of Idealism' in our own time, and thus at a reinforcement of German Idealism's commitment to combining systematic studies of subjectivity with a style of philosophical writing that is fundamentally historical and in many ways aesthetic. Through learning about and reactualizing its own history, the Jena Project also aims to strengthen, and

not merely examine, Idealism's substantive commitment to autonomy. At this point, however, some of the distinctive features of its method—for example, its emphasis on hidden group influences—can threaten to encourage the historicist thought that the very aim to be self-determining in this way (which brings along with it the growing realization that philosophical developments may be affected by countless non-rational influences) can itself create a kind of self-undermining 'Copernican vertigo'.

I conclude by arguing that, once an appropriately moderate understanding of autonomy is introduced, the Jena Project—and the historical turn in general—can meet this threat, and thus can serve to reinforce rather than to jeopardize what is best in the original ideals of Jena. In this way, even though Kant himself was not a participant within what I define as the historical turn, his overall modest Critical conception of philosophy remains relevant to the proper appreciation of the work in the turn that came after him.

PART I
KANT AND AFTER

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Text and Context: Hermeneutical Prolegomena to Interpreting a Kant Text

I.

One of the presuppositions of this volume is the phenomenon of a lack of consensus in the interpretation of Kant's philosophy. This lack may seem very surprising because it can hardly be said that Kant has been neglected. Ever since the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, the question of the interpretation of the Critical philosophy has been one of the most basic issues of German thought. The 1780s and 1790s were marked by heated disputes between Kant's successors, most of whom were either harsh critics and opponents of his work or controversial 'friends' who dismissed what they took to be its dead 'letter' for the sake of the 'spirit' that they presumed to find in it.¹ Later, and especially after the Second World War, there was a decline in Germany of systematic philosophy in the grand Kantian fashion, but there was a continuous interest in history of philosophy in general and in Kant in particular. In other countries, above all Great Britain and the United States, Kant scholarship began to take on a new level of complexity and analytic rigor by the late 1960s.² These trends converged when significant new editions and translations of Kant's works and notes were put together by teams of German and American scholars. By the end of the century, Kant had become a dominant systematic influence within the practical wing of analytic philosophy (largely because of Rawls and his students) and a

¹ I have argued elsewhere that some of Kant's very first and most influential interpreters distorted his project in a basic way that had important repercussions for all philosophy afterwards. See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). My present argument does not rest on the strong claim of that book that Kant's project was subject to a fundamental misinterpretation, but that claim does complement the more moderate argument I am making here that the interpretation of figures such as Kant is no easy or insignificant matter. Elsewhere I have also argued that significant misunderstandings of German Idealism in general, at least in Anglophone contexts, have until very recently also blocked a full appreciation of that very important movement. See my editor's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

² For a review of some developments, see my 'Recent Work on Kant's Theoretical Philosophy', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1982), 1–24.

growing presence again even within its theoretical wing (with the work of Sellars and Strawson now complemented by that of McDowell and Friedman).

Despite the enormous strides of recent decades, the upshot of all this effort has been anything other than a detailed and undisputed understanding of the Critical philosophy. Helpful 'cooperative commentaries' and collections of overview essays have provided some orientation for teaching purposes,³ but the details and fundamental character of Kant's Critical project remain very much in dispute. Given the extraordinarily complex structure and terminology of Kant's work, the problem here is not merely one of assessing the truth or relevance of his doctrines; the fundamental problem is one of first determining the mere meaning and structure of its fundamental components. Central doctrines such as his transcendental deductions, his transcendental idealism, and his notion of transcendental freedom remain in a state where rival conceptions of them barely make contact with one another. Disagreements about the overall aim of the Critical philosophy also persist. Highly metaphysical and intensely anti-metaphysical approaches both remain popular; humanistic and non-humanistic interpretations still flourish.

In the face of such conflicts, some philosophers still assume that the problem here is basically Kant's fault, that his writings are hopelessly vague and inconsistent. This suspicion can arise from a historical perspective, especially from those who get carried away with a 'patchwork' interpretation that finds strands from very different periods left carelessly side-by-side in Kant's main writings. But the suspicion arises most often from the non-historical perspective of analytic approaches that extract terms and propositions from Kant's writings without a clear sense of the date or purpose of particular statements, and which thus find numerous 'contradictions' that might have been resolved from a broader and more patient perspective.

It was because of a concern about approaches like this that I focused my first book on one small and admired section of Kant's *Critique*, the Paralogisms. My goal was to interpret Kant's text in such a way as to try to put his arguments always into the context of the development of his system as a whole and with a view to its place in his own tradition.⁴ At the same time I attempted to indicate the philosophical complexity of the problem of interpreting Kant by presenting my own assessment of each of Kant's arguments in the context of a comparison with the best contemporary strands of thought, German as well as English. Behind my approach was a desire to move Kant scholarship sharply away from the tendency to present either a 'merely historical' restatement of his words

³ See, e.g., Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten: Ein kooperativer Kommentar* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989); Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Patricia Kitcher (ed.), *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); and Georg Mohr and Marcus Willaschek (eds.), *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998).

⁴ See especially the new Preface to my *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; 2nd edn., 2000).

or a hasty ahistorical critique or expropriation of his presumed doctrines for contemporary analytic purposes. Fortunately, it does appear that studies of Kant since then have been moving toward something like this more hermeneutical approach, to one degree or another. German studies have increasingly taken into account the need to position Kant in relation to contemporary trends in analytic philosophy, and studies in English have fruitfully incorporated some of the details of recent German research on Kant's *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. And yet, despite the very significant achievements of recent works on Kant that are too numerous to mention, the goal of a comprehensive and definitive interpretation of even small parts of his main texts seems to remain as far away as ever. Moreover, many Anglophone philosophers still naively presume that elementary issues of text editing and historical background have all been settled, and that somewhere in the mountain of German books on Kant there are close and detailed discussions of the most difficult passages in the Critical philosophy.⁵ Just as naively, historical interpreters sometimes presume that philosophical disputes about meaning, knowledge, and metaphysics (e.g., 'concept empiricism') have been settled to an extent that allows them to be 'applied' straightforwardly to Kant's writings.

Both of these presumptions are misleading but in a way that I believe may indicate something positive and not merely the shortcomings of recent philosophy. The historical limitations of even some of the best recent 'textual' work on Kant can be a welcome reminder that the history of philosophy, unlike many branches of the humanities, has a side to it that provides instances of clear and significant progress. The fact is that we do occasionally find new letters, collections of notes, and other data that can unexpectedly help to corroborate interpretations that earlier may have seemed quite speculative.⁶ Similarly, from the recent experience of phenomena such as the spectacular rise and decline of rabid Wittgensteinianism and Heideggerianism we can learn that contemporary systematic philosophy is hardly an Archimedean point. Just as in the revolutions of natural science, it can happen that the most unquestioned philosophical conceptions of one era are precisely the ones that seem out of date a short time later. There are all sorts of grounds for such shifts in philosophy. Sometimes the shifts may be merely a matter of passing fashions and external pressure or of developments within the internal logic of a very specific position, but they can also be the result

⁵ I note the naivety of this presumption in my review of the first systematically edited volume in years in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*: 'I. Kant, Vorlesungen über Anthropologie', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 37 (1999), 368–70. Very specific problems with the presumption are also discussed in Dieter Schönecker, 'Textvergessenheit in der Philosophiehistorie', in Dieter Schönecker and Thomas Zwenger (eds.), *Kant Verstehen/Understanding Kant* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 159–81.

⁶ I believe corroboration of this sort was provided for my earlier hypotheses about the role of the lectures as an indication of Kant's metaphysics, and the role of Reinhold as a distorting influence in the immediate reception of Kant's views. See the new Preface to *Kant's Theory of Mind*, and *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 1.

of a fruitful influence on systematic philosophy from developments in the study of the history of philosophy.

This kind of interaction is becoming especially intense in our own time. Perhaps the best reason for characterizing contemporary philosophy as 'post-modern' in a positive sense is that it is beginning to take on a broadly hermeneutical style, a style in which close analysis of arguments and original excavations of historical detail are blended more than ever before.⁷ Rather than assuming that the approaches of historical reconstruction and contemporary analysis have nothing much to do with one another, as was assumed for a long time by both the proponents and opponents of positivism, leading contemporary philosophers and historians of philosophy are now very often interested in exploring how each approach has an effect on the other. A striking general feature of much current systematic work is the growing realization that in order to develop and defend a significant philosophical thesis (e.g., in case studies in the philosophy of science, or in recent defenses of 'virtue ethics'⁸) one of the very best procedures is to compare it with the historical options that have preceded and influenced the current state of the debate. Conversely, historians of philosophy have realized that in deciding what basic points to emphasize in interpreting a figure as difficult and deep as Kant, it is important to consider how his system can look from the perspective of what seem to be the best systematic options now available. If one happens, for example, to believe (e.g., on the basis of 'post-Kripkean' work) that metaphysics can function now as a viable and no longer thoroughly suspicious endeavor, then it only makes sense to try to read Kant in light of this fact, and to explore strands in his thought (e.g., essentialism) that appear rooted in what we can now appreciate as a reasonable respect for the importance of metaphysics.⁹ This point is compatible with also acknowledging that certain strands of past metaphysics (e.g., spiritualism) seem hopelessly out of date, and that a close reading of Kant can reveal ways in which, despite confusing terminological complexities, his work anticipated current critical insights along this line as well. It is difficult, of course, to work out the right balance here, and to a surprising extent many treatments of Kant are still much too one-sided. With respect to the Paralogisms, for example, several excellent analytic writers of a metaphysical orientation have jumped to the conclusion that, simply because Kant says a few things against certain specific arguments against the soul's substantiality, therefore he was altogether denying that the self exists or can be

⁷ The significance of new 'analytic' treatments of the importance of history for philosophy is discussed in Gary Gutting's helpful study, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁸ See esp. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

⁹ See, e.g., my Postscript to *Kant's Theory of Mind*, and my 'Kant and Short Arguments to Humility', in Pedrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Kant's Legacy: Essays in Honor of L. W. Beck* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2001), 167–94.

a substance. A similarly one-sided but quite opposite school of thought tends to praise Kant because he supposedly once and for all destroyed the doctrine of the substantiality of the soul—even though, when one looks closely at the arguments that such interpreters repeat or endorse, one finds nothing directly relevant but only much weaker propositions about difficulties in proving a priori the self's immortality or in finding empirical grounds for non-empirical conclusions.¹⁰

These one-sided approaches are yet one more reason for emphasizing the need for a thoroughly hermeneutical approach to Kant—one that insists on going back and forth between history and system, part and whole, reconstruction and assessment. Such an approach to Kant is especially worth pressing at this time because it seems only now to have become clear that this kind of hermeneutical approach is finally becoming part of the mainstream in the interpretation of other highly contested figures in modern philosophy. Although analytic philosophy was originally characterized by a disdainful ignoring of past figures, or a reference to them simply for the purpose of illustrating fallacies, recent developments have indicated that even those who were schooled in this ahistorical approach have come to see that it has outlived its usefulness. The lesson of all this for the Kant scholar should be the realization that the incompleteness and complexity of Kant interpretation need not be a sign of its weakness but rather an indication that the Critical philosophy, like other truly 'classical' achievements, has an ever relevant potential, and that the significance of its main doctrines can be no more fixed in place than the significance of the best recent, and still controversial, ideas of contemporary philosophers. Just as we should give up the old analytic presumption that the past can be put completely behind us, we should also give up the schoolbook historian's presumption that there is a complete and final interpretation that scholars can be expected to settle on regarding the most important features of a philosophy as central as Kant's. Such a presumption is unrealistic not because of confusions in Kant or weaknesses in his interpreters but simply because Kant's philosophy is so inextricably intertwined with our whole tradition and its ongoing redefinition of itself.

On this point, Kant may have been his own worst enemy when he sometimes encouraged a much too optimistic view on the issue of understanding his Critical philosophy, a view that could only lead (and did lead) to disappointment.¹¹ This problem became especially acute because of his remarkable suggestion that there was no conflict between his systematic and popular intentions, and that

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Kant's Theory of Mind*, ch. 2.

¹¹ In *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 2, I examine the fateful difficulties that arose when Kant's first readers, especially Reinhold, made the presumption that the Critical philosophy must be immediately evident. This presumption had an understandable source in Kant's positive relation to common sense, but it went too far and distorted both Kant interpretation and systematic philosophy in general by unrealistically absolutizing the notion of a 'crystal clear' foundation. As a consequence, the failure of philosophy to live up to this ideal often led to a premature despair about philosophy itself rather than an appreciation for the more modest kind of system that Kant had proposed.

doctrines within his system that are as central as the categorical imperative could be as evident as common sense even if they required a transcendental grounding in metaphysics.¹² This suggestion had an appealing anti-elitist motivation, but it spawned a whole sequence of idealistic philosophies that strove in vain to demonstrate that systematic philosophy could be completely ‘popular’, i.e., immediately certain throughout. Now that we have some perspective on the excessive disappointment with systematic philosophy that arose when the Critical philosophy itself turned out to be inescapably esoteric, we should know better than to jump to a total rejection of Kant’s methodology simply because it failed to live up to some of its most ambitious suggestions. It is important to remember that, on the whole, Kant’s system is surely much more moderate and commonsensical than the positions constructed by his best-known immediate predecessors and successors, the extreme dogmatists, skeptics, and absolute idealists of modernity. Even if Kant’s system is a multilayered complex that has only one root in common sense (in its reliance on ordinary perceptual, moral, and even aesthetic experience), it is no crime if the other root of his work (the ‘transcendental’ arguments), like all good philosophy, is inextricably involved with some abstract and endlessly disputable concepts. The fertile ambiguity of these concepts (e.g., synthesis, autonomy) has by now surely demonstrated their worth, and it is precisely this fertility that makes his system continually relevant, so that the mere unlikelihood of a ‘final interpretation’ of the *Critique* should be the very opposite of an objection to its philosophical value.

Scholars perplexed by the notorious controversies that plague Kant interpretation should take solace from the fact that even the simplest and best-known aspects of other major modern philosophies have also been susceptible to wide swings of interpretation and misinterpretation—and that they remain all the more valuable for having survived their misuse. For this reason I will eventually turn to a brief interpretation of a specific Kantian text only after indicating how its possible (and frequent) misunderstanding resembles a common fate undergone by the other most important philosophies of modernity. In this way I will try at least to illustrate what I do not have space to demonstrate here, namely, that the overlooked common-sense character of its general orientation, and the endless disputability of its technical terms, are not problems peculiar to Kant’s philosophy. Like the philosophies of all the greatest modern thinkers, the Critical philosophy cannot expect to escape constant misinterpretation. In particular, the undeniable focus on the idea of subjectivity in all modern philosophies has time and again encouraged ‘outsiders’ to distort them into easily dismissed extreme forms of subjectivism. This tendency has been combined with a preoccupation

¹² Schleiermacher raised the objection that Kant made an inconsistent attempt to satisfy popular and systematic goals at once (see above, n. 5). For an argument that Kant combines these concerns in his ‘modest’ system much better than might be expected, even if not completely successfully, see my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 1.

with skepticism—an understandable focus for the British empiricist tradition, but one that has all too often been projected improperly by analytic interpreters onto writers outside that tradition. Moreover, to free Kant's system for a proper interpretation one has not only to overcome these 'English' prejudices against modern philosophy in general but—as I will point out in the next section—one also has to fend off various equally dangerous tendencies stemming from sources connected with continental trends.

II.

Anyone taking a serious historical approach to Kant must from the very start attend to the general historical context of his work as the centerpiece of modern philosophy. In particular, any attempt to situate Kant in regard to our own struggle to define ourselves with respect to the phenomenon of 'modernity' cannot avoid seeing his work, as Heidegger did, as the critical middle step between the beginning and end points of that era, namely, Descartes and Nietzsche. In other words, to approach Kant historically is to ask, as Heidegger and others have, what Kant's position is in the fateful trio: Descartes–Kant–Nietzsche. The challenge that then arises is one of avoiding the specific prejudices of Heidegger and others like him, without denying the special significance of the development from Descartes through Kant to Nietzsche. In other words, there should be some way to read these thinkers as main stages in the history of subjectivity without presuming that they are mere pawns in a movement that inexorably concludes in either mere subjectivism or 'the death of the subject'.¹³

All these considerations presuppose the significance of the phenomenon of modern philosophy without yet indicating what there is about it that holds our interest. Professional philosophers tend to take for granted a remarkable fact of popular life, namely, that the pre-eminent academic fame and influence of the Descartes–Kant–Nietzsche trio is matched by their popularity in the marketplace, where their books continue to sell better than those of contemporary professional philosophers. Readers of all kinds continue to be fascinated by them, but why? Is it a matter of their sheer popular appeal, or of the systematic fact of their having 'clearly established' certain fundamental doctrines? The first option is belied by the difficulty of their writing, and the latter option also seems unlikely—especially since in our age, when we are asked if philosophers have 'established' something, it is hard not to take this as an ironic rather than rhetorical query. Somehow the writings of these philosophers have maintained a dominant position even if they have few literal 'followers' and their main views may be far from clear or well-grounded, let alone true.

¹³ See my 'The Ineliminable Subject: From Kant to Frank', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 217–30.

But this only intensifies the question—why, unless they are sociologists, should current readers continue to be so concerned with these figures ‘rather’ than ‘directly’ or more extensively with the leading philosophies of our own time, for example, with problems such as those found in the writings of Chisholm, Davidson, Nozick, Searle, Nagel, Fodor? Typical analytic philosophers still ask, is not the scholar working on the texts of Descartes or Kant or Nietzsche defined by an interest in history and interpretation that is ‘merely’ historical and that makes him, at best, a ‘historian of philosophy’ rather than a ‘genuine’ philosopher—just as a historian of science is, at best, only accidentally a true ‘scientist’ (in the narrow English sense of the term, which is used only for natural scientists, and not scholars in general)? And here yet another embarrassing question arises. Suppose, just for the moment, that what scholars of modern philosophy do for the most part may be ‘only’ history. If that is all it is, why then does it seem so very complicated? That is, why cannot ‘research’ on Descartes and Kant and Nietzsche, whose works have been especially well known for such a long time, come to anything like a close? Is there really anything very important and philosophical that remains to be said about these long ago figures—is not all that can be left for us little more than a matter of incidental curiosities? After all, leaving aside some of the idiosyncrasies of Nietzsche’s work, most of the writings of these figures were meant to be fairly straightforward and literal, and so there seems to be little reason to justify studying them intensively in the comparative and literary manner that may be appropriate in ‘decoding’ great fiction writers. So, why cannot we simply summarize the classic texts of this trio in a quick way, and get on with other business, i.e., ‘real’ philosophy? (And why is that when these philosophers are ‘summarized’, in this age of a plethora of encyclopedias, no respected scholar actually relies on these summary statements?)

Merely from the way that these questions have been posed, it should be obvious that they contrast with the hermeneutical perspective that I stressed earlier. These questions stem from what is still a very widespread and influential analytic position that, even after the decline of classical positivism, is still dominated by a hasty acceptance of several controversial, unfortunate, and artificial dichotomies. The last question (concerning the lack of a ‘quick’ way of accurately summarizing great philosophies), for example, presupposes an overly simple distinction between text and context—as if classical philosophical writings are like old technical manuals that can be made fully intelligible as soon as one has an adequate dictionary in hand. Similarly, the question before that suggested a related sharp distinction between doing philosophy and doing history of philosophy—as if these are always entirely separate and not merely to some extent distinct. In a similar way, an even earlier question assumed a naive picture of philosophy itself, as a package of doctrines that might be timelessly sorted out and ‘established’ independent of unexpected developments in the practice of philosophy as a human activity.

To appreciate fully the value of the hermeneutical approach discussed earlier, it is worth exploring how this approach differs from the two other major

methodological options of our time: the lingering 'positivist' position just noted, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a radical pragmatic alternative that is its natural complement and polar opposite. In contrast to what I will call the 'positivist' attitude underlying the three sharp dualisms of text/context, philosophy/history, and doctrine/activity, there is the increasingly popular alternative of 'global pragmatism' a position that would wholly erase rather than merely soften the dualisms of the positivist past. Richard Rorty and advocates of an explicitly historicist approach have contended that philosophy is never more than a 'conversation', that is, it is never a clearly established 'pure discipline' but is always a matter of mere rhetoric and practical persuasion. Sometimes this pragmatist position on philosophy is extended to an even more radical position on knowledge in general, so that natural science itself, and any other supposedly 'pure' cognitive enterprise, is said to share the 'softness' of philosophy. Thus Rorty has argued that the key lesson of Thomas Kuhn's revolutionary philosophy of science¹⁴ is—contrary to Kuhn's own self-understanding—nothing less than an across-the-board claim that in all fields a law of 'strong readings' holds: the 'truth' of writings lies not in a correspondence with a transcendent reality but instead is just (roughly) a function of whatever the latest and most creative interpreters can 'get away with' among their peers. Leaving aside the most radical implications of Rorty's view, the mere existence and influence of his position implies that, in addition to the three kinds of 'dualisms' that we began with, there is also a fourth and even more influential and (in my view) dangerous dualism: a methodological Scylla and Charybdis that would force us into accepting either the 'positivist' standpoint of the purists or the radical pragmatist standpoint of the holists. This language may seem overly dramatic, and the slogan-like positions that I have just attached to radical positivism and pragmatism are so extreme that at first they may understandably appear to be mere caricatures—but a case can be made that in fact these extremes dominated metaphilosophical discussions for a long time, and they remain the main obstacles to a truly hermeneutical approach to modern texts. Even if Russell and Ayer are no longer with us, echoes of the old positivist line on interpretation can still be found,¹⁵ while the opposing broadly neo-Hegelian pragmatism of Rorty also continues to gain attention.

It is precisely in order to oppose these two powerful trends that I have been arguing for a 'middle' position on reading philosophical texts, a 'moderate hermeneutical realism' that rejects the presumption that philosophy must be modeled on either radical purism or radical holism. Exploring this kind of middle position can and should be much more than a merely formal exercise. The

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, 'Thomas Kuhn, Rocks and the Laws of Physics', *Common Knowledge*, 3 (1997), 1–16.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Barry Smith's caricature of 'grandiose' German and sober analytic approaches in *Austrian Philosophy* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1994), 13–14. Cf. Lorenz Puntel, 'The History of Philosophy in Contemporary Philosophy: The View from Germany', *Topoi*, 10 (1991), 147–53.

extreme positions distinguished here are also tied up with several influential and not entirely harmless substantive views (mostly, crude naturalisms of various kinds), and the material critique of these views cannot be cleanly separated from the formal correction of the extreme methodological legacies of positivism and pragmatism. But while the motivation for opposing these legacies may involve some substantive commitments to more traditional philosophical positions, it need not mean a return to the speculative excesses of the past or the reinstitution of any kind of antiquarian historicism. There is a sober and non-reactionary way of focusing on the interpretation of texts—and in particular on interpretations of central figures such as Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche—that is itself a highly philosophical enterprise and much more than an idle engagement with hermeneutics for its own sake. Without elevating the history of philosophy into a ‘history of being’ (*Seinsgeschichte*), a ‘genealogy of power’, or a *Heilsgeschichte*, either of reason or anti-reason, one can still argue that even in our analytic age the task of the interpretation of the classics of the history of our tradition is itself one of the chief concerns and problems of philosophy.

To do justice to this hermeneutical task, both positivist and pragmatist presumptions must be overcome. On the positivist, or ‘purist’ view, there is a presumption that philosophy has an obvious core of ‘set’ problems, for example, ‘the problem’ of universals, or skepticism, or determinism, and that it makes sense simply to go straightway into the latest formal options on these problems. On the pragmatist, or holist view, in contrast, there seems to be no such strictly delineated problem set at all; there are simply the controversies of the age, and the new conversational moves that need to be promulgated so that so-called natural forces can be all the more interestingly channeled. The remarkable fact is that, despite all their differences, these two extreme approaches are similar in their fundamentally non-hermeneutical approach: on neither view do the concrete details of specific texts of the past play more than an incidental role in philosophy.

This non-hermeneutical approach has led to serious errors in influential interpretations of the main stages of the modern era, from Descartes to Nietzsche through Kant. Consider two contrasting and very influential approaches to Descartes in the immediate post-war era. On the one hand, there was the common Rylean and quasi-Wittgensteinian idea that Descartes’s philosophy was nothing other than a series of skeptical challenges, and that therefore his concerns and questions can be expressed clearly enough by us without any of his own peculiar arguments and terminology, for example, in terms of the hypothesis of a ‘ghost in a machine’, or a ‘brain in a vat’.¹⁶ Alternatively, it was presumed, with Dewey and Rorty, that Descartes was a radical foundationalist, obsessed with a positive ‘quest for certainty’ for its own sake; and then the point of discussing him was simply to provide a liberating therapy that allows us to see beyond the ‘fixations’ behind this quest, so that we can live instead in the safe ‘daylight’ of the

¹⁶ See, e.g., Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949).

'spiritual present', i.e., American pragmatism.¹⁷ For a long time these were the mainline readings of Descartes in the English-speaking world and yet they obviously leave us with a Descartes who is a cardboard subjectivist, i.e., a 'Cartesian skeptic', or dogmatist that no one could be seriously interested in today.

Note that both the positivist and the pragmatist approaches agreed in supposing that there was nothing very significant about the specific historical detail and context of Descartes's philosophical activity, for example, his metaphysical physics or his complex theology. All that mattered were some extreme and abstract 'arguments' that could be attached to his name (e.g., that we should supposedly start out [!] by completely mistrusting our faculties merely because of a few errors), or some old general 'tendency' (e.g., a representationalist foundationalism projected back on to him from Locke and later British radicals) that we could proudly consider ourselves to have transcended. What is remarkable about this whole procedure is that it presumed to know the shape of Descartes's own position, so that it could bury 'him' (rather than someone else), and yet, at the very same time, it insisted that we not lose ourselves in the detail of the actual context of Descartes's activity to see whether he was, after all, committed to, or even interested in, the positions of the straw man varieties of Cartesianism that were to be left behind. All the more remarkably—and yet quite unsurprisingly—this 'know it all' perspective was found precisely in those philosophers who not only admitted that they had not studied Descartes in great detail but even prided themselves on that fact! After all, for them what mattered was not the past, but the 'now' of science or scientific philosophy—or of 'strong interpretation', which disposes with mere details and facts for the sake of 'interesting to us' vehicles of 'solidarity' formation.

Fortunately, toward the end of the twentieth century the Anglophone attitude to modern philosophy changed considerably due to the much more sophisticated work of more recent scholars such as Harry Frankfurt, Edwin Curley, Daniel Garber, and Stephen Menn. But this does not change the fact that until at least the early 1970s the non-historical type of approach reigned without question in leading English discussions of Descartes, for example, by Gilbert Ryle, Anthony Kenny, or Norman Malcolm and that, oddly enough, parallel and equally inaccurate, even if more interesting, 'readings' could also be found on the continent in the aftermath of Heidegger and Maritain. For decades in America, Britain, and many schools of continental philosophy, 'Descartes' meant nothing other than the advocacy of skepticism, or 'private language', or sense data and sheer subjectivism (and this presumption has continued to be promulgated by many philosophers who were trained in that era). If one tried to suggest anything more

¹⁷ See, e.g., Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). The phrase about the 'spiritual present' comes from Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, just before his famous analysis of the dialectic of recognition.

sophisticated in the defense of Cartesianism, one was initially met by incredulity and incomprehension, because it had supposedly been settled by one's teachers (e.g., Wittgenstein, or, more often, his students—or Heidegger) that one should not be misled by the blind authorities of the past.

Cracks in this anti-historical perspective began to appear in the USA in the early 1970s, as the tradition of analytic philosophy as a purely formal enterprise began to self-destruct. In addition to Quine's and Kuhn's attacks on numerous 'dogmas', and their indirect undermining of the whole pretense of presenting an entirely 'pure' form of science or philosophy, there developed a recognition that substantive metaphysics or ethics need not be the fantasy of a benighted past. And then, despite their own reservations, the achievements and prestige of Rawls and Kripke made the world safe again for grand philosophical theories. Substantive metaphysical and normative theories became a reality and not merely a permitted possibility—and these theories often brought with them a growing appreciation for the significance of the history of philosophy, from Anselm through Leibniz and Kant and after (see, e.g., work by Robert M. Adams, J. B. Schneewind, and Stephen Darwall).

An especially revealing indication of this change in the historical self-understanding of analytic philosophy can be found in the delayed and drawn-out nature of Bernard Williams's book on Descartes,¹⁸ a work that stands right at the midway point between the early and very dismissive studies by Ryle, Kenny, and others, and the genuinely historical as well as philosophical work of Frankfurt, Curley, and most later interpreters. My hypothesis is that Williams's Descartes book was delayed for two different reasons. One reason would be that for a while Williams found the Descartes project very boring; he could well have regarded it merely as a mechanical 'assignment', and a relatively unneeded one—as just one more anti-Cartesian tract of the Wittgensteinian era. But another reason for the delay, I suspect, is that Williams was in fact a careful and historical reader (a classics scholar, after all), and so he could not help but eventually see that there was much more to Descartes than his analytic colleagues had realized. One sees this, for example, in his chapter on Descartes's philosophy of science, which manages to go far beyond the 'rationalist' caricature of earlier interpreters. On my hypothesis it is not surprising that Williams eventually came to reflect on the methodology of his work, and that he attached to his Descartes volume an interesting preface that attempted to distinguish between a mere exercise in 'the history of ideas' and work in the general area of history of philosophy that is properly philosophical after all. The details of his discussion are not as important as the mere fact that he was willing to broach the issue—and thus to begin to reverse the uniformly anti-historical orientation of his colleagues. It is therefore no wonder that in his later philosophy Williams went on to give a

¹⁸ Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (London: Pelican Books, 1978). In the preface, on p. 10, Williams notes that he began work on a Descartes project as early as 1963.

very historical twist to his studies in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, *Shame and Necessity*, and various reflections on Nietzsche.¹⁹ It is also no wonder that it was in his Descartes book that Williams found an occasion for introducing one of his own most influential philosophical ideas—the notion of an ‘absolute conception’ of the world, a notion that can, in retrospect, be understood as figuring not only in a spate of influential discussions of transcendental idealism²⁰ but also as helping to engender the whole debate on realism and anti-realism that came to dominate analytic discussions in epistemology and ethics (in the work of Michael Dummett and Thomas Nagel) throughout the rest of the century. Put very roughly, what Williams unearthed was the fact that Descartes’s reflective stance need not at all be reduced to an absurd skeptical or foundational project. It could rather be understood as, at least in part, reminding us of a very sharp and most general distinction between justification and truth, a distinction that very much needed re-examination in the post-Wittgensteinian and quasi-verificationist atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century philosophy (just as in mid-seventeenth-century thought, with its fierce battles between scientific evidence and metaphysical and theological truth claims). Rather than being regarded as an absurd subjectivist, Descartes could be understood as the first ‘transcendental’ objectivist, as the projector of a ‘view from nowhere’ that may be essential to any future self-understanding of science as well as philosophy.

However one stands on the ultimate coherence of this project (taken up more positively by Nagel than Williams himself), Williams’s work remains as a reminder that even the paradigms of analytic philosophy can provide examples of how a rigid distinction should not be presumed to hold between text and context, philosophy and history, doctrine and activity. The ‘absolute conception’ that Williams found in his own struggle to make sense of the aporias in such contemporary notions as Wittgenstein’s *Lebensform* can be said to be equally in the text and the context of Descartes work, in the history of philosophy and in the philosophy of the present, in the ‘eternal doctrine’ of realism and in the contemporary activity of fighting off certain kinds of ‘Wittgensteinian idealism’. Moreover, the example of Williams shows that, once we have moved beyond an artificial purism about philosophy or interpretation, we do not have to fall back into historicism or to go so far as to say that there is no line at all between genuine exegesis and sheer construction. There is no reason not to say that many of the crucial ideas that Williams needed really were ‘in’ Descartes’s text ‘all along’—although their salience depended on the existence of controversies in our own time, a context of controversies that provided the light for our seeing new depths in the text, for uncovering new or forgotten issues,

¹⁹ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁰ See, e.g., Jonathan Lear, ‘The Disappearing, We’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 58 (1984), 219–42; ‘Leaving the World Alone’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 79 (1982), 382–403; and ‘Transcendental Anthropology’, in Philip Pettit and John McDowell (eds.), *Subject, Thought, and Content* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 267–99.

and for revealing new perspectives on old and ever unresolved problems. Precisely because a fundamental problem such as that of making coherent the notion of an ‘absolutely objective’ conception (a conception that is itself highly relevant to reflections on hermeneutics) has still not been solved by contemporary discussions, there is no reason to presume that current epistemologists are taking a ‘second-best’ route if they go back again (as, for example, James Van Cleve and Keith DeRose have) to Descartes’s texts, for these are a source of subtle philosophical distinctions worth at least as much attention as the latest journal articles, or the latest fragments unearthed from Wittgenstein’s papers.

A similar story can, I believe, be told about the course of Nietzsche interpretation, especially in English. There too one can find for a long time a dominant tendency toward extreme and dismissive subjectivist interpretations. Nietzsche, as supposedly a proto-Nazi or a total relativist or nihilist, continued in many quarters to be a mere whipping post or source of confused attraction. And yet the very instability of Nietzsche interpretation, the swirl of interesting contradictory readings, and the prominence of his name in significant political events (Paris, 1968), eventually made it impossible for mainline analytic theorists to avoid actually looking at his work after decades of silent dismissal. And, just as Williams’s turn to Descartes happened to be especially fruitful because of a crisis in certain reigning theoretical (positivist or Wittgensteinian) dogmas in analytic philosophy, so the renewed interest in Nietzsche (and the subtle anti-subjective interpretations of him developed lately by, e.g., Richard Schacht, Maudemarie Clarke, and Raymond Geuss) was intensified by other obvious crises in that philosophy, most notably the ‘fragmentation’ of ethics analyzed by Alasdair MacIntyre. By the end of the twentieth century, most avant-garde English intellectuals found themselves probably closer to Nietzsche than anyone else, especially once it became clear that the old extreme readings of his work could be transcended. As with Descartes, the burial of a myth, namely the myth of positivist interpretations, coincided for some with a moment of identification with a philosophy from a very different time, and this in turn allowed for redefinitions of leading contemporary positions in terms that owed at least as much to a ‘historical’ figure as to any contemporary. Thus Williams, the paradigm of British analytic philosophers, and the major catalyst of much of the best work in recent ethical theory, ended up standing closer to Nietzsche than to any of his own best-known colleagues—imagine Richard Hare, or John Rawls, or Derek Parfit writing *Shame and Necessity!* (A similar story could be told of at least one very influential strand of philosophy in France, especially after 1968, which Foucault represented most influentially.²¹)

²¹ The volume *Why We are Not Nietzscheans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ed. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, proves the point of the problem of Nietzsche’s influence as a subjectivist in France, even if its own view of Nietzsche may suffer from some of the subjectivistic misconceptions of the past.

The upshot of these brief observations on interpretations of Descartes and Nietzsche in our own time can now be summarized in a preliminary hermeneutical thesis: despite its originally non-historical nature, much influential work even within analytical philosophy has been developed in a way that now clearly opposes the four anti-historical dualisms mentioned at the outset. That is, figures such as Descartes and Nietzsche are more alive today than ever, and to read them now at Cambridge or Chicago, as opposed to at Oxford or Cornell in the 1960s, is to accept from the start that text and context, philosophy and history, doctrine and activity, cannot be sharply separated, and that neither pure positivism nor radical pragmatism will do. History and ethics and metaphysics and philosophy in general are all unlike both science and 'mere conversation'; they are fields in which difficult truths and independent facts are sought by relying on the best thinkers of all times, and by using their texts in an objective hermeneutical manner as an irreducible source of illumination for our own ever-unresolved philosophical quandaries. Rather than being locked in subjectivism themselves, or in any way forcing us into such a position, Descartes and Nietzsche can be understood as developing sophisticated scientific and naturalistic philosophical alternatives that are meant precisely to liberate us from the arbitrariness of individual subjectivity.

III.

All these reflections are only 'prolegomena to interpreting Kant' (rather than an interpretation proper) in our own time, mere stage-setting to highlight the significance of a few words from a text of Kant. I will briefly discuss just one short passage in Kant that is relevant to a major controversy in all interpretation of Kant and that helps to reveal some of the ineliminable complexity and historicity of philosophical reflection in general. It can be understood as a reminder of how at the core of Kant's philosophy, like Descartes's and Nietzsche's, there are components that can lead—and actually have led—uncharitable readers to distort it into an absurd and easily dismissed subjectivism.

In his first Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant says: 'I have to deal with nothing save reason itself and its pure thinking; and to obtain complete knowledge of these, there is no reason to go far afield, since I come upon them in my own self. Common logic itself supplies an example, how all the simple acts of reason can be enumerated completely and systematically'.²² The key issue here, which I will come back to at the end, is how to read Kant's phrase 'in my own self'.

First, however, some more general points need to be reviewed. Kant's passage is an obvious reminder of the best-known feature of his philosophy, his doctrine of

²² Kant, A xiv. The translation is from Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929).

autonomy. The literal point of this doctrine is that in knowledge, ethics, and metaphilosophy we should follow only laws that 'we ourselves legislate'. The complexity here of the term 'law', its meaning in 'universalization' procedures in thinking about nature and ethics, has dominated most of the discussion of Kant over the years. But just as difficult and important as the notion of 'law' is the notion of the self. What 'self' is it that Kant believes should be the formal and efficient and perhaps final 'cause' of the 'self-legislation' with which he is concerned? A natural and dominant tendency, especially in English neo-Kantian ethics, from Rawls, through Korsgaard and Schneewind, has been to presume that this self is an individual 'human' self, understood in ordinary contingent ways, and then idealized to reflect the deliberations of a community of similar selves. Such a perspective is supposed to save Kant from Platonism, to make him the hero of modern anti-authoritarianism, and to provide some answer to the question of how the moral law, despite its severe demands, can be able to motivate us. This interpretation runs into serious problems, however, as soon as one presses the question (as G. E. Anscombe did) of why we should give absolutely overriding authority to the 'law' if it is simply a human construct.

Whether conceived in terms of Rawls's 'original position', or Korsgaard's 'standpoint of reflection', or Habermas's 'ideal communicative situation', the question remains, as Charles Larmore has argued recently, why should we give such weight to grounds that simply reflect the contingency of human choices? Larmore himself rejects what he calls the Kantian tradition here, and he argues, somewhat like Kierkegaard and Anscombe, that the mere process of human self-determination cannot magically bestow a value on beings that do not already have it: 'we misunderstand the nature of the democratic ideal . . . if we suppose that for it the collective will of the citizens constitutes the ultimate source of authority . . . popular sovereignty can be understood as manifesting itself through reasonable agreement only if it is defined as heeding the obligation of respect for persons'.²³ The crucial idea here is that the value of persons is not itself intelligible as a mere product of their choices; on the contrary, their choices and agreements have an understandable value to the extent that they reflect a prior recognition of the worth of rational persons as such. Larmore sees this recognition as rooted in a conception 'of the world [that] must have room for ideal entities, for only if reasons exist (a reason being itself neither physical nor psychological in character) can there be such a thing as normative knowledge of how we ought to act, but also, more fundamentally of how we ought to think'.²⁴ In saying this much, Larmore (reflecting on 'simple acts of reason') takes himself to be espousing an inescapable Platonism and to be distinguishing himself from the supposedly more 'voluntarist' position of Kant as well as his followers.

²³ Charles Larmore, 'The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy*, 96 (1999), 623. Some similar points are made in Philip Pettit, 'Two Construals of Scanlon's Contractarianism', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), 148–64.

²⁴ Larmore, 'The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism', 615.

All this suggests the possibility of a non-subjectivistic reading of the passage cited above from the first *Critique*. If one reads ‘reason’ and the ‘self’ of Kantian self-legislation and philosophical knowledge in individual, humanistic terms, than one will run into the problems that Larmore and others have emphasized. But, instead of going in this direction only to end up with a dismissal of Kant himself as much too ‘subjectivist’, note that one could rather use A xiv as an indication that, when Kant uses phrases such as ‘one’s own self’, he (unlike the neo-Kantians of today) really does *not* mean anything sheerly individual and human and psychological because immediately thereafter he clearly explains this ‘self’ in terms of the acts of reason within ‘common logic’. At this point the interpreter faces a crucial hermeneutical decision. One can either suppose that Kant has to be understood as taking ‘self’ in a simply psychological and absurd (especially for logic) sense, given all that we know about Kant’s views elsewhere on logic; or one can take this passage as a clue that in general Kant’s talk about a ‘self’ or ‘self-legislation’ need not be understood in the ultimately subjective terms that English neo-Kantians have assumed. That is, rather than taking the ultimately self-destructive neo-Kantian route, one can take the references to ‘logic’ and ‘reason’ to provide the crucial context for seeing that Kant’s own ‘texts’ about what is simply ‘in us’ can rather be read most sensibly as statements about reason in general and its absolutely necessary truths. And this in turn can suggest that Kant himself is not subject to the objection that Larmore poses; that is, there may be a way of interpreting Kantian ‘autonomy’ from the start as the objective self-legislation of ideal reason rather than the subjective self-legislation of mere individual or even collective human will.²⁵

Obviously, this is an extremely controversial problem, so one cannot help but ask, how do we decide who is right. What is the best way to understand Kant and the notion of autonomy? My concluding major thesis is just this: that this final problem is not, as the purists suppose, two questions, but is rather one complex question, one deep question that inextricably combines text and context, ‘pure philosophy’ and detailed historical interpretation, systematics, and contemporary *Kulturkritik*. Why? Because we are clearly in an essential hermeneutical circle here. Since Kant’s work is itself the key source of our own notion of autonomy (and he was a very deep, complex, and, as has just been noted, very often misunderstood writer), we can hardly best understand what we ‘best’ want to mean by it without exploring all the things that he might ‘best’ have meant by it. And, in order to do that, there is no short cut, there is no other way than simply going back and forth between ‘thick’ exegesis and theory—which is just what Korsgaard and Larmore and Scanlon and Höffe and other contemporary Kantians must do and keep on doing. In the end, making proper sense of

²⁵ As I and other non-neo-Kantian Kantians have argued; see my ‘On Schneewind and Kant’s Method in Ethics’, *Ideas y Valores*, 102 (1996), 28–53, as well as work in progress by John Hare and Patrick Kain. See also my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), ch. 11.

Kant's particular comment about the 'self' requires a global study of his whole philosophy, as well as a global reflection on our own part on how we want to make sense now of the whole relation between the self, reason, and objectivity. In this way the fate of the concept of autonomy reflects the fate of modern philosophy in general—it cannot progress (in at least many of its essential areas) without a systematic historical reflection upon itself. Thus, precisely for its own basic work, philosophy can, does, and must engage with classical texts as such, and not only with supposedly 'pure' contemporary writings. This is neither a minimal nor an exclusive engagement, but it is an essential one, and one that especially should not be disparaged by contemporary philosophers, any more than the equally valuable study of fields such as logic or science. To this extent, the central hermeneutical issues of Kant interpretation are also major issues for any philosophy of the future that would come forth as historically mature, as 'scientific' in the only sense that substantive philosophy can be.

2

Kantian Apperception and the Non-Cartesian Subject

Only with Kant's Critical writings did a full-scale doctrine of subjectivity become central to philosophy. His immediate successors, especially those influenced by Reinhold, argued for an even stronger emphasis on a principle of subjectivity at the basis of philosophy. By the early twentieth century, however, philosophers influenced by Russell, Moore, or Heidegger tended to criticize Kant for giving too much emphasis to subjectivity, and for supposedly encouraging overly psychological, idealistic, or reflective theories. This duality in attitudes towards subjectivity parallels a division in Kant's own systematic stance: he is famous for grounding philosophy in the 'I' in a very special sense, and yet he is also sharply critical of the specific ways that philosophy tends to focus on the I, be it rationalist or empiricist, Leibnizian or Berkeleyian.¹

In recent years, a more nuanced and positive response to Kant's doctrine has arisen. The details of his strikingly contemporary critique of rational psychology have finally become the focus of numerous studies,² and his departures from the limits of early empiricist accounts of the mind have also become better appreciated.³ I will concentrate on two fundamental topics about which there remains much controversy. First, there is the exegetical problem of making sense of the details of Kant's innovative positive account of the basic operations of the I as a theoretical subject that combines apperception and inner sense. Second, there is the question of the consistency of Kant's general notion of the I: do his strong a priori and idealist claims about it violate the conditions of his own Critical turn and make the subject into something absurd, an 'I' with paradoxical relations to any ordinary human self?⁴

¹ See below, Ch. 3. References with 'A' and/or 'B' are to the first and/or second edition of Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787). Unless otherwise indicated, translations are from the Norman Kemp Smith edition (London: Macmillan, 1929).

² See, e.g., Heiner Klemme, *Kants Philosophie des Subjekts* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), and my *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

³ See, e.g., Robert B. Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, rev. edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴ See David Carr, *The Paradox of Subjectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and cf. Mario Caimi, 'Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis in Kants transzendentaler Deduktion', in

I. THE I AND APPERCEPTION

In Kant's own time, the call for a reconsideration of his notion of apperception came swiftly and with momentous consequences. Kant's two immediate 'followers', Reinhold and Fichte, made their revisions of this notion the starting point of their own influential systems.⁵ In our era, apperception has become more central than ever in Anglophone and German philosophy. The problem of 'the self-ascribability of mental states', for example, dominated much of English philosophy throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This focus can be traced to P. F. Strawson's highly systematic interpretation of Kant, which aims to combine a 'metaphysics of experience' with realist and 'anti-private language' strands in the *Critique*.⁶ Similarly, in Germany Dieter Henrich's path-breaking interpretation of Kant's Transcendental Deduction goes hand in hand with an influential call for a new systematic explanation of self-consciousness and the identity of the subject.⁷

Other major contemporary German philosophers such as Gerold Prauss,⁸ Klaus Düsing,⁹ and Manfred Frank¹⁰ also take Kant's notion of subjectivity as a starting point in their investigations, albeit in very different ways. Frank and other students of Henrich repeatedly draw attention to ways in which Kant's theory lacks the kind of detailed consideration of self-consciousness that one finds in Fichte.¹¹ English-speaking interpreters are generally less critical on this

Dieter H. Heidemann (ed.), *Probleme der Subjektivität in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 85–106.

⁵ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 5.

⁶ See P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966), and cf. my 'Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument', *Kant-Studien*, 69 (1978), 273–85.

⁷ See, e.g., Dieter Henrich, 'The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction', *Review of Metaphysics*, 22 (1969), 640–59; 'Selbstbewußtsein—Kritische Einleitung in einer Theorie', in Rüdiger Bubner (ed.), *Hermeneutik und Dialektik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1970), i. 257–84; *Selbstverhältnisse. Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982); and cf. my 'Recent Work on Kant's Theoretical Philosophy', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1982), 1–24.

⁸ See Gerold Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971); and cf. my 'Contemporary German Epistemology: The Significance of Gerold Prauss', *Inquiry*, 25 (1982), 125–38.

⁹ See Klaus Düsing, 'Constitution and Structure of Self-Identity: Kant's Theory of Apperception and Hegel's Criticism', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 8 (1983), 409–31, and *Selbstbewußtseinsmodelle* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1997), 97–120.

¹⁰ See Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991).

¹¹ See, e.g., Manfred Frank, 'Is Subjectivity a Non-Thing, an Absurdity (Unding)? On Some Difficulties in Naturalistic Reductions of Self-Consciousness', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 177–97; and cf. my 'The Ineliminable Subject: From Kant to Frank', in *ibid.* 217–30; and Konrad Cramer, 'Kants "Ich denke" und Fichtes "Ich bin"', *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 1 (2003), 57–92.

point, and many, like C. T. Powell, continue along Strawsonian lines, with only a few divergent perspectives.¹² Other interpreters, however, go further and make Kant's notion of apperception the key to their fruitful appropriation of the Critical approach as a whole—for example, Henry Allison,¹³ Patricia Kitcher,¹⁴ Andrew Brook,¹⁵ and Robert Pippin.¹⁶ Variants of the notion also play a key role in the systematic work of leading analytic philosophers such as Roderick Chisholm¹⁷ and Thomas Nagel.¹⁸

My own view is that Kant's position is more metaphysical and hence less amenable to most Anglophone approaches than has generally been assumed, but also that it is not as vulnerable as it may seem to objections stemming from figures such as Fichte and Henrich.¹⁹ The main options here are by no means to be understood as determined by territorial considerations. The interpretation I defend is probably closest to that of some younger German scholars influenced by analytic methods—for example, Dieter Sturma²⁰ and Georg Mohr²¹—and it contrasts with that of some of the most interesting recent American interpretations, such as those offered by Allen Wood²² and Frederick Neuhauser,²³ who propose a more Fichtean position.

It is important to understand Kant's account of apperception in its historical context. Kant takes the term from Leibniz, who had distinguished bare perceptions as such from perceptions of perceptions—that is, apperceptions. Leibniz also allowed that minds as complex as our own, and only such minds, could have not only a reflexive kind of particular awareness but also knowledge of a special level of general truths—namely, necessary propositions. Thus, although there are many changes and ambiguities in Leibniz's position,²⁴ he was commonly taken to have distinguished at least three levels of mental life: (a) bare 'perception',

¹² C. T. Powell, *Kant's Theory of Self-Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); cf. Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹³ Henry E. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Andrew Brook, *Kant and the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); and *The First Person* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981); and cf. my 'Contemporary German Epistemology'.

¹⁸ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁹ See my 'The Ineliminable Subject', and *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*.

²⁰ Dieter Sturma, *Selbstbewußtsein bei Kant* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985).

²¹ Georg Mohr, *Das sinnliche Ich* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991).

²² Allen W. Wood, 'The "I" as Principle of Practical Philosophy', in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Kant, Fichte, and Schelling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93–108.

²³ Frederick Neuhauser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁴ See Mark Kulstad, *Leibniz on Consciousness, Apperception, and Reflection* (Munich: Philosophia, 1991).

what we might call the lowest level of sensation; (b) animal perception, which is accompanied by some kind of memory, attention, will, and perhaps even a minimal power of reflection and empirical inference; and (c) human consciousness, which includes the power of 'genuine' reasoning and an understanding of necessary relations. There are many questions to be raised about each of these levels. Given Leibniz's immaterialism and idealism, the first level obviously has to be mental in some fashion, but it is very hard to explain exactly what it is like. The second level is remarkable for apparently giving to subhuman beings something like a capacity for judgment but not clearly specifying what the capacity consists in. The third level seems to be an overly narrow way of designating what is special about human minds.

Kant's account can be set out in terms of its own conception of three levels of mental life. First, there is the level of passive representation, which involves sensations, feelings, or 'bare' intuitions.²⁵ At the second level, there is an element of activity, involving attention or recollection but—and this is most important—still nothing that amounts to genuine cognition. This arises only with the everyday judgmental states that are definitive of Kant's third level, for which he generally saves the terms 'consciousness' in the sense of 'apperception'.

What Kant means by these terms becomes fully clear only in the B edition of the first *Critique*, which insists on distinguishing and relating 'inner sense' and 'apperception'. These terms might be easily conflated—and often were, by many empiricists and rationalists as well as the earlier Kant—because each of them can seem to indicate some kind of inner event that is cognitive all by itself. In recognition of the danger of this conflation, several key reformulations make explicit that 'apperception' alone is a genuinely cognitive term, signifying (in the first instance) the act or power of objectively judging or synthesizing data provided in inner sense (B 67–9, B 129–30, B 139–40, B 153–9, B 421–3, B 428–32). A complete act of apperception is thus meant to contrast sharply with any mere stream of 'sense data'. Such data, whether they are outer or inner (and whether they are immediate or involve complications such as association), lack cognitive standing, even if their status as actual and mental is not denied. They are literally mere 'data', and it is a 'Myth of the Given' (as Wilfrid Sellars stressed²⁶) to suppose that they are already cognitions, already in the space of reason, justification, putative truth, or falsity.

The point of the *Critique's* use of the term 'apperception' is not to define mentality or subjectivity as such, but to designate the minimal distinctively human cognitive level, something that is higher than either mere receptivity or bare activity (hence, Kant also denies what Susan Hurley has called the

²⁵ See B 376, and my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 245 ff.; and cf. Dietmar H. Heidemann, 'Anschauung und Begriff: Ein Begründungsversuch des Stämme-Dualismus in Kants Erkenntnislehre', in Kristina Engelhard (ed.), *Aufklärungen* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 2002), 65–90.

²⁶ Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

‘Myth of the Giving’²⁷), but still does not directly have to involve a perception of necessary truths, the feature that Leibniz had stressed. It is true that Kant sometimes notes, in a rationalist sounding manner, that apperception (or synthesis, or judgment—these eventually all come to the same thing in the Critical philosophy) involves the assertion of objective relations that are in some sense necessary (B 142). It is important to realize, however, that what Kant is speaking of in such cases is the general and hypothetical necessity that *some* features must be ascribed to an object as such, and not merely to us, if there is to be objective apperception—that is, known structures at all. This is not the same thing as claiming an insight into particular categorical necessities concerning the nature of specific things or concepts.

I take Kant’s paradigm of apperception to be an ordinary judgment of experience, involving a claimed objective fact as well as a judging subject. An example is, ‘I think that this body is heavy’ (cf. B 142), which illustrates the scheme ‘I think that x is F’. Such judgments are typically straightforward and ‘external’, but Kant also has resources for allowing more complex judgments, including some that involve explicit reference to a subject—for example, ‘it seems to me that the sun is warming the stone’.²⁸

For particular instances of apperception in this paradigm sense, it is natural to use the term ‘empirical apperception’ in contrast to ‘transcendental apperception’, which is also called ‘pure’, ‘original’, and ‘universal’ (B 132). Unfortunately, the term ‘empirical apperception’ can become confusing if its paradigmatic objective sense is conflated with what Kant in one passage calls an ‘empirical unity of consciousness’ or ‘empirical unity of apperception’ (B 140). This unity turns out to designate a subjective condition that amounts not to a particular instance of ordinary apperception, as just explained, but rather to a more primitive act or series of acts connected in a less than objective way—for instance, in mere association. This is a confusing use of terminology for two reasons. In the first instance, it can seem in tension with Kant’s definitive cognitive understanding of the term apperception. Moreover, it does not make clear that the situation of something other than an objective unity can be found in very different kinds of states, some that are wholly subjective and pre-judgmental, and others that are modifications of an objective judgmental core.

A pre-judgmental ‘unity’ would be a mere empirical sequence of sense data, perhaps connected by associations or perhaps not. Note that such states can be adequately picked out simply by the term ‘inner sense’ (cf. B 139) and do not as such require introducing the extra term ‘apperception’; indeed, using any form of the term here runs the danger of obscuring the sharp distinction between inner

²⁷ Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 73.

²⁸ See Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant*, and cf. my ‘Recent Work on Kant’s Theoretical Philosophy’ and ‘Contemporary German Epistemology’.

sense and apperception. It is easy to misunderstand this distinction, because if 'inner sense' is defined as it was in many pre-Critical theories, which dogmatically presumed an automatic cognitive faculty of 'inner observation', then the term can already seem to signify a multiplicity of data that are not only 'given' but—mysteriously—immediately 'taken' as well—that is, known as if by some kind of intellectual intuition. It is central to Kant's mature view, however, that *all* such 'taking' must rather be an act of the understanding (B 129). Unfortunately, even this development is complicated by the fact that, as was noted earlier, there is an intermediate level of mindedness that can be more than sheer passivity. A simple act of attention, for example, can involve less than the specific kind of taking that is involved in the synthesis that is judgment, and yet it is not simply an instance of *primitive* inner sense (B 157 n.).

Examples of states that meet the condition of being 'other than straightforwardly objective' in a way that is *not* entirely pre-judgmental would be an act of complex imagination, with no intended correspondence to the actual world, or a vivid sensation accompanying what can be called 'a merely perceptual judgment'. Instead of straightforwardly asserting something objective, this kind of judgment claims merely that such and such actually appears to someone.²⁹ Nonetheless, such a state still presupposes the general notion of apperception, since it is obviously judgmental and can be understood as similar to 'hedged' variations of standard objective claims. Although these states are not directly objective, it can be argued that (cf. Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Prauss) their sense still depends on a background judgmental understanding of objectivity. Such perceptual situations can be said to include the core of a typical apperceptive claim, involving the scheme '*x* is F', as in 'this object is heavy', but modified so that the 'F' becomes 'appearing heavy to me'. The judgment then does not assert a heaviness that is *directly* predicated of the object, but it presupposes an understanding of related judgments of experience that do make such predications.

Many more complex judgments are possible. As soon as one gets to any explicit second-order judgment—, for example, 'I think that I think that *x* is F'—one is in some sense at an important new level. For simplicity's sake, however, I propose to limit Kant's theory of mental states to three main levels, and to say that all forms of apperception, no matter how complex, still remain within the third and highest general level, the level of apperception as such. There can, of course, still be very significant distinctions within this highest level. The most important special sublevel concerns what Kant calls the 'original synthetic unity of apperception' (B 131). This unity stands for more than a simple 'I think that *x* is F', or even a particular reflective judgment, 'I think that I think that *x* is F.' It stands for the 'necessary possibility' of a 'global' or all-inclusive 'I think', an 'I think' that we are 'capable' of using to link all 'first-order' acts of thought carried out by a

²⁹ See above, n. 28.

particular subject, which then has a whole world of experience as its correlate.³⁰ This higher sublevel is also called ‘transcendental apperception’, and it follows the scheme ‘I think that: I think that x is F, I think that y is G, I think that z is H, and so forth’. In Kant’s own words: ‘*pure apperception*. . . is that self-conscious representation which, while generating the representation “I think”. . . must be capable [NB] of accompanying all other representations. . .’ (B 132).

Passages like this one suggest that in principle each and every act of empirical apperception must ‘really’ be directly subject to an all-inclusive act of transcendental apperception, even if not actually accompanied by it. But perhaps we need not be committed to a ‘strong apperception thesis’ of this form.³¹ Without disturbing the essentials of Kant’s philosophy, it seems possible to retreat to allowing some acts of empirical apperception that are in an understandable sense beyond any finite subject’s ‘real’ reach—as long as the notion of an ‘in principle’ capacity for an overarching act of transcendental apperception is not simply trivialized. That is, it seems true but trivial that we should not deny a sense in which it is *merely logically* possible that any act of mind could become the object of another act. It is not entirely clear, however, that anything crucial in Kant’s theory rests on insisting from the start on a claim about the ‘real self-conscious accessibility’ of *all* one’s thoughts in a direct and more than ‘merely empirical’ or ‘merely logical’ sense.

To appreciate the significance of this issue it is useful to consider alternative proposals about when one’s thoughts can be said to become ‘really attachable’ to an I at all. Precisely because of reasons stressed by contemporary readers of Fichte, which concern the absurdities of making one’s own consciousness depend, in its original ‘mineness’, on a subsequent or separate act of reflection, it would be good to find some broadly Kantian way to explain this attachment short of basing it on an in principle ‘real’ transcendental act of reflection that must be global and direct.³² An easier position to accept here would be simply to allow that, when an empirical act is part of a *non-reflective overlapping sequence* of acts (and necessarily governed by the form of time; cf. B 140) that exist for one and the same mind (I discuss below the condition of being ‘for a’ mind), then each act in that sequence can thereby count as belonging to that subject as such—even if, for some reason, there might be no ground for assuming that it ‘really can’ *directly* recover each and every one of those acts in one grand act of transcendental reflection. For example, some acts might exclude or mask others in various complex ways that do not depend on the idiosyncrasies of individual psychology. A naive thought at one time of someone as completely innocent may be incompatible, in any real

³⁰ Cf. Brook, *Kant and the Mind*, 80 ff.

³¹ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 241.

³² On alleged circles in this ‘reflection theory’, see Henrich, ‘Selbstbewußtsein’ and *Selbstverhältnisse*, and the solutions discussed in Frank, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis*, Düsing, *Selbstbewußtseinsmodelle*, 97–120; and Dan Zahavi, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Otherity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

reflection, with one's thought of them now as clearly guilty—incompatible not merely in a logical sense, but in the sense that, for any common judging subject, the very thought of the one content would change the thought of the other.³³ Nonetheless, because of the many overlapping relations between these thoughts and others that are directly experienced, one could still say that all such thoughts belong to one and the same self and its transcendental 'field' of representations.

Kant does not explicitly address this point, but he does make a related remark about the scope of apperception that is very significant. At the very beginning of his discussion he indicates that the doctrine of transcendental apperception is to be understood as relevant only for those states that are at least not 'nothing to me' (B 132, my emphasis)—and so, if in some sense there can be states that are in some subliminal way 'in' my mind (for example, as effective parts of my actual mental history) without also being 'for' or 'to' me, then one does not even have to consider whether these states are directly subject to a global transcendental apperception. This is not an incidental or merely hypothetical restriction but rather a point that reflects the basic fact, noted earlier, that Kant's theory allows for a level of states that are mental in some sense but below the threshold of being something 'to' someone. For Kant, states like this could exhaust what crude brutes are allowed to have, and they might also coexist with other higher-level features in the more complex minds that human beings have.³⁴ Given our purposes, the main issue is how to characterize what it is that takes us beyond the lower-level states. What must be present when an act of mind is specifically something 'to me' *at all* and thus can be part of an ordinary 'identical' human self as such?

My proposal is to say that the condition of empirical apperception (and all that it presupposes) is what explains the distinctive character of the level of acts that are something 'for me', and that therefore can be part of a self's identity as such. Below such apperception, there may be mind, but not mind that needs to be said to be 'for one', and that thus has at least a clear ground for also being subject to something like (I say 'something like', in view of the problems noted above concerning the 'strong apperception thesis') a global act of transcendental apperception.

The advantage of saying that empirical apperception is crucial in this context is that since, by definition, such an act truly has an 'I' within it (the 'I' of 'I think that x is F'), it is immediately understandable that this is in no sense a state which is not at all something 'to me'. The structure of the state is precisely that of something (the judged state of affairs) being there 'to me', where 'me' stands in a meaningful way for a particular I that clearly has the distinctive representative capacity of a genuine human mind (rather than of a merely 'blind' passive or active animal), and so the possibility of self-recognition and

³³ See my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, ch. 4.

³⁴ Cf. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 108 ff.

transcendental apperception should not be mysterious. The I involved in judging gives the whole state a relevant kind of cognitive focus, including a focus *from* a particular direction, the direction of the particular subject. One might say that, although at first this I is in a sense not ‘mentioned’, it is ‘used’ and in that way is essentially present. It need not be the object of a separate reflection, and thus one can meet neo-Fichtean objections that Kant’s theory implies that the I exists, as a consciousness of a particular self, *only* through such reflection. Kant’s theory, rather, implies a basic kind of asymmetry: I might exist without this particular thought, but this particular thought, as a concrete act, could not exist without me. Whenever one is actually judging something, the judgment’s content is always given subjectively, insofar as the self of the judging subject must be constantly active. Thus it is present ‘adverbially’, so to speak. In this sense, even for the pre-reflective acts of simple apperception, Kant’s theory can allow that there is already a self ‘in’ consciousness, a primitive ‘self’-consciousness. This is not to say that Kant’s account, as understood so far, has developed clear resources for explaining *all* the peculiarities of self-acquaintance as such; the point is simply that his account need not be assumed to have anything within it that stands in the way of whatever promising explanation of its special reflexive features might be added by someone else.³⁵

A key feature of even this simple kind of apperception is that it is obviously intentional: here the I must be in at least some minimal sense thinking about something with some kind of objectivity. Intentionality is thus central to this level of mind, and yet this is not to say that all states of mind must be intentional (the first level of mindedness was introduced, in fact, precisely as *not* intentional). It is also not to say that something becomes a state ‘for’ a subject only by the subject or the whole act becoming itself the object of an intention — as in ‘self-illumination’ theories that require that each basic act of mind have a direct object and itself always as an object as well.

Despite these advantages, one might still ask if Kant’s notion of apperception can do justice to the full range of phenomenological peculiarities involved in our having a kind of special self-familiarity that does *not* seem to be a matter of making judgments that register typical objective observations, relations, descriptions, and fallible states. Kant did not focus on this issue in contemporary terms, but he does seem to have uncannily sensed the core idea of these peculiarities in what I will call his *fundamental thesis* that, ‘in the consciousness of myself in mere thought, I am the *being itself*, although nothing in myself is thereby given for thought’ (B 429).³⁶ This could be taken to be Kant’s way of saying that there is a basic kind of consciousness that discloses one’s own self and existence in a

³⁵ See, e.g., Hector-Neri Castañeda, ‘The Logic of Self-Knowledge’, *Nous*, 1 (1967), 9–22; and Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 87–110.

³⁶ Cf. my ‘The Ineliminable Subject’.

way that is not tied down to any ordinary determining description or particular observation. Note, however, that this basic state is said to involve a consciousness ‘in mere thought’, and thus some kind of apperception, and this helps to keep the experience from being wholly mysterious. If our basic self-familiarity were contrasted totally with anything intentional and judgmental, then it would become difficult to see why it must even involve a genuine personal subject at all, rather than a mere object or the crude animal-like condition of mere inner sense. Its ‘infallibility’ about itself could then be taken as derived from the fact that it is not yet semantic at all,³⁷ and so is not a state ‘of’ anything. This would empty it of its personal and epistemic status, and make self-consciousness’s possible development into a reflective semantic state seem miraculous.

Another point that seems to be implied in Kant’s fundamental thesis is that the basic ‘consciousness of myself’ is *not* to be understood in terms of my having to have a special intuition that picks out the I (that is, one’s own particular I) all by itself to determine it. Kant’s point is simply that, ‘in’ *any* actual ‘mere thought’ of one’s self, one’s own undetermined ‘being itself’ is revealed. This ‘being’ is correlative with the thought of the actual subject pole that is present within *any* particular apperception. Therefore, *as such*, it can be said to be ‘without’—that is, not disclosive of, or restricted to—any further *particular content* that is ‘given for thought’ (as Kant says in his fundamental thesis). Furthermore, even though the thought of an I can *also* be understood as the thought of a *function* that is present in all thought (the function of synthesis), the I that is spoken of here is not being characterized as a *mere* function or abstraction. Kant stresses that it exists, it has ‘being’ as an actual element in all the particular apperceptions that I can carry out or consider, and so it is there in the minimal determinate truth that each of them is really had by an I: ‘it is no mere logical function but determines the subject in respect of existence’ (B 430). Considered merely as the correlate of this thought as such, it is *not yet* theoretically ‘determined’ in any further way (for example, as belonging to a physical or spiritual, simple or complex being), but this does not foreclose the possibility that every actual I has many important further determinations. For example, Kant immediately goes on to note, with an obvious reference to his own moral philosophy, that the practical ‘legislation’ of reason may offer a way to add a legitimate determination of ourselves (B 430–1). (In general, it is important to keep in mind that for Kant the term ‘I’ or ‘self’ often refers primarily to reason, rather than subjectivity in any mere psychological sense.³⁸)

In a nearby statement that is also notoriously difficult, Kant adds that ‘the “I think” expresses an indeterminate empirical intuition’ (B 423 n.). This claim

³⁷ Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

³⁸ See, e.g., A xiv: ‘I have to deal with reason itself and its pure thinking . . . I come upon them in my own self. Common logic itself supplies an example . . .’. Cf. my ‘On Being Neither Post- Nor Anti-Kantian: A Reply to Breazale and Larmore Concerning “The Fate of Autonomy”’, *Inquiry*, 46 (2003), 272–92.

complements and does not conflict with what is stated in Kant's fundamental thesis. Whereas the thesis states that with any cogito there is the presence of an I with existence and thought, Kant's second claim explicitly reminds us that any actual 'I think' that we assert will also involve the presence of some empirical intuition. Of course, in particular instances of the cogito, there can always be various sorts of determinate features of intuition as well. The mere cogito by itself, however, stands for what is definitely present in all instances, and so it would be inappropriate at this stage to attribute any more specific content to it. Matters may seem to get mysterious when Kant adds, 'an indeterminate perception here signifies only something real that is given [with the cogito], given indeed to thought in general, and so not as appearance, nor as thing in itself (noumenon), but as something which actually exists' (B 423 n.). This might sound as if Kant is asserting that the I is an absurd being that is neither an appearance nor something in itself. But one can easily enough save the statement from absurdity by reading it as expressing how at this point the cogito is 'topic neutral'. To understand it, and to understand that there is some empirical 'perception' present whenever a real 'I think' takes place, one does *not yet* have to consider the I in terms of being specifically an appearance or something in itself, or both. One can simply note that 'something real is given' already with this thought, and one can remain agnostic about what might be said about the I given further facts.³⁹

II. THE VERY POSSIBILITY OF A KANTIAN SUBJECT: WHICH I AM I?

What has been uncovered so far are two very indeterminate, but not totally empty, characterizations of the I. On the one hand, there is the general representation of the I as a subject of apperception. This functional characterization can be said to stand for something that is present in the general thought of transcendental apperception and also in each actual empirical apperception. Call this the thought of *the I as epistemic subject*. On the other hand, Kant's statements also stress that, wherever there really is an epistemic subject, there is a confrontation with one's own 'being itself', an I that at least has 'existence'. Call this the thought of *the I as existing subject*. There should be no mystery about how one and the same being can be, simultaneously and certainly, both kinds of subject. These characterizations are very different, but the main problem with them is not that they are controversial in themselves or in conflict. Their limitation is simply that they are very indeterminate, and hence might be confused with one another. Thus it is important to keep them distinct. (The Paralogisms chapter of

³⁹ For further characterizations of the I, see my *Kant's Theory of Mind*; and cf. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the *Critique* explains how the features of the one characterization can be illicitly transferred to the other, as when irreducible functional simplicity is conflated with irreducible ontological simplicity.)

These two relatively indeterminate (but now clearly contrasted) characterizations of the I need to be distinguished from two other characterizations that (so far) are also very indeterminate: namely, as the already mentioned thoughts of the I as ‘appearance’ (or phenomenon) and as ‘thing in itself’. Even if one jumps ahead to the full implications of Kant’s theory, these thoughts remain surprisingly indeterminate. At the level of phenomena, Kant has remarkably little to say directly about the I as a distinctive kind of entity. Despite the expectations of a Critical doctrine of the mind that would parallel his detailed doctrine of body, Kant’s final decision was to forgo working out a distinct doctrine of phenomenal mind, and to suggest that almost all the philosophical knowledge we can have here is parasitic on physical science.⁴⁰ He also launched a detailed criticism of attempts to determine the I theoretically as a distinctive kind of thing in itself (B 427–8).

This criticism is often misunderstood as showing that Kant believed there could be no I at all in a non-phenomenal sense, or that there is absolutely nothing we could properly say about it. Such readings go much too far and confuse the specific sharp criticisms that Kant does make of positions such as spiritualism (which makes very vulnerable claims about our being able to give a priori and theoretical proofs that the self as an ordinary psychological entity has a power of independent existence) with a global denial of a non-phenomenal aspect of the self—which is something that Kant does *not* offer.⁴¹ In fact, the denial that there *can* be such an aspect would make incomprehensible Kant’s fundamental motivations (especially his commitment to our transcendental freedom) and transgress the general implications of the Critical philosophy.

For most of the twentieth century, Kant’s interest in a non-phenomenal notion of the self was a very unpopular topic, but that may change now that even some mainline trends in analytic philosophy of mind argue that for us the self is *in principle* ‘elusive’ and consciousness remains an unsolved ‘hard’ problem.⁴² Kant’s general metaphysical perspective stresses very similar considerations, and hence it may become an ever-more relevant option to consider.⁴³ If one abstracts from incidental outdated details of the Critical philosophy, one can construct

⁴⁰ See Michael Washburn, ‘Did Kant Have a Theory of Self-Knowledge?’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 58 (1976), 40–56; Kitcher, *Kant’s Transcendental Psychology*; and Gary Hatfield, ‘Empirical, Rational, and Transcendental Psychology: Psychology as Science and as Philosophy’, in Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200–27.

⁴¹ See my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*.

⁴² See Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); cf. my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*, and in particular the discussion concerning McGinn in the Postscript added in the 2nd edn.

⁴³ See William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

an attractive generic Kantian position that is defined largely by the insights of the doctrine of apperception, combined with the belief that there may be key aspects of the self that are in principle beyond any spatiotemporal and scientific knowledge that we can envisage.

Some would still contend that such a position is totally hopeless from the outset. This is not a new problem. The metaphysical aspect of Kant's theory of the subject was heavily attacked by the very first reviewers of the *Critique*. Pistorius and others insisted that, even if the doctrine of transcendental idealism were accepted with respect to the 'external' domain, it still can make no sense to extend it, as the *Critique* does, to the inner domain as well (cf. A 37/B 53–4; B 66–7). Kant, however, was clearly motivated to insist on a global doctrine of idealism, because he held that this was the only way to save the central moral and broadly deistic beliefs that he assumed essential even to enlightened thought. He also thought that this doctrine was needed for his Critical strategy of blocking a return to dogmatism by denying any asymmetries that would privilege self-knowledge over external knowledge. Many of his readers continue to distrust or misunderstand these motivations, and conclude that Kant's approach only makes the obscure all the more obscure: if the Ideas of God, freedom, and immortality are already somewhat problematic, it can seem clearly beyond 'the bounds of sense' to connect them, as Kant insists, with the operations of unknown non-spatiotemporal things in themselves.

One way to hold to this conclusion is to insist on a general incoherence in the doctrine of transcendental idealism. This is a common but extreme and questionable strategy.⁴⁴ In a consideration of Kant's notion of subjectivity as such it seems only fair to focus on the more specific objection that his initial readers raised—namely, that, even with the concession that transcendental idealism of some sort might be permissible, there appear to be fundamental difficulties with Kant's specific doctrine of the ideality of *self-knowledge*.

Once this problem is clearly defined, it may not be as severe as is often supposed. Note that the problem has already become one simply about the ultimate interpretation of theoretical *self-knowledge*. The careful reader will see that this is a complex epistemological issue, and that Kant nowhere argues for the extreme ontological claim that the self as such is 'merely ideal'—that is, non-existent. The philosophical question for Kant here is simply whether various traditional *determinations* of the self as such—as causal, spatial, temporal—must be regarded as transcendently real. It is very hard to see why the hypothesis of their ideality is completely incoherent if it is allowed that similar determinations of external things may be ideal, and that the ideality of these determinations of the self is not meant to destroy its existence. In particular, given the earlier analysis of Kant's fundamental thesis about apperception, there is no reason to think that the ideality of the self's ordinary determinations would *make* the I as

⁴⁴ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

epistemic subject or existing subject disappear, since this I is defined independently of these determinations.

It is true that, with the radical form of idealism that Kant theoretically proposes, one might still ask whether there is specifically a self that *has* to remain, no matter what, in the ultimate ontology. In other words, if we can do so little to determine any things in themselves, it would seem that in the end there could fail to be (at this level) anything like finite selves, and the truth could be a 'self-annihilating' ontology consisting, for example, of only one Spinozist substance or a stratum of subpersonal beings. Kant in fact is quite aware of such *possibilities*, but he also thinks that he does not have to go so far as to attempt to disprove them (and it is not clear, in any case, that anyone can disprove them). Kant rests confident with the thought that he has deep and unrefuted practical reasons for continuing to believe that any such 'self-annihilating' philosophy is irrational, and that it is a proper bit of common sense to believe that others properly think this as well. Of course, we might not be swayed by Kant's presumptions about common sense, let alone his particular practical considerations. But that is not crucial here, for the question at this point is simply whether Kant's thought of the I as non-phenomenal is clearly incoherent—the common worries about *establishing* its truth are something else and must be set aside for now.

In the end, I suspect most worries about the coherence of Kant's notion of the I are rooted in either a very dogmatic (and highly un-Kantian) form of empiricist verificationism, or a confused thought that he is denying our existence altogether—or an artificial worry about how an alleged multiplicity of selves implied by the *Critique* can relate to one another, especially if one of them has something non-phenomenal about it.⁴⁵ The last objection is the only one that still deserves some consideration, but it is never backed with proof that Kant's statements or implicit theory ever entail an absurd multiplicity of selves. There is no need to decide here whether the relation between appearances and things in themselves is to be understood *elsewhere* in terms of two objects or rather two aspects or perspectives on the same items (note that, if the latter view is generalized, it immediately conflicts with Kant's affirmations of God). If one keeps properly focused on the issue of the self, it is enough for the Kantian to say that, just as with the locutions 'epistemic subject' and 'existing subject', the mere locutions 'non-phenomenal' and 'phenomenal' do not have to be thought of as designating *necessarily* distinct entities. Just as we can easily think of ourselves as both existing and thinking, we can also (until someone demonstrates otherwise) think of ourselves in phenomenal as well as non-phenomenal ways—that is, as having some characteristics that appear in space and time, but also as possibly having others, such as absolute freedom, that are not to be understood in mere spatio-temporal terms.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*.

This is not to defend the claim that Kant, or any other philosopher, has shown that we must affirm characteristics such as absolute freedom.⁴⁶ But the notion of such characteristics surely seems to have an unrefuted hold on many very important ways of thinking. Hence, if—as most contemporary theorists allow—our ordinary framework of scientific knowledge does not warrant affirming instances of such a notion, then it seems only sensible to keep exploring a sophisticated theory of subjectivity like Kant's, which aims from the very beginning at setting up a coherent philosophical framework that could accommodate such a notion.

There remains a final worry, a common thought that threatens to bring the whole Kantian account down after all. Suppose it is accepted that there could be a significant non-phenomenal side of the self, a side that we are *not* able to determine theoretically. How is this to be connected with the first part of our story, Kant's account of our selves as epistemic subjects, as beings who really carry out acts of apperception? It may seem that this account must either illegitimately claim to know the self in itself after all or undermine the intrinsic validity of our initial story, so that it 'only seems to be the case' that we are active in thinking, judging, intending. Kant's own theory thus seems committed to a 'transcendental self' that is either an illegitimately privileged being or an absurd illusion.

The solution to this problem begins with noting that Kant does not use the expression 'transcendental self'. In his ontology there are, at most, appearances and things in themselves—there is not a third realm of entities that are 'transcendental beings'. In a sense, the 'transcendental' cannot even be a fundamental 'aspect'; it is a feature that depends on more fundamental features. This is because the term 'transcendental' is basically a functional and normative adjective (not at all to be confused with 'transcendent'). The transcendental feature of a being, self, or a discussion is just the feature that explains how, in the context under discussion, claims to a priori knowledge can arise as legitimate (A 11/B 25). If, somehow, mechanical processes could account for the normative origin of such claims, then a mechanical self could *be* at once mechanical and functioning transcendentially. This transcendental theory, however, would not require a mechanical self and something *else* that is a real transcendental self. Similarly, if only the operations of non-spatiotemporal souls could account for such knowledge, then these souls could function transcendentially. But this would not mean that a census of what there is would add transcendental selves to the souls that exist. In either case, there will never be any more entities than things in themselves and (possibly) their appearances.

One might still wonder what this implies for Kant's claims about *specific* transcendental capacities. Is the much-discussed spontaneity of our intentionality, for

⁴⁶ For some criticisms, see my, 'Pure Reason of Itself Alone Suffices to Determine the Will', in Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Berlin: Akademie, 2002), 99–114.

example, something that can be a matter simply of how phenomena function, or must it reveal (in what would seem to be an improper dogmatic way) specific operations of the self as a thing in itself? This is a core question for Kant's doctrine of the I, and his position shows, I believe, that he is not forced into incoherence. In fact, unlike negative or positive dogmatists, for the most part Kant does a very fine job of not overcommitting himself here. The main point of his transcendental account is simply that, no matter what the ultimate metaphysical story about our self is, knowledge requires *more* than mere *sensibly* given data; it must also involve conceptual functions, and thus some kinds of spontaneity that are not exactly the same acts as the reception of data. This is a distinction internal to epistemology, and it does not as such involve space and time in its definition (even if all the illustrations we use—as in mathematics—involve some space and time, at least indirectly). Hence, what is ultimately responsible for these acts—and whether their generation is in truth absolutely spontaneous, rather than only relatively so—is something that the Critical theoretical philosophy insists on leaving open. It thus leaves open, as Wilfrid Sellars noted,⁴⁷ whether this 'spontaneity' is a matter that goes down all the way to *our* nature as things in themselves, or to something deeper, underlying the 'I or he or it (the thing) that thinks' (A 346/B 404). Precisely this agnosticism may be one of the greatest advantages of Kant's endlessly suggestive notion of subjectivity. Whatever limitations the rest of his philosophy may have, his modest doctrine of the I escapes the charges of incoherence, dogmatism, and irrelevance.

⁴⁷ Wilfrid Sellars, '... This I or He or It (the Thing) which Thinks', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 44 (1970–1), 5–31.

3

Idealism from Kant to Berkeley

1. The interpretation of Kant's idealism, from the first days of its reception even in Germany, has been almost constantly entangled with the philosophy of Berkeley. From the beginning it has also been insisted, most notably by Kant himself, that the linkage to Berkeley is inaccurate and unfair, that not only does it distort the basic intentions of the Critical philosophy but it also makes its idealism seem much less plausible. Nonetheless, for many renowned thinkers of our own time, the notion of a Berkeleyan approach to Kant's idealism has continued to be a strong temptation, one that promises to give the complex Critical system at least some semblance of an approachable and concrete, even if not entirely persuasive, meaning.

I will for the most part leave aside the thorny issue of how much justice has been done to Berkeley's own system by Kant or the history of Kant interpretation. There will be enough to do in working simply with the commonly assumed meaning of Berkeley's idealism, especially as propagated by those who have had good intentions with respect to both Kant and Berkeley. In the end, I will be arguing that in fact it would be a good thing if Kant were finally liberated, once and for all, from the popular Berkeleyan interpretive tendencies that have persistently followed him—somewhat like a stray dog that refuses to go home. But any adequate treatment of this problem must also recognize that here the uninvited guest is unlikely to be a complete accident. Some account is needed of how it happened that Kant's and Berkeley's writings became linked so widely and so closely if it is true, after all, that the linkage is philosophically indefensible.

2. To start with, one can cite the obvious fact that there is some sense (although not necessarily the same sense) in which, at the deepest level, it is very accurate and important to say that Berkeley is an idealist and Kant is an idealist. Moreover, I believe it is true for both of them that, in contrast to many other self-designated idealist philosophies, idealism has a core metaphysical meaning that is at least in part negative—that is, it features a denial of substantive existence claims concerning a broad class of (alleged) entities that have been posited by many other philosophical positions.

There are, to be sure, positive meanings of the term 'idealism' that Kant and Berkeley happen to share—a commitment to all sorts of 'higher' values, and a *belief*, for example, in the existence of spiritual beings and a generally

well-designed shape to existence on the whole.¹ For some influential versions of idealism, especially the grand systems of German Idealism, these positive doctrines seem to be what is most important, and worries that these systems deny familiar entities are (I believe) largely misplaced.² With Berkeley and Kant, however, the negative doctrines stand out. I will be assuming that Berkeley does deny matter and material substance, at least as they are supposedly confusedly intended by other philosophers, and that his philosophy does imply that, for any ‘tree in the quad’ that we think of, there is not, strictly speaking, any ‘one and (numerically) the same thing’ that endures and can truly be referred to as such by a plurality of human minds.³ In addition, unlike those who might propose an ‘anodyne Kant’,⁴ I will be taking it that transcendental idealism is *not* just one other, that is, mere transcendental (in the sense of ‘methodological’ or ‘merely epistemological’) ‘way of looking’ at ordinary things, in addition to the empirical (‘naturalistic’) way of doing so, but that it is (at least in its most basic metaphysical sense) the assertion of the *non*-reality of things affirmed by so-called transcendental realists—a group that clearly was meant to include among its members no less than the greatest geniuses among Kant’s predecessors—namely, Newton and Leibniz.

This interpretative stance complicates matters considerably, but it can also make the project of distinguishing Kant from Berkeley much more interesting as well as closer to the historical evidence. It is all too easy to unlink Kant and Berkeley if one plays the odd game of refusing an ‘anodyne’ reading of Berkeley that would take Berkeley’s views somehow to preserve all that ‘we ordinarily’ maintain about trees and quads—while nonetheless allowing Kant an ‘anodyne’ position that reads his idealism as having merely an epistemological or methodological meaning, and takes no ontological stance other than a refusal to allow the assertion of utterly strange and transcendent entities.

As a foil for presenting my own interpretation here, I will be focusing largely on showing how it differs from the recent reading of Kant’s idealism offered by James Van Cleve. This is a useful focus, I believe, not only because of the

¹ The term ‘belief’ is crucial here. Kant strongly rejected as ‘visionary’ Berkeley’s claim to *theoretical knowledge* and intellectual intuition of spirit. See below, Section 13, and cf. Brigitte Sassen, ‘Introduction’, in Brigitte Sassen (ed.), *Kant’s Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19; and R.C.S. Walker, ‘Introduction’, in R. C. S. Walker (ed.), *The Real in the Ideal: Berkeley’s Relation to Kant* (New York/London: Garland, 1989), p. xiii.

² See my ‘Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism’, in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–17.

³ See Robert J. Fogelin, *Berkeley and the ‘Principles of Human Knowledge’* (London: Routledge, 2001), 87.

⁴ See the discussion of Kant interpretations by P. F. Strawson in ‘The Problem of Reason and the A Priori’, in Paolo Parrini (ed.), *Kant and Contemporary Epistemology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 167–74. See also my ‘Recent Work on Kant’s Theoretical Philosophy’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1982), 1–24, and *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), Introduction.

exceptional analytic rigor of Van Cleve's work, but also because he himself makes very clear the specific problems in approaching Kant in an 'anodyne' way that understands transcendental idealism basically in 'methodological' rather than metaphysical terms.⁵ Since he is willing to stress that Kant's idealism has some serious ontological implications, Van Cleve has to face the full force of the Berkeleyan tradition. He proposes what I consider to be an unfortunate strategy of capitulation, however, a way of formulating Kant's idealism as a phenomenalism that is all too close to a Berkeleyan position after all. While Van Cleve's work demonstrates the continuing vitality of a broadly Berkeleyan approach to trying to make sense of Kant in our own time, it also creates a significant interpretive challenge. It deserves a response from those who would like to find a reading of Kant's idealism that does not dodge its ontological implications, and that nonetheless leaves room for a position that in some ways is still closer to attractive common-sense notions than seems possible on any neo-Berkeleyan position.

3. With such a daunting maze of problems, it may bolster spirits to disclose that I do have a familiar clue, an Ariadne's thread, ready to rely on in the task at hand. The clue is simply the thought that it should not be too difficult to find a very basic distinction here between Berkeley and Kant if we keep in mind that, from a Kantian perspective, Berkeley's idealism rests on a version of what can be called (to introduce a terminology I have used in other contexts, picking up on a key phrase by Kant's first major interpreter, Reinhold⁶) the 'short argument to idealism', whereas Kant, despite many misunderstandings by his first and later interpreters, definitely eschews such an approach.

The heart of the idea of a 'short' argument is simply this: the conclusion of ideality is to be drawn *directly* from the most *general* features of representation, for example, the mere fact that we use representations at all, or that we are passive or active with respect to them, or simply that we require intuitions or concepts or their combination. This kind of argument is 'short' not because its execution can definitely avoid extensive argumentation,⁷ but simply because it bypasses the strategy of arguing (as I believe Kant himself always does argue) that the first and most crucial stage on the way to any conclusions about ideality has to do with features distinctive of our *specific* nature as *spatiotemporal* knowers. In other words,

⁵ James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3–4, 143–4. In references in the text, this book will be cited hereafter as VC. References to Kant are to *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929).

⁶ See my 'Reinhold and the Short Argument to Idealism', in Gerhard Funke and Thomas Seebohm (eds.), *Proceedings: Sixth International Kant Congress 1985* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and the University Press of America: 1989), vol. ii, pt. 2, 441–53; and my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chs. 2–3.

⁷ See, e.g., Hartmut Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus. Ein kritischer Versuch* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzlar, 1993), ch. 6, 'Der lange kurze Weg zum Idealismus'.

to say that Kant's idealism should *not* be understood in terms of a short argument is to say that it is first and most fundamentally a thesis about the ideality of space and time. Henceforth, to be more positive, I will call his ground for it 'the species argument' (because it concerns our species of intuition) rather than simply the 'non-short argument' to idealism.

The way that the species argument fits into Kant's overall strategy is this. First, the specific ideality of space and time is established, in the first *Critique's* Transcendental Aesthetic, with some help later from the Transcendental Dialectic. Extra and 'long' considerations are then added in the *Critique's* Transcendental Analytic in order to reach the conclusion that, *because* human intuition and determinate theoretical knowledge are always dependent on space and time in very special ways as forms 'in us,' therefore (given the ideality of these forms) all that *we* can know turns out to be restricted to them and their ideality. (I will forgo constantly repeating the fact that this 'all' claim is restricted to 'determinate' and 'theoretical' contexts, but it is important to keep them in mind always.) It is true that in the end there is in Kant, as in Berkeley, a kind of global thesis about the ideality of human knowledge, but on my reading Kant's order of argument is the very opposite of the short and Berkeleyan order: Kant is saying that all our knowledge is ideal because (of implications of the fact that) it is spatiotemporal, whereas the others are saying that the spatiotemporal is ideal because knowledge as such (or at least all finite knowledge), as representative at all, must be ideal.

This reading of Kant, like all interpretations of his idealism, is not undisputed. Elsewhere I have argued that even the major philosophers closest in space and time to Kant himself—namely, the German Idealists—misunderstood, or overlooked, or rejected (or sometimes did all these at once) Kant's own 'species' approach while, consistently enough, devoting themselves to working out various versions of their own short argument.⁸ Matters get complicated here because, on the one hand, a movement away from Kant's own procedure and toward a short argument would seem to bring with it a more unrestricted and radical, and therefore more disputable, form of idealism (if, for example, the mere fact that something is represented is already tantamount to making it ideal), and yet the very radicality of this unrestricted idealism is what allows some of its proponents to present it as, on the contrary, a relatively harmless rather than threatening and negative doctrine. That is, if anything that we can represent or think or intuit or refer to at all is—thereby automatically—'ideal', then that which is outside this now obviously very huge 'ideal' realm might seem to be dismissable as wholly irrelevant, as 'the world well lost'.⁹

Philosophers interested in the short argument for its own sake often seem comfortable with attaching it to Kant because, out of what they take to be a

⁸ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 3, and my 'Hegel and Idealism', *Monist*, 74 (1991), 386–402.

⁹ See Richard Rorty, 'The World Well Lost', *Journal of Philosophy*, 59 (1972), 649–65.

principle of charity, they (like most secular theorists) are happy to ascribe to him an immanent ‘principle of significance’ that condemns to nonsense or irrelevance anything in principle beyond the realm of our sensory experience.¹⁰ My reading of Kant does not go in anything like this direction, since, among other reasons, it takes very seriously Kant’s talk of non-sensory things in themselves such as God or the soul. This is not a minor point, because my reading also holds that Kant sees the negative ontological claims about space and time, that it is transcendently ideal rather than real, as preconditions for the meaningfulness of doctrines (such as the absolute freedom of our will) that he takes to be absolutely crucial to our full use of reason, even if they transcend the empirical and spatiotemporal domain in principle. It seems to me that Kant is quite clear that, given his views about the closed structure of the natural world, it follows that freedom, immortality, and God would be impossible if an absolute, or transcendently real status is given to space and time (see Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* as well as *Critique of Pure Reason* B xxix; cf. VC 69).

There are also many problems for understanding Kant’s relation to earlier thinkers that immediately arise for anyone trying to ascribe a short argument to him. For example, the short-argument approach also seems compatible with dogmatic empiricist or materialist forms of realism. If, as on this argument, the ‘ideality’ of empirical things is little more than a way of indicating the fact that they are and can be represented, then these dogmatists could assert the ‘ideality’ of the spatiotemporal items that we can know while also saying that space and time remain absolute—that is, unconditioned, realities—a position that Kant clearly claims is the opposite of his own (A 26/B 42–3).

4. Matters become even more complicated in comparisons with Berkeley. Berkeley, even more obviously than Kant, wants to leave room for existence claims about God and our own absolute activity and possible immortality. He also clearly does not want to endorse the kinds of transcendental realism that Kant would ascribe to a materialist or to figures such as Leibniz or Newton. Berkeley’s position thus maintains a focus on representation as such (often in the form of a focus on sensible representation), which defines the short-argument approach, but without bringing along with it the threat to freedom or divinity found in other philosophies.

There are peculiar aspects of Berkeley’s position that make this understandable. His stress is actually not on the view that to be is to be representable but rather on the claim that being can be only where there is representing, and thus that active spirits are the foundation of reality (here he has significant affinities with Leibniz and Fichte). All that can make sense and exist are these representing

¹⁰ See P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966); and Jonathan Bennett, *Kant’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). A similar view can be found in Fichte.

beings and what they have within them as concrete representeds. This means that there are coherent ways in which it might be said that the domains of the real and the ideal overlap for Berkeley.

In one sense, colors and odors are paradigms of what is ‘ideal’ in the common positive sense of ‘necessarily in or identical to a mind,’ and yet, *if* one uses the term ‘real’ simply to designate that which has genuine being in one’s ultimate ontology, then, as concrete representeds of a real spirit (for Berkeley), these entities are themselves also real. Once one understands these terms precisely in these ways, one can meaningfully say that (sensory) colors are both ideal and real. A fortiori, the representing beings themselves, as spiritual agents and substances, are also ideal and real in a related and even more fundamental sense. But this is all still compatible with the negative moment that is especially important for Berkeley’s idealism, for, while saying that a color is real in that it is in a spirit that is real, Berkeley is also committed to the view that the colors we see and all sensible and material qualities are *not* real in the familiar sense of being *mind-independent*—that is, entities that would exist even if there were no finite representing beings at all. And this kind of non-reality could also be expressed in the language of ideality. In sum, in one sense *ideality* and *representation* go together for Berkeley, and yet, in another sense, so do *reality* and *representation*. (Note that what I have been regarding as the ‘directly represented’ in Berkeley’s philosophy—for example, the contents of our sensible intuitions—are not to be understood as ‘representations’ in the contemporary and Lockean sense of being a kind of intermediary between us and what is really ‘out there’; complications arise for this doctrine when one tries to work out Berkeley’s philosophy of science.¹¹)

5. For Kant, on the other hand, *representation* and *reality* are never so closely tied together. For him it is always possible that there are some beings, some things in themselves, that have no tie to representation at all (other than the incidental property of being knowable by God, and even this is something that theoretical philosophy cannot get close to proving). Similarly, on the species argument interpretation, *representation* and *ideality* are never so closely tied for Kant as they are for Berkeley. For Kant, only those representations, or features of representation, that are totally dependent on space and time turn out to be ideal (this is not a trivial restriction, because for Kant there are both ‘high’ and ‘low’ features, such as the pure categories and bare pre-cognitive ‘stuff’, that are not completely dependent on space and time); and, even for those representations that are ideal, the ideality does not follow directly from the feature of representability. In short, neither the grounds nor the consequences of Kantian idealism involve an acceptance of the formula ‘to be is to be perceived’, or the more general idea that all

¹¹ See Margaret Wilson, ‘Berkeley and the Essences of the Corpuscularians’, in John Foster and Howard Robinson (eds.), *Essays on Berkeley: A Tercentennial Celebration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 131–48.

being (or even all assertable being) is correlative with representing or being directly represented.

This interpretation can be supported by a reading of the Transcendental Deduction and the argument of the *Critique* as a whole as well as by Kant's explicit remarks on how he understands the difference between his own philosophy and Berkeley's. Especially clear is Kant's reply to J. S. Beck, on 4 Dec. 1792: 'Herren Eberhard's and Garve's opinion that Berkeleyan Idealism is identical to Critical Idealism (which I could better call [NB] 'the principle of the ideality of space and time') does not deserve the slightest attention. For I speak of ideality in reference to the *form* of representation while they construe it as ideality with respect to the *matter*, i.e., ideality of the *object* and its existence itself'.¹² It is hard to imagine a more direct expression of a clear understanding on Kant's part of the fundamental point that his idealism allows, whereas Berkeley's idealism denies, the existence of representation independent entities. The passage also very nicely confirms the species argument interpretation of Kant, because it explicitly ties Critical idealism to space and time, and hence leaves free from ideality everything not specifically dependent on space and time, such as even the matter of representation as such. Similar evidence for the claim that Kant understands his position as only 'formal' rather than material idealism also occurs at key places in the *Prolegomena* (Ak. 4: 289, 375) and the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 71, B 274). The same point is also made repeatedly in Kant's lectures on metaphysics: 'Bishop Berkeley in Ireland went even further, for he maintained that bodies are even impossible, because one would always contradict oneself if one assumes them. This is dogmatic or crude idealism . . . But there is also a Critical or transcendental idealism, when one assumes that appearances are indeed nothing in themselves, but that actually something unknown still underlies them. That is correct.'¹³

6. Misunderstandings of this point lie behind the very influential interpretation by F. H. Jacobi (1787) that carried further the controversy about Kant's idealism sparked by the first reviews of the *Critique* by Feder and Garve (1782, 1783). Jacobi insisted that Kant needed an argument to *establish* that there are objects in the *transcendental* sense—that is, things in themselves, which he (Jacobi) assumed to be the relevant issue.¹⁴ Jacobi found the very idea of such an argument impossible for Kant because he presumed that the *Critique* required total ignorance about things in themselves, and hence that Kant could not even understand

¹² *Correspondence/Immanuel Kant*, ed. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 445 (Ak. 11: 392). Kant adds: "'representation" means a determination in us that we relate to something else.'

¹³ *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, ed. and trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 227 (Ak. 29: 928–9); cf. pp. 382–3, 408 ff.

¹⁴ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 'On Transcendental Idealism' (1787), in *Kant's Early Critics*, 175: 'For according to the general use of language, the object must signify a thing outside us in a transcendental sense.'

what he was supposedly arguing for, let alone use a consistent ‘bridge principle’ (from phenomena to noumena) to try to make an argument establishing their existence.

What Jacobi failed to consider is that it is precisely the formal nature of Critical idealism that reveals that Kant was starting with, rather than arguing toward, the reality of things in themselves (that is, some ‘matter’ whose being is not simply relative to being represented). The fact that Kant’s idealism is only ‘formal’ is also what allows him, *pace* Jacobi, to leave room from the beginning for a meaningful concept of things in themselves. They are simply entities characterized apart from our specific spatiotemporal forms, something that is possible because, like anything intelligible at all, they can be (as Kant’s practical philosophy shows) thought of in terms of general categorial structures of the understanding, which have a non-spatiotemporal and therefore non-phenomenal meaning. Missing all these points, Jacobi lamented that a Kantian could ‘not even find it *probable* that things outside us in the transcendental sense exist’.¹⁵

Jacobi’s own position had a twofold character that is often overlooked: he claimed we can know ‘outer’ things only by ‘faith’, and, since he was not a transcendental idealist, he took the outer to be spatial and absolutely real at once. Kant’s famous immediate reaction was to add a passage in a note to the *Critique’s* B edition Preface calling it a ‘scandal’ for anyone to resort to ‘faith’ here (B xxxix n.). This reaction has been repeatedly misunderstood as some kind of signal that Kant was proposing instead an argument (as if ‘faith’ and ‘argument’ exhaust the alternatives) focused after all on establishing externality in the ‘transcendental’ (that is, thing in itself) sense that originally concerned Jacobi. In fact, nothing in this passage, or the A or B editions’ versions of Kant’s discussion of the ‘external-world’ problem, shows any concern (on his own part) with inferentially arguing toward things in themselves, let alone toward proving space and time apply to things in themselves. The A edition is notorious for explicitly focusing only on an argument to ‘things which are to be found in space’—that is, for the outer in an ‘empirically external’ rather than ‘transcendental sense’ (A 373). Interpreters who imagine that an argument to the transcendently external is needed here have often supposed that the B edition’s Refutation of Idealism was introduced to meet this need. In fact, however, a mere look at Kant’s formulation of his thesis (‘proves the existence of objects in space outside me’ (B 275)) shows that the concern of the Refutation has to do merely with empirical externality. (This is evident also in every line of the proof, and is not belied by the conclusion about ‘the existence of things outside me’ (B 276), since, as was just noted, Kant also made use of phrases about ‘things’ when explicitly talking merely about empirical items, as in the A 373 argument.) This point is also clear in the very

¹⁵ Ibid. Kant agrees that specific estimates of ‘probability’ with respect to the content of things in themselves are nonsense, but that is compatible with saying that some such things are possible and even undeniable.

beginning of the famous B ‘scandal’ footnote, where Kant announces that his concern is with refuting ‘psychological idealism’ (B xxxix n.), a position that turns out to be basically the empirical level mistake of epistemically privileging inner over outer sense.

All this leaves Kant with a perfectly intelligible response to Jacobi—concerning empirical externality—although, like most interesting philosophical arguments, the incidental details of the Refutation remain vulnerable to specific objections.¹⁶ The main point for our purposes is that, irrespective of these difficulties, Kant can properly emphasize that there is a kind of externality for which he had already given a relevant argument in A, and not a mere expression of faith, and which he had reformulated to a similar end in B. It is true that Kant’s position is not one of arguments ‘all the way down’. His argument for empirical externality invokes the presupposition that there is experience—that is, the cognitive achievement of ‘empirically determined consciousness . . . [i.e.,] of my own existence as determined in time’ (B 275).¹⁷ It is open to radical skeptics to reject such a presupposition and to slander their opponents by painting them into the corner of mere ‘faith’—but Kant never felt that philosophers had to pitch their work against this kind of skepticism. For him, the thought that there is some kind of empirical knowledge (that is, simply some determinate putatively warranted knowledge claim; it is not presupposed thereby that this claim is certain, or specifically physical or psychological) is not some kind of optional faith but is simply the common fact from which he took it that all sane people and philosophers actually proceed. (Some have presumed that a ‘regressive’ approach like this would leave the *Critique* without a significant task, but in fact there is more than enough left to do in seeking the necessary structures central to such experience.¹⁸) Jacobi had all sorts of ulterior motives for calling any step that was a premiss rather than a conclusion a matter of ‘faith’, but this is not how the term is commonly used, and there is no reason why Kant has to give in to Jacobi’s linguistic revisionism.

Matters are complicated by the fact that, while Kant at least presents a regressive argument concerning empirical externality, he does not even offer an argument here for transcendental externality. Kant’s position on this point might therefore seem more disappointing than his argument in the Refutation. Yet one can also contend that here the very lack of an argument by Kant shows his insight into the oddity of insisting that one must be had, and of thinking dogmatically, as Jacobi did, that only such an argument—one concerning transcendental externality—could rescue the legitimacy of claims about empirical things—that

¹⁶ See my *Kant’s Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 115–23.

¹⁷ See my ‘Problems from Van Cleve’s Kant: Experience and Objects’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66 (2003), 196–202.

¹⁸ See my ‘Kant’s Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument’, *Kant-Studien*, 69 (1978), 273–85.

is, spatial rather than merely 'psychological' phenomena. In the case of empirical externality, however, Kant realizes that there is an understandable philosophical worry that arises if someone supposes that we could have determinate psychological experience without ever having to avail ourselves of specifically spatial considerations. To meet this worry, Kant argues that its 'Cartesian' supposition does not hold up under investigation. But he never even responds to someone who might be seriously confused at the transcendental level, someone who might really think that there is no reality at all, just an impression of reality, or at least that there is no reality besides the reality that is oneself. Given that the strongest idealism that Kant finds it sensible to argue for is merely the ideality of spatio-temporal forms, and not at all of the ultimate 'matter' of the given that these forms structure, he has no reason for thinking that transcendental solipsism is anything other than an empty thought, something that no one actually believes or has presented a decent argument for. An early lecture note reflects this view vividly: 'Origin of *idealism*, the truth that the body without thoughts constitutes no world. So Bishop Berkeley, in the treatise *On the Use of Tarwater for our Body* . . . logically he cannot be refuted, but rather by the assent of other human beings and one's own conviction.'¹⁹

It would be odd to call Kant's dismissal of skepticism a matter of 'faith', for it is rather a matter of continuing to hold on to what we all do hold to and for which there is no point in letting go.²⁰ Of course, as I have noted elsewhere,²¹ this does leave Kant with the theoretically unrefuted possibility that 'we' are all manifestations of a single ultimate being (in which case there would be no transcendental externality, and, a fortiori, no plurality of ultimate personal beings). But this is a highly abstract thought that no one else has refuted either, and Kant's practical philosophy simply ignores it (right after Kant, Fichte and other idealists were innovative in going on to raise and attempt to solve the 'other-minds' problem, but not with clear success).²²

A proper understanding of Kant's response to Jacobi's objections thus only reinforces the point that Kant does not accept the representation = being principle. Kant denies this equation at two levels: he allows an 'empirical gap' (which can be bridged by our knowledge) between individual psychological representations and items that have the character of spatial externality; and he also allows a 'transcendental gap' (which our theoretical knowledge cannot bridge in a determinate way) between the totality of representations, in the sense of all

¹⁹ *Metaphysik Herder* (1762–4), in *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, 5–6 (Ak. 28: 42–3).

²⁰ Here (on the general issue of the mere existence of things in themselves) I differ from, among others, R. C. S. Walker, who calls Kant's invocation of things in themselves an instance of an 'inference to the best explanation'. See his 'Idealism: Kant and Berkeley', in Foster and Robinson (eds.), *Essays on Berkeley*, 126; and cf. below, Ch. 5.

²¹ See my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 115–23, and 'Kant, Fichte, and Short Arguments to Idealism', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 72 (1990), 63–85.

²² See Paul W. Franks, 'The Discovery of the Other: Cavell, Fichte, and Skepticism', *Common Knowledge*, 5 (1996), 72–105.

possible knowledge in human beings, and an ultimate ‘matter’ that could, for all we know, exist even in the absence of any such knowers. Interpreters who have begun to appreciate this position have been correct, I believe, in noting that, for all its specific idealistic claims, Kant’s position has strains of what we now would call a very serious commitment to realism, a realism of ‘modesty’ or ‘humility’ in that it nowhere even tries to argue that the domain of being as such must be cut down to the domain of representation or human accessibility.²³

7. All these points must be kept in mind when approaching contemporary neo-Berkeleyan interpretations such as that of James Van Cleve. Like many distinguished Anglophone philosophers, Van Cleve proceeds from the presumption that properly understanding Kant’s idealism should involve reconstructing an argument from the *Critique* that at least looks like an understandable attempt to prove the being = representation principle. It should be clear enough that I am pessimistic that even traces of such an attempt can actually be found in the text, but this should not stop us from considering what Van Cleve does claim to find, or from taking what we can from Van Cleve’s work to get an extra perspective on the peculiarities of Kant’s idealism.

The first observations Van Cleve offers on Kant’s idealism do not mention Berkeley but focus on the ‘Copernican’ issue of why it is that Kant thinks that our substantive a priori knowledge should be accounted for idealistically (VC 5). But Van Cleve moves very quickly from this specific question to formulating the main Kantian thought as a general claim that ‘the object conforms to our knowledge rather than conversely’ (VC 5, citing B xvi–xvii). And then he jumps very quickly again to proposing that ‘the most satisfactory way’ to understand this claim must be in terms of the notion that ‘the objects in question owe their very existence to being cognized by us. An object can depend for us on its *Sosein* (its being the way it is) only if it also depends on us for its *Sein* (its being, period)’ (VC 5). Given such a bold interpretive hypothesis, it is easy to see why Van Cleve feels impelled to find, or manufacture, a Kantian argument for the being = representation principle.

There is much that is odd about this procedure. First of all, it conflicts with Van Cleve’s later endorsing a kind of ‘two-world’ interpretation of Kantian idealism, one that takes non-empirical things in themselves very seriously (VC 134–47). This concession alone means that it cannot really be the case that Kant makes ‘being’ as such dependent on ‘our knowledge’. To concede that there are things in themselves in this sense is to concede precisely that there are beings that do not depend on our knowledge (or representation in general). Furthermore, a closer look at the ‘Copernican’ passage that Van Cleve starts

²³ See Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and cf. my ‘Kant and Short Arguments to Humility’, in Predrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Kant’s Legacy: Essays in Honor of L. W. Beck* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2001), 167–94.

with shows that what Kant is really proposing there is not that objects as such depend on our knowledge but only that the spatiotemporal form of the objects of experience (that is, of empirical knowledge) depends on our knowledge. This may, suddenly, sound rather unexciting—that objects of our knowledge as such ‘depend’ on our knowledge, that is, must be knowable. Yet, it surely must be what Kant means, for he is certainly not arguing that it is objects as such—which would have to include those that we do not know, or whose form we do not know—that ‘depend’ on us. Does this mean that Kantian idealism is a mere triviality? Not at all, for, as Kant explains, the crucial feature of his position is that it is a ‘formal’ idealism. It is trivial that the objects of our knowledge cannot as such be wholly independent of our knowledge of objects (for otherwise they could not be known); but it is not trivial to hold, as Kant does, that: (a) these objects have universal structures, (b) these structures are correlative with epistemic forms in us (pure forms of intuiting), and (c) this correlation might be best explained by giving a kind of Copernican explanatory primacy to the subjective, or ‘epistemic’, rather than sheer objective side (or hidden common cause).

Kant’s ‘Copernican hypothesis’ receives preliminary content and support from the Preface’s appropriate reminders of serious weaknesses in at least two alternative ‘objective’ ways of trying to explain the kind of ‘correlation’ relevant for the a priori knowledge of space and time that is his main concern (B xvi–xvii; see also A 41/B 58, where Kant speaks of ‘both difficulties’ being removed on his hypothesis). Saying that the forms are given by an object’s sheer sensory impact, or the mere fact of its existence as an external structure, makes it very difficult to explain how such a contingent fact can generate any *necessary* content. And saying that the forms are given in the analytic content of the definition of an individual object makes it very difficult to explain the possibility of our *knowledge* of general forms of experience, especially since on Kant’s view we have no way of determining the relevant definitions, and have no Leibnizian insight, even a dim one, into the real essences of individuals.

Against these classical empiricist and rationalist objectivist theories, Kant’s alternative hypothesis that the general forms lie in the subjective structure of the spatiotemporal species of knowing seems at least an intelligible possibility (for example, in terms of the familiar *analogy* of a colored lens), even if there remain obvious gaps in nailing down his claim that only an explanation from the subject side is feasible (note that his initial claim is simply that he has an ‘intelligible’ explanation (B 41), whereas his opponents have none). It is significant, therefore, that in the Dialectic Kant supplements the *Critique*’s initial positive argument for the ideality of space and time with another argument (which may well have been discovered earlier) that is negative but stronger in its implications, since it claims that there are contradictions in regarding space and time to be transcendently real. Whatever one thinks of the cogency of Kant’s basic strategy (I am not claiming that Kant has defeated objectivism or given a clear warrant for his

crucial assumption that we have adequate access to these forms simply because they are within us), the main point is that its general structure does not even look anything like the claim that representation and being as such must coincide, let alone any statement that we literally create the existence (and not merely the form) of what is outside us.

8. Even if I am correct about Kant's main strategy here, it still might be the case that elsewhere Kant in fact does, or should, deviate from this strategy and adopt a line of argument close to Berkeley's. This seems to be Van Cleve's view when he asserts that Kant 'explicitly equates objects with "the experience in which alone, as objects, they can be known"' (VC 6). And yet there is still no reason to think that this assertion fits Kant's hypothesis about space and time as ideal 'forms', for there Kant's point is surely just the opposite of what Van Cleve suggests. That is, rather than cutting objects as such 'down to us', Kant is letting us know that it is only objects of experience as known by us that he is making relative to us. This leaves objects as such—that is, things in themselves—free from any claim (at least so far) of having to be 'equated with' or determined by us or our specific modes of knowing. Nonetheless, if we shift our attention merely to the issue of empirical objects as such, it is not so hard to see how someone might think that there is a Kantian position here that—even if it is definitely not tantamount to a global endorsement of the being = representation principle—somewhat resembles part of Berkeley's view. After all, Kant does seem to be saying that at least the empirically determinable properties of objects are relative to our modes of knowledge. These properties are not only accessible to us; they are properties that Kant, like Berkeley, would say could not possibly be understandably ascribed to objects without some reference to our modes of sensible intuition (see VC 7, citing A 490–1/B 518–19).

All this means that one can consider Van Cleve's Berkeleyan reading of Kant as at least a discussable view about all the features of empirical objects. (This reading is perhaps better called 'quasi-Berkeleyan' or 'neo-Berkeleyan', because, unlike Berkeley himself, it does not invoke God to explain perception.) Since at times even Van Cleve himself concedes that Kant cannot be a phenomenalist about objects as such,²⁴ the relevant remaining issue is simply whether or not one ought to take phenomenism as the best way of expressing Kant's theory about objects as clusters of empirical determinations.

Two kinds of phenomenism are distinguished by Van Cleve: 'ontological' and 'analytical' (a similar distinction can be found in much older interpreters,

²⁴ At one point Van Cleve says: 'Unlike some phenomenists, however, Kant is also a noumenalist: he believes there are some objects, the things in themselves, that resist phenomenist reduction' (VC 11). But elsewhere Van Cleve seems to forget this and says, for example: 'I take him [Kant] to be saying that his concern [in allegedly being a phenomenist] is not epistemological, but ontological, not with the conditions of obtaining knowledge of pre-existing objects, but with the question of *what it is for objects to exist at all*' (VC 94, emphasis added).

for example, in Norman Kemp Smith's attribution to Kant of a 'patchwork' of 'subjectivism' and 'phenomenalism'). Van Cleve's preferred reading is the ontological variety, which treats empirical objects as appearances that are mere 'virtual objects', 'a shorthand for saying that a certain kind of representation occurs' (VC 9, cf. pp. 71, 123–4), where a 'representation' is nothing more than an individual psychological event, one that might happen to be related to other such events by various rules. According to the second option, analytical phenomenalism, 'truths purportedly about material things are necessarily equivalent to truths solely about our perceptions' (VC 71; cf. pp. 123–4). Roughly speaking, the difference here seems to parallel that between reductions to actual or possible perceptions. On ontological phenomenalism, the existence of a tree is just the existence of a set of actual tree representings in some subject. On analytical phenomenalism, it is true that a tree exists even if there are no such actual representings as long as it is still the case that some subject would have appropriate tree representings if its experience were simply extended in various natural ways.

As explained so far, it is not clear whether, with analytical phenomenalism, it can be said that there are trees even if no finite perceivers continue to exist, or even if they never did exist. That is, if all that is said is that the truth that 'a tree exists' entails that there be some possible tree perceivings, it is not clear whether, or why, this possibility would have to be grounded in some *actual perceiving* (one might think it could be grounded merely in the possible development of some other actual property of a being, which then later might turn into a capacity for representing). However, if it does not have to be grounded in this way, one could ask why the position should be understood as idealist. After all, a dogmatic realist might also say that, if there are trees, then surely in some sense it should be possible that there be tree representings (since it is possible that there could come to exist perceivers who would develop an appropriate representational state). Perhaps the only way to maintain a difference between the realist and the idealist would then be to say that the realist would still hold that the tree is something extra, something more than, though perhaps necessarily correlated with, the possible perceivings, whereas the 'ungrounded' kind of analytical phenomenalist/idealist (presumably on the basis of some kind of principle of economy) would say that all there is are sets of possible perceivings (some of which might be actualized, but they would not have to be). But in that case, this kind of 'analytical' phenomenalism would seem to be characterized not by lacking an ontology but rather by restricting itself to a fairly rich and peculiar ontology of all sorts of 'real' but ungrounded possibilities.

If one does not take this peculiar 'ungrounded' route, the distinctiveness of analytical phenomenalism would have to rest on an insistence that external empirical objects exist fundamentally on the basis of the existence of at least some actual perceiver, even if the range of its actual perceptions would not determine the bounds of reality. But, even if this view is not as 'peculiar' as the previous one, it is still something of an odd hybrid. One can wonder, for instance, if

a super-Robinson Crusoe had somehow been the only human being who ever existed, why his existence would suddenly bring into existence all the remote and past and future trees that he would never actually see anyway. Moreover, if all that is needed for these trees to exist is that this Crusoe might exist for a moment with some representings, why could not some other possible *non-psychological* relation of that or another being have done just as well? Perhaps one can say—since this is not an ontological phenomenalism, which insists that all that can exist are actual representation states—that the trees exist as long as there are some beings who could have ‘concretely’ related to them in some way or other, say by bumping into them. In other words, what is so special about the relation of (grounded but merely) possible representing?

9. If one is not fixated on the doctrine that there is something very special simply about psychological actuality as such, the natural way to go on here would be to say that representings (as opposed to ‘bumps’) are special because it is through them that knowledge is obtained. But Van Cleve realizes that this line of consideration could lead (and has led) some interpreters (notably Carl Posy) to consider an alternative to phenomenalism altogether—namely, evidentialism. Unlike phenomenalism, which is a kind of psychological reductionism, evidentialism is a cognitive reductionism. It says that there are only those facts for which there is evidence (VC 12–13), and it leaves open the possibility of construing evidential relations in a way that does not have to map onto phenomenalism’s exclusive focus on psychological reality. Thus, comparative truths about two individuals’ inner sensory lives might hold on a phenomenalist position (since presumably they are really ‘there’ with what is given in the minds, whether knowable or not), but not on an evidentialist one (since no single subject might ever be able to have evidence for them, not being able to compare the states). Conversely, some philosophers claim that there is mathematical or physical evidence for truths that has no basic psychological character at all. Evidentialism thus provides an alternative and altogether non-phenomenalist way of getting beyond the bind of phenomenalism’s worrisome restriction of reality to psychological states.

Evidentialism certainly has a special appeal from my general perspective, since I have been arguing all along that there is no reason for supposing Kant was ever interested in reducing any kind of facts to a psychological basis. In the end it seems that for him not even the facts of psychology are rooted in a traditional ‘psychological’ notion of ‘experience’; hence his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* offers only a physics and not a separate science of individual minds as such. But the main point is that, although Kant’s terminology may tend to focus on ‘representations’ rather than ‘evidence’, his arguments about ‘representing’ surely have to be understood epistemically rather than merely psychologically. What always matters to Kant is not what mere inner sense series of primitive

representations is occurring, but what kinds of judgments and epistemic activities we have or are capable of having.²⁵ A telling illustration of this point can be found in Kant's claim that there can be truths about fine-grained 'magnetic matter' that no human perceiver could ever 'directly experience' (A 226/B 273). The example is constructed in precisely such a way that no actual or expected course of human perception of the matter is allowed to be possible. The truths remain assertable simply because they follow from extrapolations concerning natural *laws* that have been gathered about experience—that is, the realm of spatiotemporal empirical knowledge, which is not something that has to be cut down to the accidental size and acuity of the 'real potential' of human sense organs (see also A 493/B 521).

There remain difficulties for evidentialism, however, for it would seem to have some counterintuitive consequences. On Michael Dummett's version, for example, the fact that we cannot see how there could ever be evidence for a proposition such as 'a city will never be built here' is enough to count against its having any truth value at all—and yet it is hard not to be sympathetic to a realist who would insist that it nonetheless must be either true or false (VC 224). There may also be self-referential problems that arise when evidentialist principles are stated in a general form (VC 143). For most of these problems, however, it is not clear that they would be directly relevant to Kant, because he need not have a commitment to a completely general evidentialist position. It is worth noting, however, that here Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena might help with some of these problems while providing a useful supplement to a kind of empirical evidentialist position. That is, in resisting for evidentialist reasons the assignment of an empirical truth value to a proposition about an empirical state assumed to be beyond any evidence for us, the Kantian might be taken simply to be making a point about what 'the realm of experience' means. Since Kantian 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) is defined in terms of 'empirical knowledge', it should not seem so odd to exclude from it states that, *ex hypothesi*, cannot be known. And yet, for those who insist that reality itself should not be tied down by the limits of our knowledge, the Kantian might have his cake and eat it too, by simply adding: 'well, yes, there might be such evidence-transcendent truths after all, but their peculiarity is a good reason for calling them non-phenomenal.'²⁶

²⁵ On Kant's important inner sense/apperception distinction, see above, Ch. 2, and my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, ch. 7.

²⁶ There are extremely complicated implications of these positions for the assessment of Kant's antinomies, but there is no space to discuss that issue here. For the beginning of a discussion, see my 'Kantian Idealism Today', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 9 (1992), 329–42. My argument here has emphasized non-empirical aspects of Kant's philosophy, but I believe it also could be developed in a way consistent with the position Paul Abela defends, according to which 'Kant's commitment to the reality of the past and the idea of hidden truths serves to affirm a realist, truth-condition interpretation of empirical realism' (*Kant's Empirical Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 249).

10. Rather than pursuing these difficult issues further here, I will elaborate some additional textual reasons for my main conclusions about the limits of Van Cleve's way of linking Kant and Berkeley on idealism. My fundamental unease with his interpretive proposals comes down to two points. First, contrary to his suggestion, I believe it can be shown that not only does Kant not prefer ontological to analytic phenomenalism, but there is also no clear evidence for ascribing ontological phenomenalism to Kant at all. Given the considerable oddity of the position, this leaves a strong ground for saying positively that he does not hold it. Second, for reasons similar to those that have been rehearsed above, I would also argue against ascribing even analytic phenomenalism to Kant. This would liberate him from being bound down to the remaining, and least Berkeleyan, of Van Cleve's Berkeleyan interpretive options.

Consider first the weakness of the evidence that Van Cleve offers for ascribing ontological phenomenalism to Kant. Sometimes he refers to statements in which Kant makes empirical objects, as appearances, relative to 'our' 'sensibility' (VC 6, citing A 129). There are doubtless many such passages in Kant, but there is no reason to believe that the restriction to 'sensibility' is meant in terms of actual psychological limitations rather than in terms of the general structures of space and time that for Kant define for us the domain of the 'sensible'. Moreover, the generality and necessity of these forms, as well as Kant's emphasis on the 'sensible' rather than the actually sensed, implies that here the 'our' or 'us' to which empirical objects are relative must not be understood in an individual psychological sense. This is why even in the first edition's Fourth Paralogism Kant distinguishes a 'transcendental' from an 'empirical' sense of 'in us' (A 369), indicating that the 'in' means not that spatial objects are in minds empirically as one individual box might concretely be within another individual box, but rather that they are 'in' our knowledge in general, in accord with the general point that we can give no meaning to empirical features of objects that are beyond the necessary conditions of our empirical knowing—namely, space and time.

Confusions can arise here because, in addition to the positive claim about general conditions of experience, there is a negative ontological claim that Kant holds to—namely, that what is in space and time is not as such in things in themselves. This is an important Kantian doctrine but it is one that is meant to follow from arguments elsewhere, in the Aesthetic and the Dialectic, and it is not equivalent to the epistemological doctrine that there is a purely epistemic rather than merely psychological notion of subjectivity. To appreciate the distinctness of these doctrines, consider the following possibilities. Some philosophers, such as Berkeley and a skeptical Humean, might deny pure epistemic forms of subjectivity, while also rejecting the absolute objective existence of space and time. Other philosophers, such as some contemporary physicalists, might accept the ontology of absolutely objective space and time but reject the epistemic notion of pure subjectivity altogether. And a transcendental Platonist might somehow accept

both absolute space/time and pure epistemic, that is, transcendental, subjectivity (for example, necessary normative rules for finite cognition in general, as, for example, in Chisholm). Kant is unique in holding to the fourth basic possibility here: the joint assertion of (ontologically) ideal space/time and (epistemologically) transcendental forms of subjectivity. Although these assertions are closely related for him, they can be defined independently and then assessed separately in many ways.

11. The other evidence that Van Cleve cites for his ontological phenomenalist reading concerns Kant's frequent statements that empirical objects, as 'mere representations', must be distinguished from things in themselves (VC 7). This distinction is obviously important, but by itself it does not imply that the 'representational' status of empirical objects could not also involve an irreducible (that is, non-phenomenalist) ontological level between things in themselves and actual psychological states—just as some philosophers once suggested that in contrast to both actual sensings and actual physical objects there might be 'sensa' that exist in their own right. (They might be actually sensed but could also exist in some way apart from being sensed; the possibilities of analytical phenomenalism might also be said to occupy a similar level of being in between actual psychological and physical states.) For similar reasons, one cannot assume that Kant's discussions in the Antinomies favor ontological phenomenalism simply because they say, for example, that the determination of the magnitude of parts in a division of matter is 'actual only by its being given in representation' (VC 70)—because, as has just been noted, the relativity to 'representation' in the case of 'magnetic matter' is not at all a psychological fact about what humans actually see, or even can see, but rather a fact about what can be extrapolated from scientific laws.

There is something of a backhand appreciation for this point by Van Cleve when he cites similar passages and says that there are 'occasional hints in Kant that transcendental idealism should rather be construed as a version of analytical [rather than ontological] phenomenalism' (VC 71). But elsewhere he insists, 'The *Critique of Pure Reason* contains many explicit statements of ontological phenomenalism. For example, Kant says that an object like a house is a *sum* of representations (A 191/B 236) and that matter is a *species* of representations (A 191/B 236)' (VC 123). These are not strong points: the second passage here fits right in with the 'species argument' interpretation, and the first bit of 'evidence' rests on a very questionable and overused single word, Kemp Smith's translation of the difficult German term *Inbegriff* as 'sum'.²⁷ This term can sometimes be used to signify a 'sum', but it can also have much more abstract meanings, signifying the 'purport' or 'quintessence' of something. In this context, there is no reason not to believe that Kant is saying merely that whatever we claim to know

²⁷ This point was already appreciated by Wilfrid Sellars, 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism', in Walker (ed.), *The Real and the Ideal*, 179.

about empirical items such as houses, for example, that their parts are not successive, this will 'in essence' have something to do with how we *ought* to represent a house. That is, the fact of the relation of these parts is not determined (as Kant makes quite clear) by the sequence of actual representations that a particular mind goes through in one instance—as would have to be the case if ontological phenomenalism were Kant's view. If the house were simply the English 'sum' of my representations, then a sequence of house-door, house-window representations would mean that these exist simply in sequence.

Amazingly, Van Cleve also contends that, because Kant occasionally uses 'representation and appearance interchangeably', 'most of this paragraph [at A 191/B 236] is laden with ontological phenomenalism' (VC 124). And yet, in his own single paragraph, Van Cleve notes the obvious point that an ontological phenomenalist approach, with its collapse of any distinction between the order of representing and of what is represented, would mean that the 'opening wedge of Kant's argument [the fact that there is an order in the parts of the house that we want to distinguish from the order of our representings] would thus be lost' (VC 124). This reading exhibits not a hermeneutics of charity but a harshly uncharitable hermeneutics. Perhaps one could imagine that, right after introducing, on his own, a (rough) distinction between 'appearances' as represented, and 'representations' as representings, Kant has totally forgotten and misunderstood everything about the issue that he has just raised and has fallen back into a view that makes his chapter pointless; but one could also suppose that, in German as in English, 'appearance' and 'representation' have all sorts of meanings, and by this time Kant thinks he can let his readers pick their way through them a bit on their own. Sometimes it is easiest to think of 'appearances' as the representeds that appear to a subject, while, in contrast, the term 'representations' signifies the representings within a subject; but it is also not unprecedented to call the appearances themselves representations in some sense—they are, after all, representeds, and in this way they can also be at least notionally distinguished (as Kant does immediately go on to distinguish them) from whatever is assumed to be a 'thing in itself'.

12. Even if we conclude, as I think we should by now, that the ascription of ontological phenomenalism to Kant is not only inadequately supported but also evidently absurd, it is still not clearly absurd to think that he might have been attracted to an analytical phenomenalism restricted to the spatiotemporal features of objects—even if, as noted earlier, there also seem to be good reasons for linking him instead with some kind of evidentialist position. One final reason for not staying with analytical phenomenalism is that an appreciation of one of its most basic weaknesses fits in very well with a striking feature of Kant's idealism.

A familiar problem with analytical phenomenalism is that it seems to leave us with countless dangling hypotheticals. Suppose we are worried about the truth of a claim about some invisible magnetic matter, and then we are told

(by the phenomenalist) not to worry: to say that it exists is just to say that some present sensory representing, plus some use of complicated natural laws, can yield some kind of anticipated sensory representing that could be used as the indirect confirmation of the existence of the hidden matter, since it might be supposed that matter of that type would lead precisely to that kind of later representing. Our worries might disappear for a moment, but not for long, since it is only natural to ask what makes these laws true—at which point we no doubt will be told about even more complicated hypothetical relations and states that are not and cannot ever be directly perceived. And, as if this were not enough, this phenomenalist would have to add that all this keeps going on and on and that is it, the end of the story is an ever-continuing story. There is no ‘brute matter’, there are just stories about what would be represented if. By this time some philosophers may well want to scream—as G. E. Moore did, politely, at the ghost of J. S. Mill—that what we all really believe is that there are some categorical facts apart from us (and our representings) that are making these countless hypotheticals true.²⁸ Those who share Moore’s view should feel a bit closer to Kant, and a final step away from Van Cleve’s quasi-Berkeleyan suggestions (I say ‘quasi’ because Berkeley himself, unlike most contemporary theorists, can appeal to God as an actual ground for true hypotheticals), in seeing that for this very reason Kant cannot be an analytical phenomenalist. He does not hold that the structures, or hypotheticals, of the domain of experience hold on their own and are the end of the story. For him, there are and must be things in themselves, and their states can be thought to be reflected in categorical, albeit unknowable by us, absolute truths, truths that presumably provide some categorical ground for the phenomena.

That is the good news. There are, of course, many messy complications that I am still ignoring. It is undeniable (and perhaps only to be expected) that the specific relations between Kant’s things in themselves and the features of the empirical world remain obscure; my main point, in contrast to most interpreters, has been merely that the assertion of a general relation between these two can be seen as a help, and not a hindrance, to properly understanding Kant’s philosophy. Beyond this, the most that one may ever be able to do here is to suggest that something like the problem of a never-achieved final specification of this relation (of empirical conditional truths to categorical grounds) looks as if it will also continue to bedevil future theories in science and philosophy, so the difficulty is at least not Kant’s problem alone.

13. One other big problem is the negative side of Kant’s idealism, which I said from the very beginning is quite important, but which I have not developed in detail. In one of his most difficult ‘ontological’ interpretive moments, Van Cleve faces up to this challenge in a radical way by saying Kant’s ultimate view is that

²⁸ G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), 190–2.

while there are two worlds ‘of discourse’—spatiotemporal phenomena and non-spatiotemporal noumena—the first domain is of mere appearances, so that in the end, ontologically, there is but one world ‘whose only denizens are things in themselves’ (VC 150).

If we go along with this remarkable view, it may seem that, although we have finally arrived at a position very unlike Berkeley’s, it is one that is all the worse. Whereas Berkeley went too far in cutting the world down to our representations, it would seem that Kant has gone too far in cutting our representations off from ‘the’ world (this was Hegel’s worry). But this is not right. Just as Berkeley was not as merely psychological as he might seem, because he grounded reality not in represented ideas but rather in representing activities or powers, so, on the other hand, Kant does not simply ignore representation and banish it to sheer non-being, but holds that it too is some kind of manifestation of an ‘intelligible cause’ (A 494–5/B 522–3) or ‘being itself’, albeit in a way that we cannot determine theoretically. And he even asserts that in our own case, despite all the limitations we have in determining things in themselves, inside or outside us, we are in contact with ‘the *being itself*’ (B 429). So, for both Berkeley and Kant, we are in some way directly familiar with ourselves and with ultimate reality (and not mere appearance), but this is not an ordinary representation and it does not allow us immediately to know the nature of ourselves or the ultimate source of representations as such.

Nonetheless, there remains a crucial difference in the end: Berkeley is not merely an idealist, someone who holds that material beings are not ultimate; he is also a spiritualist, someone who holds that substantive mental beings exist and are invulnerable to destruction by natural causes. He is convinced that only active thinking beings can exist and that we can develop some detailed knowledge of their nature. Kant is more modest theoretically in that he does not assert that we have any knowledge that there must be or is any spiritual substance—even if he agrees with Berkeley that only things that are not material in a spatiotemporal sense can have absolute reality. Unlike Berkeley, Kant does not rule out in principle the possibility of a ‘quasi-scientific realist’ and non-spiritualist theory of these things—a theory that, to be sure, happens to be beyond our capabilities, but in principle could explain objects somewhat along the lines of a Lockean ideal science of ‘real essences’ (with the proviso that its ultimate predicates would have to be more basic than anything spatiotemporal).²⁹ In other words: materialism and spiritualism are exclusive but not exhaustive options, and Kant’s ‘mere immaterialist’ idealism stands between them.

This final way of distinguishing Berkeley from Kant should not be shocking news. It corresponds to how Kant himself basically viewed his relation to Berkeley and explains his characterization in the *Prolegomena* (Ak. 4: 293) of Berkeley’s

²⁹ Wilfrid Sellars came the closest to working out something like this form of Kantianism. See above, n. 27, as well as the Postscript to my *Kant’s Theory of Mind* (2nd edn.).

idealism as 'fanatical' (*schwärmerisch*). However, as has just been argued, it does not at all correspond to how many other interpreters continue to relate Kant and Berkeley, and for that reason alone it seems worth reconsidering. Once this is done, the well-trodden road in the history of Kant scholarship from Kant to Berkeley might begin to swing away from Berkeley and back in the direction of Kant's own idealism after all.

4

Kant, Hume, and the Problem of Moral Motivation

The problem of moral motivation, roughly the question of why we should be expected to follow the voice of ‘pure reason’ rather than our own ‘given nature’, remains central for those who resist the general approach of Kant’s practical philosophy. Often, however, this problem is oversimplified in Anglophone philosophy, and it is approached in isolation from the full structure of Kant’s system.¹ Despite the renaissance of Kantian ethics, it appears likely that most analytic philosophers still reject the Kantian perspective in favor of positions such as utilitarianism, expressivism, virtue theory (Aristotelian or Humean), or ‘anti-theory’ particularist views. They follow the disparaging attitude that leading ethicists such as Foot, Williams, Mackie, McDowell, and Blackburn have expressed toward all systems of a Kantian type. Hence, if a Kantian still wishes to reach a truly cosmopolitan audience, it makes sense to step beyond the perspective of Kant scholarship alone, and to reflect on the basic features that contemporary philosophers would insist that any acceptable moral theory treat with sensitivity. Once these features are clarified in relatively neutral language (Part I), one can begin to situate Kant’s position more effectively in relation to common criticisms (Part II), and to construct a defense of his account of motivation by recalling some key but relatively neglected aspects of his texts (Part III).

I. NON-KANTIAN PROLEGOMENA: ‘THE MORAL PROBLEM’

At the very least, any moral theory should provide an account of the (1) content, (2) motivation, (3) possibility, and (4) authority of its principles. It should explain *what* is supposed to be done, and *how* human beings, given their basic psychology, can actually be expected to do it; as well as *whether* the very notion

¹ For helpful overviews of recent Kantian discussions of related topics, see Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds.), *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

of such moral action is even possible, metaphysically, and *why* it should be given special (perhaps always overriding) importance. Kant's theory of morality as autonomy promises an answer to all these questions at once: (1) the lawful content of *autonomy* tells us what, most basically, is to be done, and (2) its being rooted in our own rational 'self', in *autonomy*, is supposed to make it readily understandable how we can be willing to do this; while (3) the metaphysics of transcendental idealism, which undergirds both the Critical philosophy's general position and its notion of autonomy, is designed to allay fundamental worries about the impossibility of morality, and (4) its doctrine that autonomy is central to the very idea of responsible action supposedly shows that no agent can properly go against it.

This is a formidable package of claims, but it should be understood from the start that it is presented with numerous qualifications not made explicit in this extremely brief summary. Kant emphasizes that his system is aimed at *finite rational agents* as such, and so (for all we know at this point) it need not apply to beings not meeting these conditions. Hence, however ambitious Kantian morality may seem, it is important to keep in mind that, given these limitations alone, the theory cannot be understood as aimed toward demolishing all forms of skepticism. If some persons opt out of rationality altogether, the claims of a system of moral obligations built precisely on considerations of rationality can hardly be expected to force them to comply.

Contemporary philosophers tend not to want to stop at this point. Even within the camp of those who claim to be close to Kant, there are many who want to make his moral principles virtually inescapable. One strategy along this line would be to argue that the Kantian position is not restricted from the start by a bias toward reason or rationalism but has *deeper* and more 'existential' roots, such as the very idea of having a 'practical identity' at all, and these roots are what lead to, rather than presuppose, the rationalist Kantian perspective.² A somewhat different but in the end similar strategy would be to start from a point that is already clearly *within* the 'standpoint of rationality', but to argue that this is an extraordinarily broad standpoint, one that does not already presuppose any controversial material commitments but can justify morality merely by reflecting on conditions of consistency that any 'normal' agent would have to acknowledge.³

For systematic and exegetical reasons, I believe Kant's moral theory is *not* best defended by these kinds of ambitious strategies.⁴ By the time of the *Critique of Practical Reason* at the latest, it seems to me that Kant clearly recognized a point that is common ground in most contemporary discussions of morality, namely

² See, e.g., Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Korsgaard et al., *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³ See, e.g., Onora O'Neill (formerly Nell), *Acting on Principle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), and *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pt. II.

that there are clear senses in which an agent could be recognizably rational (if not 'reasonable')—for example, as someone who carries out all sorts of proper theoretical and social judgments—*without* thereby having to accept the special claim of a 'fact of reason' that dictates a commitment to morality in a Kantian sense involving 'pure' and categorical principles. On this interpretation, neither 'mere' practical rationality, nor some basic sense of being a person or subject at all, is enough by itself to force one to admit to being bound by Kantian moral principles.

These concessions might seem to make matters all the worse for a defense of Kant's account of moral motivation. The classical objection to the account is that since, at the very least, we are beings not of *mere* thought, but of sensibility *and* thought, and since motivation is precisely a matter of moving toward, and not merely thinking about, a state of affairs, it follows that the burden is on rationalist theories such as Kant's to show that sensible agents like us can and should be expected to move to act not merely from desires but on the basis of 'pure practical reason'. Moreover, the anti-Kantian notion of ethical action without submission to reason appears to be much more than a mere philosophical possibility. As Humeans repeatedly argue, there are all sorts of ways in which agents led by desire rather than reason can still behave admirably and agree with most of what people think needs to be said about the (at least) 'quasi-real' features of morality.⁵ Since, for them, being moral is basically a matter of responding to well-developed customs rooted in the desires of human nature, the motivation question—that is, the explanation of the 'how' of our 'being good'—appears not very difficult in principle. In addition, it seems that they can easily offer an account of the what, whether, and why of moral life by reminding us of how desires generated under standard social conditions can naturally lead to agreement on central values such as benevolence.

Of course, *if* our desires were deeply chaotic and did not give any appearance of developing even roughly in the fortunate patterns that Humeans discuss, then their account could also be objected to from the very start—but in fact their account does not appear implausible at the outset, even if one might dispute many of its particulars. Hence, it can seem that Humeans have a ready answer to what Michael Smith has called 'the moral problem'—that is, the difficulty of providing an account of morality that explains at once both its 'objectivity' and its 'practicality'.⁶ For Humeans, the driving power of desires can directly show how morality is necessarily practical, and contingent but easily understandable facts about our need to express common desires in a social form can account for the putative objectivity of its content. Furthermore, Humeans can do all this

⁵ See Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and *Being Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶ See Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), ch. 1.

without adding unnatural and controversial features to our list of the 'furniture of the world'. Physical objects and sensations (whatever they are) seem to be all that is needed, without any mysterious positing of Platonic entities or 'pure' Kantian values.

A standard way (one that is also used by Smith) of picturing this dispute between Humeans and Kantians is to characterize it as an argument about whether *desire* or *belief* has primacy. (I will follow the shorthand custom of using 'belief' and 'thought' interchangeably in this context; what matters here is the content of belief and not the specific attitude of believing.) For Humeans, human beings have moral beliefs that are roughly convergent, and thus can preserve the appearance of objectivity, because they are the product, rather than the ultimate source, of basic human desires. In this sense reason is and should be 'the slave of passion'. From this Humean perspective, Kantians are pictured as strangely insisting that moral beliefs are free-standing insights into a set of purely rational truths that somehow, mysteriously, must be able to have a dominating practical effect on all agents.⁷ Here passion is to be the servant of reason, and desire is to mold itself to belief, rather than vice versa—but how this can happen, and why we should think that it must happen, can seem (to Humeans) wholly unclear.

II. THE KANTIAN SITUATION

1. The first step in understanding the Kantian response to this challenge is to point out that the philosophy of action in general requires a much more complex approach than the simple contrast between belief and desire commonly found in Anglophone ethics. This contrast is, to be sure, not entirely without a basis. Kant himself treats theoretical philosophy under the heading of the faculty of cognition, and thus of proper belief, and practical philosophy under the heading of a term that is normally translated as the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*). But this way of expressing the relation of the theoretical and practical can be misleading in a number of respects. Although it is true that the terms 'desire' and *begehren* are commonly connected, and although in English 'belief' (or 'reason' or 'cognition') is commonly contrasted with 'desire' (or 'passion'), these facts hide what are—for practically any philosophy—crucial asymmetries between the key terms, and crucial complexities in the phenomena that fall under the heading of what so far has been called simply 'desire'.

The first relevant complexity to note is that the notion of 'desire'—insofar as here it designates simply *all that contrasts* with 'mere belief'—can involve a number of very different components, most notably: feeling, volition, and normativity. In Anglophone philosophical contexts, the term 'desire' (or 'pro attitude')

⁷ See John Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), 40.

is often used simply as the most general *conative* term, just as ‘thought’ or ‘belief’ is used as the most general *cognitive* term. In this sense, a desire is simply a state that does not have the neutrality of a mere thought but stands for an attitudinal component, something that is most naturally, but not always, understood as a stance for or against a thought. This implies, first, that each desire—in *this sense*—is parasitic on a thought; one cannot intelligibly desire X (in this sense) without some thought of what X is, whereas the reverse claim is not necessarily true. Secondly, this immediately implies that each desire, in this sense, is something else than a mere thought, in this case a ‘thought plus’.⁸

Different theorists tend to focus on different forms of this ‘something else’ without always considering together all the possible complications concerning them. The three factors just listed concerning desire—willing, feeling, and evaluating—are distinct, and each of them brings further complexities along with it. In the context of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, to say that one desires a state of affairs, in the sense of engaging the *Begehrungsvermögen*, is to say much more than that one is simply thinking of it or believing it is there. Typically, it is to say even more than that one merely ‘has’ some ‘stance’ or other toward the state, for it implies that one is in some way going so far as to *will* that state. In other words, for Kant the main relevant factor concerning the ‘something else’ that contrasts with mere thought (belief) essentially involves a distinct faculty of volition.

For philosophers in the empiricist tradition, however, a situation warranting the introduction of a term such as desire can arise already when there is mere feeling or passion (‘appetite’). For them, desire, in one sense, can exist and already contrast with belief as soon as there is a state *immediately* expressing a way of being positive or negative toward something, in some qualitative degree or other. Here the desire itself is understood as a kind of intense sensation, a sensation that, in addition to having some phenomenal qualitative content, happens to have a certain ‘direction’, and hence operates literally as a motive generating the next state, rather than merely as an idea recording the impression of the previous state. In this context, the ‘something else’ that contrasts with thought turns out to be something *less* than a thought in the contemporary philosophical sense (that is, less than something with the syntactic and semantic complexity of the content of a human belief), rather than a ‘thought plus’. Volition as such is not especially significant here, because, on the classical empiricist model, a volition turns out to be nothing but the last desire preceding action. For this reason there is still a tendency in English to assimilate desire to feeling rather than to volition, as an independent faculty—although the notion of such a faculty is precisely what Kant (in line with most philosophy in the broadly Augustinian tradition)

⁸ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 107. (Because I believe that desire in the sense of *mere* ‘feeling’ can be *less* than this kind of ‘stance’, I do not take the notion of desire as a ‘stance’ toward a thought to be literally a ‘common denominator’ of all the components listed at the beginning of this paragraph, and I am not sure that there is any *positive* common feature of them.)

presumes as the starting point for practical philosophy in devoting his second *Critique* to our *Begehrungsvermögen*.

In sum, in a Kantian context, the most basic contrast between the theoretical and the practical, and the essence of the problem of motivation, concerns the relation of thought to volition as such rather than to mere desire-qua-feeling, in the English sense. For this reason feeling as such is not the prime concern of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Instead it is reserved, as a major topic, for the *Critique of Judgment*,⁹ although it also happens to be an indispensable substratum for the subject matter of the first two *Critiques*, thinking and willing in general. For each ordinary thought or belief, there will be some sort of sensory material, something involving feeling, that is an original stimulus for the content of the thinking, even if our thinking may in all sorts of ways also go beyond its initial stimuli. Likewise, since our willing appears to occur not on its own but as thinking plus something else, each volition will typically involve something of the sensory component of the underlying thinking as well as a sensory component that comes with the willing as such. If I want to pet a cat, there is some sensory feeling involved with the mere content of the representation of the notion of a cat, and also some feeling involved in my wanting to approach the cat.

These are relatively elementary complications but they have a highly relevant implication. They remind us that something like a ‘problem of motivation’—that is, a kind of gap between thought and desire—can occur already at this level, *before* anything like morality, let alone Kantian morality in particular, enters the scene. For example, one can wonder why a mere thought of a cat has the specific sensory feeling that it may have for one (since the two seem to be only contingently related), and also why, when one does will something with respect to the cat, this experience comes with whatever feeling it has. One could imagine totally neutral, unfeeling cognitions and willings of states of affairs, and yet our actual life does not seem to be like that at all, and the specific additional features that our experience takes on do not have a clear necessary relation to the specific events that they accompany.

Noting the distinction between feeling and willing also serves as a reminder of how very different Kant’s own general theory of action must be from its caricatures. For Kant, our will never operates with anything like the brute force of mere feeling. And yet, on one popular view, the moral Kantian is precisely someone who simply overpowers the forces of feeling within him by relying on the competing force of his reason.¹⁰ A hasty reading of Kant’s own discussion of how a good will is ‘determined’ by reason rather than sensibility may have helped to

⁹ Kant’s third *Critique* gives special attention to the specific feeling of purposiveness; and in its architectonic it shifts, sometimes confusingly, between competing suggestions that our three basic faculties are thinking, willing, and feeling, and that they are understanding, reasoning, and—as if this were something else—judging.

¹⁰ This interpretive line began in Jena with C. C. Schmid; it is treated sympathetically (as an interpretation) by, e.g., Robert Paul Wolff, *The Autonomy of Reason* (New York: Harper

reinforce this unfortunate picture of competing inner vectors. ‘Determination’ is an ambiguous term, with efficient and formal meanings. To speak of something being ‘determined’ can suggest that there is simply some kind of efficient, and perhaps inevitable, causation at work. In this context, however, Kant clearly is thinking of ‘determination’ in the formal sense of rationality, as when we say that a geometrical formula determines how a mathematical problem is to be solved (this is compatible, of course, with causal factors also being at work in one’s actual solution of the problem). This element of deliberative rationality involves the crucial third component in what can make our practical life something other than a mere thought: in addition to simply willing and/or having a feeling about something, we can be in a state that involves an evaluation of something as appropriate (as when we draw a triangle ‘in line’ with geometrical norms)—that is, seeing it as it ‘is to be’,¹¹ or ‘ought’ to be.

It is remarkable that the ‘something’ that is ‘more’ than ‘mere belief’ in this new (normative) sense, and that for this reason in English can also be called a desire, in the sense of a ‘pro-attitude’, can most naturally be characterized as something that is itself fundamentally a kind of belief. Whereas some beliefs reflect only the theoretical way that we think that matters actually are (and, if they are necessary truths, have to be), other beliefs can reflect our practical view of how matters should be.¹² Such beliefs *need not* be about something that does *not* exist and has yet to be brought into existence. We might see a landscape or action and think, ‘yes, this is something that ought to be’—and then also, ‘ah yes, thank goodness, it does exist’. Here there is a normative attitude that goes beyond merely registering the fact of the state of affairs—and, as soon as it also involves appreciative *feeling*, it also goes beyond even (merely) believing that something ought to be. We thus can go beyond ‘mere thought’ to evaluation, and then evaluative belief itself can easily, *but not inevitably*, lead to feeling, and, eventually to willing as well.

These complications are relevant to a major controversy in contemporary Anglophone ethics—namely, the dispute between ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’.¹³ *If* we were to combine our perception of all that is, and all that we think ought to be, with a cognition of what is not, and then were to add to

& Row, 1973); and Richard Henson, ‘What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Overdetermination of Dutiful Action’, *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), 39–54.

¹¹ Cf. Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 9, ‘a desire representing the way the world is to be’.

¹² See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 633/B 661), and *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak. 5: 134).

¹³ See, e.g., David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37 ff.; Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 52; Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25–8; and Robert Audi, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13–15, 18–19, 166, 199–201, and 224–37. My own terminology and general position are closest to Audi (except that I attribute to Kant the view that Audi suggests Kant should have had but did not have), who helpfully distinguishes very different forms of ethical internalism with respect to justification, reasons, and motives. *Motive* internalism is my only concern here.

this an overriding ('motivational internalist') premiss that believing that something ought to be (and can be) is tantamount to (that is, has 'internal' to it) being committed to trying to bring it into being, then our beliefs about what ought to be would *automatically* bring with them desires and actions directed toward actualizing what we think is not but can be and ought to be. Were it not for the controversial nature of this 'overriding internalist premiss', it could seem that we have already solved 'the motivation problem'. That is, *if* it is the case that, as just explained, beliefs that X ought to be *must* bring with them, *ceteris paribus*, motivations toward bringing X into being, then 'the gap' between belief and desire would seem to be closed.

Unfortunately, the key premiss here turns out to be a very controversial one, and so the gap cannot be closed so quickly. For those who believe that Kant must be an internalist *in this sense*, there remains the difficult task of substantiating the key premiss against the common view of contemporary philosophers who remain 'externalists' on this issue. There is a way around this difficulty, however, if it can be shown that a Kantian need *not*, after all, be committed to this kind of internalist premiss. Such a strategy obviously leads to the question of how one can proceed without such a premiss and also not fall back into a Humean position. I will argue that Kant's own texts provide us with a very plausible ('non-internalist') option here, one that is not clearly worse than the alternatives. The argument will involve repeated reminders of the fact that, as earlier considerations have already indicated, there remain problems similar to Kant's in understanding *other* aspects of action, problems that generally have *not* been considered to be *especially* disturbing, and so the Kantian 'motivation gap' also need not be taken to be such a severe problem.

Of course, even if this strategy—or some kind of internalist Kantianism—were completely accepted, there still would remain the question of how we get in the first place to beliefs that certain states ought to be. This is surely a difficult question (indeed, it is a fundamental question for philosophers), but it is not something that is properly characterized as 'the problem of motivation'—and so it is important not to project (as Humeans are tempted to do) the genuine, but not uniquely Kantian, difficulties of this question onto that problem.

In general, there appears to be no getting around admitting a number of 'mysterious' *but distinct* gaps inherent in the complexity of action. The *mere belief* that some state of affairs exists does not appear *necessarily* connected with any specific *feeling* about that state of affairs—although 'matching' feelings are regularly found with such states. The mere belief also does not appear necessarily connected with the specific *normative belief* that the state ought to be (although there regularly are such accompanying beliefs), nor does it appear necessarily connected with a *volition* to preserve that state and to *do* something that brings others like it into being (although there regularly are such accompanying volitions and actions). One might have a very positive feeling about a particular state of affairs and still be too listless even to try to do much about preserving it, or

about bringing it into being if it does not already exist. Similarly, one might have a very positive mere feeling about a particular state, and yet not think that this is a state that even ought to be. And, without commitment to the controversial internalist premiss mentioned earlier, it appears that, even if one truly believes that a state ought to be (and that one could easily bring into being, or at least make a good effort in that direction), a normal person might understandably not actually try to bring it into being.¹⁴ Some philosophers propose calling such a person ‘practically irrational’¹⁵—as if acting in this way could not involve following a reason at all, but this strikes me as a desperate stipulative move, not fitting the way ordinary people use terms such as ‘irrational’. Agents who are not, in some special sense, ideally rational need not be literally *irrational*, even if they obviously are not-in-that-particular-way-rational.

Not only are there gaps between the individual aspects of belief and desire distinguished so far; there are also gaps between their combinations. Feeling positive about X while *also* thinking that X ought to be, still does not necessitate forming a volition to bring about X. It is noteworthy, moreover, that all these problems are present even where there is an ‘ought’ that is not characterized in any especially rigorous Kantian moral terms but simply in a common-sense way that agents themselves can acknowledge. For example, we can understand someone saying ‘I do not “feel like” gambling again (the mere thought makes me feel very bad), and I know that I ought not to do it, but I have a will to try it again—see!’

2. The preceding considerations are some distance still from Kant’s texts and the details of the common objections that there is a serious motivation problem for his moral theory in particular. By now, however, at least the general issue at stake and the strategy of my indirect argument on his behalf should be evident. It is easy to be mystified *if* one simply asks, at first wholly abstractly, how an agent must be *expected* to will in a specific moral manner when, on Kant’s own concession, such willing is precisely not necessitated by any (Humean) desires internal to the agent’s prior ‘motivation’ set.¹⁶ It might seem that all is therefore lost for the intelligibility of such moral action, since mere moral belief, ungrounded in desire, seems far from leading ineluctably to action. Nonetheless, I believe that Kant’s theory is not undermined here, but, on the contrary, it can be shown that it has an especially sophisticated way of dealing with the relevant complexities. As has already been noted, there are *many* sorts of combinations of belief, feeling, and volition that can seem naturally appropriate for one another without

¹⁴ For example, one might just go back to sleep, with understandable reasons, even if one also believes that one ought to get up and grade some ethics papers. See John Hare, *God’s Call: Moral Realism, God’s Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), 55; and Sigrun Svavarsdóttir, ‘Moral Cognitivism and Motivation’, *Philosophical Review*, 108 (1999), 161–219.

¹⁵ See Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 61 ff.

¹⁶ See Bernard Williams, ‘Internal and External Reasons’, in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–13.

there being any clear necessary connections between them. It could happen that what I actually will is always something that I have a definite feeling for, and/or something that I clearly believe ought to be—but it can also happen that I have a positive feeling about X, and/or believe that X ought to be, and yet *not* will X. This point is simply a corollary to the idea that the faculty of volition is not *reducible* to the faculty of feeling and/or that of rational belief.

Perhaps the main reason why this kind of situation is taken by some philosophers to be such a problem for Kantians is because of the fact that no such gaps would arise on the simplest empiricist account. On that account, standard human feelings for X clearly do lead necessarily to beliefs that X's are to be gotten, and then to volitions for getting X, which lead in turn to general (and widely shared reflective) beliefs that things like X are good—that is, desirable. In this way 'moral' practicality and a kind of objectivity are quickly secured in tandem.

While on this account there may be no troublesome gaps of the kind that arise in theories such as Kant's, there are problems with this kind of empiricist account that are even more perplexing. First of all, no simple version of an account like this can begin to explain what beliefs themselves are, and hence how they are at all intelligibly connected with feelings. Having mere sensory feelings with regard to an object does not amount to having a belief about the object, a thought that can be true or false, let alone require a belief that must be a direct affirmation of the feeling.¹⁷ A masochistically inclined person feels a pain, and a sadistically inclined person has the same feeling, and one believes it is good and the other does not. Or, someone else might have the very same feeling and have no belief about its value at all—perhaps because of being too immature or primitive to operate at a level of beliefs and language and genuine evaluation at all. Whatever beliefs are, they have a semantic and epistemic complexity that takes them far beyond states of mere feeling or 'dull impressions'. The empiricist account, *insofar as* it is to have the advantage of providing a line of clear necessary connections, must hold to the remarkable claim that adult human beliefs are mere reflexes, as if the mere feeling of pain, which has no semantic complexity in itself, somehow *necessitates* the formation of the complex thought 'pain is bad'. In an era of philosophy that has long been critical of any 'myth of the given' with regard to the most elementary sensory levels of theoretical epistemology in general, it is hard to see why anything like this myth should be held onto within the complex domain of practical philosophy. What the crude empiricist account lacks is any sense that a belief is not a mere factual state that simply exists or does not exist, without a semantic value, but must involve some kind of intention, a thought affirming what is correct, justified, likely to be true, in accord with norms, and so forth. If the gap between feeling and thought is this large even at the theoretical level, it should be no wonder that gaps can also arise at the much more complex level of practical life.

¹⁷ Cf. Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

As noted earlier, opponents of the Kantian model try to project an inverted version of their own elementary necessitarian ‘psychophysics’ onto his theory of action. It is supposed that, if one does not hold, with the empiricist, that feelings automatically cause beliefs and volitions, then one must hold that mere beliefs about morality force actions in a moral direction and must do so mysteriously, since here they are not simply determined by ordinary human feelings. Kant’s actual theory, however, is expressed at a level of rational considerations and free intentions that has nothing to do with a reduction of human belief or action to this kind of model of a complex of forces.¹⁸ The most relevant features of his theory here do not depend on any of the more controversial aspects of his specific moral principles. The core idea is simply that, however we are ultimately to understand morality, it comes to us primarily in the form of certain *recommended principles*, principles that we can and do deliberate about (which is not to say that a proper moral life must involve spending a lot of time in deliberation; the opposite could be true). While recognizing that it comes to the moral situation with many feelings about particular objects, and, at a very different level, many practical beliefs about the objects that can generate further feelings (for example, that pleasure will arise if one wills to obtain these objects), the moral agent understands that it can step back from both its feelings and these beliefs and ask what it is that, everything considered, it ought to do—and that even then it still has the task of determining itself in that direction—that is, actually willing and doing the right thing.

Given this understanding of action in general, not very much depends at this point on Kant’s specific view of categorical imperatives—that is, that we must follow principles that are not aimed merely at the prudent attainment of happiness. Even if Kant had come to the view that it is the principle of prudence rather than the principle of duty that should guide human action, it should be clear that a kind of ‘motivation problem’ could also have been raised for this view.¹⁹ That is, even with the recognition of the truth of a principle of prudence, one has a ‘mere belief’. Since the belief that the policy of prudence should be followed is itself still a belief and not a motivating desire, one can ask: how do we explain getting over the gap from this belief to a desire that generates action? Even if he were to think that the principle of prudence is correct, that is, our highest intelligible practical principle, the ‘prudential Kantian’ whom I am imagining will not suppose that this is a principle whose truth is literally forced upon him, or even that, given a perception of its truth, he is forced to move to act in line with it (or to be condemned as simply ‘irrational’ if he does not, as if from then on nothing he did could be backed with reasons). The fact that the principle in its content involves states of feeling should not lead us into the elementary fallacy of thinking that

¹⁸ This point is explained very clearly in Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 189–92.

¹⁹ Cf. Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

following the principle is simply a matter of ‘following’—that is, being *forced* to go along with, our feelings. What I take this to show, of course, is not that Kant must have a special problem with prudence as well as morality, but that some kind of gap concerning the relation of belief and motivation is *always* likely for serious policy issues.

Despite all this, one might argue that willing to act on a principle of prudence would be at least ‘highly intelligible’, because the states that one would think would be obtained thereby would be at least necessarily *in line* with states that one already likes, whereas a choice to act on duty would precisely not have this feature. So a *special* motivation problem for Kantians might seem to arise after all: how can agents be expected to act in a non-prudential and moral way that might *not even correspond* with anything in their ‘prior motivation set’?

An appropriate Kantian response to this problem is to point out that the process that ends with deciding that one should act for duty is something that could of itself—and ‘right then’—generate a motive, and so, by the time that the policy of duty is followed, there would be something within one’s motivation set after all that this policy is ‘in line with’.²⁰ If one insists on calling any motive a desire (that is, if the term ‘desire’ just signifies the state that one is in immediately prior to action), then one could say in a harmless way that even Kant can allow that all our actions are desire-based; it is just that moral actions are grounded in a desire (to respect duty) that is *consequent upon* a decision to respect categorical rationality rather than in states that are merely like one’s *antecedent* (that is, merely sensory and prior to the acceptance of rational duty) desires.

One way to appreciate this point is to consider a person D who has made a moral decision of a Kantian sort and accepted the priority of the principle of duty, and as a consequence now has a genuine desire to act morally, a motivation for duty that is acted on with appropriate volitions. Compare this with a person P, who proceeds similarly except for happening to be convinced by and following the priority of a principle of prudence. Suppose that P and D had exactly similar lives prior to their decisions. As noted earlier, P could say: ‘my insight into prudence didn’t force me to do what I am doing now, but look, each state I obtain is in line with and just like the states I enjoyed earlier, so surely my action now is quite intelligible.’ It is true that D could *not* say *exactly* this, but D could say something analogous, namely: ‘each state that I now reach is precisely in line with the belief I came to that I ought to respect duty—so surely my action now is quite intelligible.’ The main point here is that it is not clear, after all, why a *belief* that the policy of prudence is right would make the motivation of consequent action on it any *more* intelligible than would the motivation of the consequent action of a person who had reached a belief that it is right to follow duty. In other words, each of these actions is in its own way intelligible,

²⁰ See *ibid.* 29; cf. Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. 363–73 (‘Williams on Internal and External Reasons’).

even if not necessary. What might seem mysterious (especially to an empiricist), of course, is exactly why someone would ever come to believe that duty trumps prudence as a norm—but note again that this is a question concerning the proper content of morality, and it should not be expressed as a form of ‘the motivation problem’. It is a question about what to believe, not about a gap between belief and desire as such.

The strategy that has just been used to defend the Kantian position *might seem* to be like the so-called Kantian internalist argument form that was noted earlier (see above at n. 13)—but in fact it is not the same, and that argument form is *not* one that I mean to endorse. According to that argument form, ‘if someone judges that it is right that she does X, then, *ceteris paribus*, she is motivated to X’.²¹ I believe this strategy is too ambitious, that it overshoots its mark systematically and exegetically, and that there is a more modest alternative available. It is well known that there are many sorts of systematic objection to the internalist approach. One can imagine, for example, an ‘amoralist’²² who regularly grants that certain things are right to do but does not even begin to move toward actually doing them. What is not so well known is that Kant’s texts show that he was very sensitive to these points. He took great pains to construct an account of motivation that does not ignore the difficulties here and yet manages to preserve a close connection between judgment and motivation—that is, a relation between belief and desire that involves an intelligible relationship but also a realistic gap.

III. KANT’S SOLUTION

1. Kant’s sensitivity to the motivation problem is evident not merely from the intricacies of his second *Critique* but also from his long-term concern for what he called the problem of the ‘philosopher’s stone’, the mysterious fact that an agent’s mere intellectual insight into the right thing to will seems in fact not sufficient to make the agent will it.²³ This fact has a very fortunate consequence for Kant’s system insofar as it serves his libertarian conception of action in general. If intellectual insight into moral truths did compel action in accord with these truths, then a commitment to morality would bring along with it a commitment to intellectual determinism. Although distinguished interpreters have sometimes suggested that this was Kant’s own view for at least a period of his Critical work,²⁴

²¹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 12.

²² See Brink, *Moral Realism*, 45–50; cf. above, n. 14.

²³ See Dieter Henrich, ‘Kants Begriff der sittlichen Einsicht und Kants Lehre vom Faktum der Vernunft’, in Dieter Henrich, Walter Schulz, and Karl Heinz Volkmann-Schluck (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Griechen im neueren Denken* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 77–115; cf. my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, pt. II.

²⁴ See, e.g., Paul Guyer, ‘Kant on the Theory and Practice of Autonomy’, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 20 (2003), 70–98; and Henry Sidgwick, ‘The Kantian Conception of Free-will’, *Mind* (1888), repr. in *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edn. (London: Macmillan, 1907), 511–16.

this seems very hard to believe, to say the least. Kant emphasizes that the transcendental idealism of his first *Critique* aimed precisely at making room for our absolute freedom, especially as moral agents, and so it would be schizophrenic for him to propose an account of morality, action, and motivation that directly foreclosed the possibility of our freedom of choice.²⁵ As is often true with Kant, there are several sources of possible misunderstanding. Kant's claim that proper action must be in line with moral lawfulness, his insistence that our action in general takes patterns that fall under universal laws of nature, and his constant practice of speaking of moral rules as compulsory can all make it *seem* as if moral agents simply must do what they do. In fact, however, Kant shows clearly that his understanding of the role of laws and compulsion here has nothing to do with threatening our absolute freedom of choice. Moral laws tell us what must be done—but only *if* we are moral, and the praise and blame that Kant insists that we properly assign to agents presuppose that we think of them as freely choosing how they act (so the 'moral must' is not a 'causal must').²⁶ Kant's metaphysics of transcendental idealism aims precisely at showing a way that this power of choice also need not be extinguished by the existence of natural laws covering all the effects of our actions.²⁷

What complicates matters further is Kant's main discussion of motivation, his explanation of the role of the feeling of respect in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (book I, chapter III: 'On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason'). According to that account, we should think that each moral action that we carry out is in fact preceded by a motive that involves a feeling expressing respect for the moral law, a feeling that Kant explains as the consequence—not the cause—of our rational judgment that we should do our duty. At first sight, this view could look like the worst of both worlds—a 'double affection' intellectualist *and* sensualist form of determinism, where intellectual insight necessitates feeling and this in turn necessitates action. In fact, however, Kant's position is much more subtle than this, and it is designed to build in just the right kind of flexibility.

Kant's explanation of an essential role for a motive of feeling even in the context of moral action allows him to do justice to a number of non-rationalist points while not having to abandon his fundamentally rationalist position. Holding onto that position is what gives his kind of position an initial advantage over other kinds of theories with respect to the 'objectivity' aspect of 'the moral problem'. If rationality is an essential source of the content, possibility, and authority of morality, then there is at least a chance for a 'strongly' objective moral standard, one for all agents as such (even God). Although, as noted earlier, Humean theories can account for a kind of objectivity for moral beliefs that arise in contexts

²⁵ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxviii–xxix.

²⁶ See *ibid.* A 547/B 575–A 557/B 585. Cf. Hare, *God's Call*, 109, on how 'Kant thinks submission is compatible with autonomy'.

²⁷ See Allen W. Wood, 'Kant's Compatibilism', in Wood (ed.), *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 73–101.

of the convergence of natural desires, there is no ground (short of a return to something like a Scholastic natural-law theory) for expecting that these 'objective' values must provide *any* common standards for *all* agents. It is true that, through an understandable development of desires in a particular context, some communities (for example, Augustine's and its successors) can and do strongly agree on various values, for example, the virtues of compassion over power—but other communities (for example, Aristotle's), under parallel but distinct conditions, can and do agree on just the opposite values. Thus, while each community's values may have a kind of 'objectivity' in its own context, and the advocates of each may even insist from their own viewpoint that all others agree with them, there is, on any broadly Humean theory like this, no intelligible ground for any necessary *overarching* agreement on values even in principle. Some suggest that theories such as evolution might help the Humean here. But, even if benevolence were in fact generally in the interest of the perpetuation of our species on earth, it is very hard to accept the consequence that, if biology happened to change in such a way that 'kind motives' turned out not to serve that end most effectively, then these motives would *therefore* lose their *moral* value.

Because non-rationalists can at best account for only a weak kind of moral objectivity, it is understandable that they place so much weight on trying to embarrass rationalists by emphasizing the other aspect of the moral problem, the difficulty in explaining the practicality of morality, that is, the motivational power of moral judgment. Kant fully recognizes that a mere intellectualist response to this problem by a rationalist would not be adequate. Common sense and ordinary phenomenological reflection show that people generally need to care or feel strongly about something in order to be likely to will and act on it; simply 'seeing' that something is the right thing to do cannot be counted on as enough.

By the time of the second *Critique*, Kant himself emphasizes that there is an even deeper problem for rationalism. Not only is the real *efficacy* of moral rationality not automatic even for human agents who acknowledge the primacy of reason, but also the ultimate *justification* of the possible applicability of moral principles is something that goes beyond what can be deduced from mere rationality. Pointing to a 'fact of reason' is the best that Kant's moral theory aims to do here,²⁸ since he sees that no simple intuition or mere analysis of what it is to judge or to will can *prove* that our idea of a rational morality for free agents is definitely not a mere *Hirngespinnst*, a figment of the brain.²⁹ A realistic appreciation of these problems leads Kant to stress the limits and the complications of any account of how 'pure reason can be practical'. The most that he believes can be done is to say how matters might coherently proceed on the *supposition* (the 'fact' rather than

²⁸ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, pt. II; cf. John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Barbara Herman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²⁹ See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Ak. 4: 445).

the apodictic conclusion) that rational agents truly, but not unavoidably, take a proper (and hence free) interest in the specifically moral aspect of rationality and act on it.³⁰

2. Aside from the special intricacies of the metaphysical aspects of his doctrine of freedom (which are not directly relevant here), Kant's basic account of our moral responsiveness in many ways resembles other still significant and strongly objective ethical theories,³¹ and it fits in well with other appealing aspects of his own normative views—for example, his path-breaking account of our aesthetic experience. The basic structure of his account of our value experience relies on arranging in proper sequence the four factors that were discussed earlier in general terms: evaluative thought, feeling, volition, and action.

First, there is the perception of a principle or form that appears as having more than a merely accidental validity, for example, 'actions like this are obligatory—not merely useful', or 'this form is beautiful—not merely pleasant'. The kind of normative perception that is relevant here is never a matter of mere belief or thought, of simply noting the actual or possible existence of a state of affairs, but is rather an insight into something's being compellingly *appropriate*—that is, proper for (at least) any normal human perceiver as such, independent of all the particular contingencies of our experience. Here it is presumed that one is not merely an intellectual machine but is sensitive to a special domain of normativity that can be rationally assessed—for example, morally or aesthetically. To use terms that were introduced earlier, it can be said that this perception is therefore already more than a 'mere belief' insofar as it has an element of what was called 'desire' in a very broad sense—namely, a positive evaluative stance. As the term 'sensitive' suggests, this kind of evaluation is naturally linked with a kind of feeling, but, although these two moments are closely connected, they must also be clearly distinguished. It is one thing simply to hold that 'X merits approval, morally or aesthetically', and it is something else literally to feel positive about X on that basis.

The feeling that is immediately *consequent* upon proper judgmental perception constitutes the *second* step of Kant's basic account of our value experience. It is crucial for Kant that this kind of feeling not be conflated with the very familiar feelings that can occur prior to and independently of our value perception (such feelings would be at the mercy of physical and social contingencies, and simply

³⁰ That this is not an entirely satisfactory position, and that it naturally led to overambitious attempts to do better is a main theme of my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³¹ On some parallels between Kant and moral realism, see Brink, *Moral Realism*, 50; and Hare, *God's Call*, 3–6. Cf. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903); and my discussion of Kant and Charles Larmore's defense of moral realism in *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, ch. 11. Hare (*God's Call*, 6) stresses that Moore, like Kant, distinguishes cognition (thought), emotion (feeling), and judgment (evaluation) in his analysis of our experience of both moral and aesthetic value. This point closely parallels my own analysis here.

following them would conflict with his fundamental point that the appreciation of the most basic values should be in principle egalitarian). Kant understands empiricism as precisely the ‘optical illusion’ of inverting the relation between feeling and judgment here (as with sensation and cognition in general) in such a way as to suppose, falsely, that the validity of our judgment must be basically the effect rather than the cause of the relevant feeling.³² The complexity of the situation is what makes the mistake so tempting, for it is true not only that there often are feelings that precede (and can play a key role in occasioning the process that leads to) the value judgment, but also that they are qualitatively very like the feelings that depend upon the judgment, and they can persist and be easily confused later with these dependent feelings. Nonetheless, Kant’s point stands: we can easily understand the idea that thinking that X is right or beautiful need not be thinking merely that one has found X to be useful.

It is a merit of Kant’s account that it can show how these first two steps of our value experience are closely but not inevitably bound together. It seems evident that one might abstractly say that X is right or beautiful *without* actually feeling a noticeable mental ‘push’ toward X—and also without being a completely odd, wholly ‘irrational’ person. Anglophone philosophy has tended to insist on making evaluative attitudes like this (which are not ‘merely theoretical’) so distinctive that it is part of the very *meaning* of a positive judgmental state toward X in these contexts that one *must thereby* also have some desire, feeling, tendency, or action toward X. It is not clear that we need to go this far, and I believe it is a virtue of Kant’s account that it can and does treat the presence of consequent feeling here as ultimately a common and understandable and yet brute fact. Beings might judge positively about X’s and yet *not* feel, or notice that they feel, anything about X’s afterwards—but in fact we are generally not like that, and in retrospect we can say it is only appropriate that we have the strong ethical or aesthetic feelings for X that we do have when we in fact judge X’s highly. There are, of course, many controversial aspects to Kant’s accounts of the processes that lead to these feelings—for example, his metaphysical notions of what is involved in our being ‘raised and lowered’ in the feeling of moral respect, or his hypothesis about a special ‘harmony of the faculties’ in taste. The details of these accounts are ingenious, but it is all too easy to get sidetracked by them. One should not lose sight of the main points that Kant considers it important to acknowledge: that various kinds of reliable causal mechanisms are at work here, and, just as with geometry or other forms of significant cognition, it does not have to be supposed that the relevant process of experience can thereby reveal only matters of contingent validity.

The structure disclosed in the first two steps of Kant’s account prefigures but does not yet amount to his *third* step, which in the case of moral value consists in having a genuine motivation toward proper action. (In the aesthetic case, the

³² See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak. 5: 71–89) and *Critique of Judgment*, §9; and cf. my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, pt. III.

parallel step may be simply holding to the expectation that others should agree with us on taste; keeping the aesthetic context in mind is relevant here because it shows that there can be significant and coherent acts of valuation that, contrary to what ‘internalists’ contend, do not have to lead directly to an expression in behavior.) The distinctiveness of this step is easily overlooked. Kant realizes that we might see what we ought to do, and as a consequence even have a feeling pointing in the direction of doing it, and yet *not move* toward doing it. This is a point about human action in general on his account, and not just about morality. When we have a feeling for something in line with an action that we later go on to take for that thing, it is never the case that the feeling is *by itself* sufficient to be a literal motive, a ‘mover’. The feeling plays a key role in leading to the movement that takes place (if it does take place), but it is not yet that movement, even within the will, let alone in the world of behavior. As a mere feeling, the state is a present opportunity for action, a sign, as it were, that urgently says ‘go that way’. But for Kant it is still up to the agent, through its free will, to ‘incorporate’ that sign, that feeling, and to become actually motivated by choosing to direct itself accordingly, in contrast to all the other directions that might seem available at that moment.³³ Internalists tend to rely instead on a notion of ‘implicit’ motives, but this idea is tantamount to robbing the notion of motivation of any separate reality; it is all too easy to say that we have a motive for something if all that this requires is something in us that ‘could’ lead in a certain direction.

In sum, although it is crucial on Kant’s view of proper action that the specific feeling of respect for duty be present in some way, it is also crucial for any proper human motivation that there be, in addition to feeling, a preceding (logically, if not temporarily) founding judgment and a relevant commitment of volition. Fortunately, Kant does not insist that the feeling of duty always has to be clearly explicit to consciousness; it could be present simply as a background that fulfills an appropriate functional role³⁴—for example, in the calm devotion of habits of genuine charity. The will to do the right thing thus involves an initial judgment on behalf of respect, various forms of an ‘in-between’ feeling of respect, and a decisive volition that regularly takes up both of the earlier elements in fact, but never necessarily (parallel stages occur in aesthetic experience).

It is clear that for Kant this third step must be kept separate from the others. In the ultimate formulation of his theory³⁵ he indicates that humans who are not actually moral (that is, most of us) still have a constant appreciation for morality within them, and so they can judge and even feel positively about morality while not going so far as to commit themselves to it after all. Nothing in Kant’s discussion entails the idea that if we were only to think about matters more clearly,

³³ See Andrews Reath, ‘The Categorical Imperative and Kant’s Conception of Practical Rationality’, *Monist*, 72 (1989), 384–410; and Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁴ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 7, and *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, ch. 7.

³⁵ See Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (Ak. 6: 26–280).

or simply feel more strongly about them, then we would *thereby* have to will the right way. His view is also consistent with saying, nonetheless, that all those who do will the right way manifest relatively clear judgment and strong feeling. All this still does not require falling back into the optical illusion of holding that our volition is absolutely determined by mere intellect or sense.

The *fourth* and final step in Kant's account—the action itself, which succeeds the volition—leaves room for one more 'realistic gap' in Kant's theory. Kant stresses that, even when we move to act in a proper direction, this means only that our decision is well formed and accomplishes something external, and this still leaves open the possibility of many kinds of less than perfect realizations of our aim, and all sorts of difficulties in adhering to our own decision in the long run.³⁶ (The domain of taste does not seem to have a directly parallel fourth step of action, but Kant is very interested in ways in which a dedicated appreciation of beauty exhibits and reinforces a proper moral attitude, and thus can play a significant role in leading toward moral action—as Schiller and others would also stress.) This final stage appropriately complements the others, but it is much less important for our purposes than the third stage and the crucial point that Kant's account of motivation yields a close but not too close connection between objectivity and practicality—that is, between acknowledging moral standards external to our antecedent desires and being genuinely and regularly moved in their direction. Rather than denying that feeling, motivation, and practicality are central to our moral life, Kant's complex form of rationalism makes a dedicated effort to show how all these features can be essential to human action without undermining a fundamentally realistic and non-empiricist account of morality's basic nature. This is not to say that his account is demonstrably superior to its alternatives, but with respect to the issues discussed here it still appears to be in at least as good a position as its main competitors in facing 'the moral problem'.

³⁶ See *ibid.* (Ak. 6: 66–78).

5

A Common-Sense Kant?

I begin from an admittedly unusual perspective. Whatever Kant's system is in itself, it is likely that most philosophers believe the last thing it can be helpfully linked with is common sense in general and the philosophy of Thomas Reid in particular.¹ From the perspective of my interpretation, however, the intriguing issue here is not whether Kant's thought *is* in fundamental ways like common sense and the viable core of Reid's philosophy, but rather why so many fine minds still think otherwise.

I. A DIFFERENT KIND OF TURN

The basic systematic similarities that I will be stressing include the very features of metaphysical realism and epistemological anti-Cartesianism that have led many contemporary philosophers to think that we obviously should look to Reid *rather than* Kant as a philosophical 'soul mate'.² The standard attitude toward this choice will need to be reconsidered if it can be shown that these similarities obtain, and that the overall strategy of the Critical philosophy involves an effective apologist methodology remarkably similar to what is best in Reid's common-sense approach.

¹ The period of Reid's (1710–96) major works, the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) and the *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (1788), corresponds exactly to that of Kant's (1724–1804) major works in theoretical philosophy (*Critique of Pure Reason*, (1781, 1787); *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science* (1783)) and practical philosophy (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785); *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)). On the historical issue of how well Kant knew Reid's work, see Manfred Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill–Queens University Press, 1987). See also Jonathan Friday, 'Dugald Stewart on Reid, Kant and the Refutation of Idealism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 13 (2005), 263–86; and Nicholas Rescher, *Common-Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005).

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and The Story of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. x. Wolterstorff discusses Reid as an opponent of 'classical Cartesian' versions of foundationalism, but since there are more moderate ways of understanding the term that allow Reid also to be called a foundationalist, I have substituted the notion of 'anti-Cartesianism'. Even here, however, I have in mind not Descartes's own views but 'Cartesianism' as generally understood by philosophers in the Rylean tradition.

Although I will focus on epistemological arguments in the theoretical philosophy at the core of Kant's system, I believe this reading would only be strengthened if there were a chance to consider these arguments in more detail in the context of his entire system.³ In its ethics and aesthetics, the Critical system begins from presumptions that parallel the common-sense starting points of the first *Critique*, as well as similar claims in Reid's multifaceted system.⁴ I will argue that the mystery of how these similarities could have been so often overlooked can be explained largely by the failure of many interpreters to appreciate the crucial 'regressive' and multilevel structure of Kant's system. I will also draw attention to the highly relevant historical fact that a common-sense approach to Kant's system had considerable popularity at the time of the initial reception of his work.⁵

Faced with the notorious difficulty of Kant's texts, readers naturally gravitate toward assimilating the Critical system to those models of philosophy with which they are most familiar. This has often meant trying to understand Kant's work in terms of the so-called Cartesian tradition of the 'way of ideas'. Instead of working through exhausting details concerning 'transcendental deductions', 'transcendental idealism', and metaphysical 'postulates', one focuses instead on the notion of a shift to a basically 'anthropological'⁶ perspective that promises a new way to defeat the old challenge of radical modern skepticism. Supposedly, Kant's main point is that matters such as the external world and the moral law are demonstrably knowable through an introspective turn to our own ideas after all, precisely because we construct them out of concepts that we ourselves generate.

Surely many non-specialists would feel lost if Kant cannot be taken in this way, that is, as simply trying to tie inner representations together a bit more tightly, from the inside out, with a new Prussian superglue— one that may seem literally too good to be true but at least does not have the specific defects of Berkeley's spiritualist contentions or of Humean skeptical resignation. When this transcendental 'glue' is discussed further by specialists, the tendency is to explain it as part of a system without any literal metaphysical implications. On this popular and 'anodyne' reading, Kant's project is basically to limn the contours of our empirical 'conceptual framework'. Insofar as he meaningfully discusses metaphysics in any other sense, this is merely to reveal the illusions of its systems, or, at most, to explain how his philosophy provides an especially appropriate partner for Newtonian science. If texts that suggest more than this are acknowledged at all, they are dismissed as showing that sometimes even Kant expresses his position in terms that are riddled with 'patent nonsense' and lead to 'piling metaphysical monstrosity upon metaphysical monstrosity' in an 'extravagant' way, clearly 'at odds with

³ See my 'Introduction', in *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1–48; cf. Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, ch. 9.

⁴ On realist strands in Kant's ethics and aesthetics, see my *Interpreting Kant's Critique*, chs. 11–14.

⁵ See below, Ch. 6.

⁶ Cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 231.

common sense'.⁷ And that's what one of the most knowledgeable of Kant experts says. No wonder that top analytic philosophers not overly concerned with exegesis of the *Akademieausgabe* do not hesitate to call (what they take to be) Kant's views 'perplexing', 'preposterous', and 'bordering on madness'.⁸

My interpretation, in contrast, proposes an ineliminable and coherent place for the metaphysical dimension of Kant's system within its basic four-level structure. These four levels are: (1) a starting point in experience, which is defined in terms of the ordinary claims of everyday knowledge,⁹ (2) a development in terms of 'transcendental' arguments that 'regressively' establish pure concepts and principles as necessary for the knowledge that has been presupposed, (3) a metaphysical interpretation of the contents of the whole sphere of our determinate theoretical knowledge as 'transcendentally ideal', and, finally, (4) a culmination of the system as a whole in a satisfaction of its founding concerns through a rational, albeit 'practical', defense of the postulates of freedom, God, and the possibility of immortality. (I present these four levels primarily with the structure of the first *Critique* in mind, but parallel points apply to the structure of Kant's ethics and aesthetics.)

Kant's main motive for the third level of his system, his theoretical arguments for transcendental idealism, is surely to defend what he takes to be the only reasonable way to exclude, as not possible, the main obstacle to his fourth-level beliefs and their key libertarian doctrine. This obstacle is any form of transcendental realism that takes the thoroughly determined spatiotemporal features described at the second level to be ultimate, to exhaust the realm of all that concretely exists.¹⁰ Making sense of Kant's motive alone therefore requires, I believe, a metaphysical interpretation of the content of transcendental idealism and a reading that focuses specifically on the doctrine of the ideality of space and time. No 'short argument' that would arrive at idealism from entirely general considerations about minds, concepts, synthesis, and so on can begin to do justice to the basic arguments and conclusions actually present in the *Critique*.

⁷ Allen W. Wood, *Kant* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 70, 74.

⁸ Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 103.

⁹ See, e.g., Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xvi and B 218, and my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, chs. 1–2. References to the *Critique* are given by pages of the first and/or second edition ('A/B'), and quotations are from the Norman Kemp Smith translation (London: Macmillan, 1929). For Kant, 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) usually signifies an empirical knowledge claim (e.g., 'these bodies are heavy'), typically in a perceptual context, but some of Kant's arguments employ a starting point of 'experience' in a broader sense, e.g., moral experience, aesthetic experience, or even the mathematical experience of making elementary geometric or arithmetic claims without yet taking them to be synthetic a priori. It is also true that *some* of Kant's arguments start from claims that are understood from the outset to be a priori, as in the *Prolegomena* (and use 'experience' in a sense that already presumes a systematic, and even highly scientific, perspective), but that does not mean that this is his typical or ultimate starting point. See below, nn. 20, 22, 27, 41, 45, 57, 66, 106, and 110.

¹⁰ There are strands in contemporary physics that also allow for something more fundamental than spatiotemporality, so this notion can hardly be dismissed as immediately absurd. See, e.g., Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time and the Texture of Reality* (New York: Random House, 2004), 472: 'spacetime may not be among the most fundamental cosmic ingredients.'

I turn now, in a second section, to showing how these introductory points, and especially the distinction between the first two levels of the Critical system, are relevant for understanding mistakes commonly made in attempts to contrast Reid and Kant. In a third section, I begin to build a positive connection between Reid and Kant by clarifying significant underlying similarities between them, most of which concern common-sense aspects of their epistemology of perception. In a fourth and final section, I briefly address metaphysical issues that also link their philosophies.

II. FALSE DIFFERENCES

The locus classicus for those who sharply contrast Kant and Reid is a passage from the *Prolegomena*:

To appeal to common sense when insight and science fail, and no sooner—this is one of the subtle discoveries of modern times, by means of which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinker and hold his own. . . . Seen clearly, it is but an appeal to the opinion of the multitude, of whose applause the philosopher is ashamed, while the popular charlatan boasts of it.¹¹

Because Kant made these remarks in discussing ‘opponents of the great thinker’ Hume, and he singled out ‘Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and lastly Priestley’, it is understandable that this text has been taken to signal that the Critical system excludes any appeal to common sense and any positive relation to Reid’s philosophy. However, as Manfred Kuehn demonstrated some time ago, we now know that the context of the *Prolegomena* reveals that Kant, in large part, intended this passage not as a rejection of Reid as such but as a criticism of the *Popularphilosophen* in Germany at the time. Kant’s main concern was to distance himself from what he took to be their very influential and crude appeals ‘to the opinion of the multitude’ under the heading of employing common sense as a tool for rejecting systematic philosophy altogether.¹² These appeals directly threatened his *Critique*, and they appeared to Kant to lie behind the negative reviews of the first edition that the *Prolegomena* was hastily written to counter. Kant also had general reasons for being worried: the supporters of common-sense philosophy that he was most familiar with had

¹¹ Kant, *Prolegomena* (Ak. 4: 425), as cited in Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 21. References to works by Kant other than the first *Critique* are to the volume and page of the Academy Edition, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900–). This passage is also cited in Noah Lemos, *Common Sense: A Contemporary Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67–8; and Ronald Beanblossom, ‘Introduction’, in Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer (eds.), *Thomas Reid: Inquiry and Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. xxv.

¹² See Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, esp. 191–207, and his ‘Reid’s Contribution to “Hume’s Problem”’, in Peter Jones (ed.), *The Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 124–48.

been linked with anti-academic movements and, indirectly, with fanatical trends that were of urgent concern in his own country.

From a systematic perspective, however, there are many reasons for saying Kant's system is clearly indebted to common sense, and he and his immediate followers stressed this point repeatedly. As a famous autobiographical note from 1764 reveals, the main inspiration for Kant's mature work was the 'leveling' effect of reading Rousseau, who taught him that it is not lofty speculation but rather insights into rational morality shared by the 'common laborer' that define the main interest of philosophy.¹³ Kant turned the three basic articles of the simple 'Savoyard vicar's' creed into the three postulates of pure practical reason—God, freedom, and the possibility of immortality—that his first *Critique* was designed to make rationally defensible.¹⁴ Instead of tying the basis of these postulates *directly* to intuition or common sense, however, Kant went on to distinguish between the first-level fact of 'moral experience' as such (that is, a common but rational sense of duty), the second-level philosophical formulation and defense of its general principles, and the higher-level metaphysical considerations and specific postulates that fill out the proper conditions of the moral life.¹⁵

Kant's main expositor, Karl Reinhold, then made the Critical philosophy a belated but enormous success in Germany by emphasizing these themes, and their relation to current controversies, in his *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786–7). This remarkable bestseller does not actually bother to explain Kant's philosophical project in terms of the details of its complex 'grounds' in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic. Instead, it argues vividly that the core 'results' of both 'the founder of Christianity' and the *Critique's* 'Gospel of pure reason' are nothing other than the most appropriate responses of reason to the deepest moral 'needs' of *common sense* in light of the historical situations in which these doctrines were introduced.¹⁶ Kant wholeheartedly endorsed Reinhold's influential work, not foreseeing that, once Reinhold obtained his own professorship and immense following in Jena, he would eventually turn his students in directions leading to the development of German Idealism and doctrines pointing away from common sense and the Critical system.¹⁷

¹³ 'Rousseau set me to rights. This dazzling superiority vanishes, I learn to honor man and I would find myself more useless than the common laborer if I did not believe that this observation would impart to all else a value to restore the rights of mankind' (Kant, *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen'* (Ak. 20: 44), as translated in J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 488–9).

¹⁴ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education* (1762), esp. part IV. Kant studied this book immediately and intensely.

¹⁵ These levels correspond roughly to the three parts of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹⁶ See Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Fourth Letter, 121.

¹⁷ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

Reinhold was not the only one of Kant's early readers to link common sense and Critical philosophy. When Friedrich Niethammer founded the new leading journal of Jena in 1795, its first article was entitled, 'On the Demands of Common Sense to Philosophy'.¹⁸ In this article and his editor's forward, Niethammer closely links the 'scientific' (that is, systematic) aspirations of Critical philosophy with the goal of properly 'making philosophy popular' by serving the 'final purpose of humanity', after bringing a correct 'determination of concepts' to 'common human understanding [i.e., common sense]'.¹⁹ Niethammer appropriately characterizes what I have called the 'first level' of Kant's system by saying 'that there is experience at all is a general fact that [proper] philosophy presupposes',²⁰ and he understands this not so much as an explicit belief but as a ground commonly taken for granted.²¹ It is for this reason that he says, 'what does not allow of philosophical proof, also is not to be doubted in philosophy'.²² He notes that common-sense realism provides a proper limiting condition on philosophical claims, but he adds that common sense alone is not in a position to settle higher-level disputes about universal and necessary claims such as a general principle of causality or a non-empirical kind of freedom. Similar positions can be found in the ideas of the Jena circle of 'early Kantians' such as Franz von Herbert and Johann Benjamin Erhard, and these positions became a major factor in philosophical strands of early romanticism. This movement strove mightily, but vainly, to save Kant's own perspective from being swamped by the ambitious foundationalist projects of German Idealism.²³

It is precisely this *distinction* between the first two levels of Kant's system—ordinary experience and pure principles—that is crucial to properly understanding his reaction to common sense in the passage quoted above from the *Prolegomena*. Kant is not arguing there against common sense as such, but only against those who appeal to it when 'science' fails and '*no sooner*'. As he immediately goes on to explain in the next paragraph, there is nothing at all wrong with heeding the bounds of 'healthy common sense'²⁴ as a starting point. Problems arise only if one supposes that the first step of all our thought, common experience, can by

¹⁸ Friedrich Niethammer, 'Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie', *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, 1 (May 1795), 1–45.

¹⁹ See Niethammer, 'Vorbericht über Zweck und Einrichtung dieses Journals', *Philosophisches Journal*, 1 (May 1795), vii.

²⁰ Niethammer, 'Von den Ansprüchen', 23: 'daß überhaupt Erfahrung ist. Dies allgemeines Factum setzt die Philosophie aus.' Cf. above, n. 9.

²¹ Ibid. 24.

²² Ibid. 25. See also his letter to Erhard, 27 Oct. 1794: 'Kant's entire system can be expressed in the hypothetical proposition, "If experience is . . . then".' Cited in Manfred Frank, '*Unendliche Annäherung*'. *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), 507 n., from *Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer: Korrespondenz mit dem Erhard und Herbert-Kreis*, ed. Wilhelm Baum (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 1995), 109; cf. *ibid.*, von Herbert to Niethammer, 76.

²³ See Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*; and Jane Kneller, 'Introduction', in *Novalis: Fichte Studies*, ed. J. Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁴ Kant, *Prolegomena* (Ak. 4: 259).

itself substitute for the second step, the transcendental step of exploring pure concepts to see whether they provide us with demonstrable general principles for experience—and whether they yield proofs or contradictions when we try to apply them determinately beyond our experience.²⁵ In other words, the Critical system is not designed for questions or answers in regard to radical skepticism about whether there is experience of objects at all.²⁶ Kant's concern is to vindicate our healthy common sense by arguing that the objects it presumes require a more systematic structure than it itself can explain, a structure that ideally fits modern science and our pure practical goals as well.²⁷ Kant's aim is not to overturn common sense as such, but merely to slow down any quick and crude appeal to it alone to settle especially difficult metaphysical questions such as the existence of empirical necessity and non-empirical freedom.

Reid admittedly does not pause, in the specific way that Kant does, over the distinctions made here between the basic levels of philosophy, and so there remains a difference between them—hence the question mark in my title—but not a difference of the radical kind that has generally been supposed. There remain many important issues concerning which Reid and Kant can agree.

III. GENUINE SIMILARITIES

There are at least ten kinds of basic similarities between Reid and Kant that deserve clarification in this context. They fall into three groups: the first three directly concern philosophical *methodology* and the notion of common sense in general, the next six have to do primarily with the theory of *perception*, and the final one introduces a batch of *metaphysical* issues raised especially by Kant's doctrine of the ideality of self-knowledge.

The *first* of these similarities consists in the *broadly rationalist* orientation of Reid and Kant, an orientation that also distinguishes their characterization of common sense. They both take common sense to be best understood as not a separate

²⁵ Kant emphasizes this point in the *Critique* (A 855/B 883, A 783–4/B 811–12) and *Prolegomena*, §31, where he makes plain that his criticism of advocates of common sense concerns their broadly empiricist attempts to give contingent grounds for principles that are a priori.

²⁶ Cf. Paul Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', *Kantian Review*, 7 (2003), 1–37; and Stephen Engstrom, 'The Transcendental Deduction and Scepticism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 32 (1994), 359–80. Guyer and Engstrom show that 'Cartesian' or perceptual skepticism is not the only issue in Kant's work that can be linked with the term 'skepticism'. As Guyer notes, however, 'it all depends on how you define skepticism'—and I have chosen to focus for now on the term in the Cartesian 'external-world' sense that is primary in Anglophone philosophy. I do not mean to deny that Kant attends, in addition, to Humean skepticism concerning principles of *reason* as well as to a form of skepticism about *philosophy* that the 'natural dialectic' of our thought can lead to when it is without proper metaphysics. The possibility of a concern with 'skepticism' at these different levels reflects the multilevel structure of Kant's system.

²⁷ This point is missed in contemporary interpretations that suggest that, if a part of Kant's argument relies on a basis in experience (in the sense of 'empirical knowledge'), then this is tantamount to presuming *universal* principles in a question-begging way. See below, n. 45.

and ‘oracular’ or majoritarian faculty but rather a ground-level manifestation of ordinary human capacities of thought—and in particular of judgment and reason—which allow us to obtain substantive truths that go beyond mere sensation.²⁸ In treating these intellectual capacities as basic rather than derivative, Reid departs from the empiricist mainstream of British philosophy, and he picks up on the broadly linguistic rather than sensationist connotations of the English term ‘sense’. Somewhat similarly, Kant and his immediate followers such as Reinhold pick up on the stress on intellect contained explicitly in the German term for common sense.²⁹ Because that term, *gemeiner Menschenverstand*, literally means ‘common human *understanding*’, it can help avoid the suggestion of mere particularity and contingency that can immediately arise with the term ‘sense’.³⁰ Moreover, Kant’s special focus on judgment and reason, especially when discussing the ‘sound’ common sense (*gesunder Verstand*, or *gesunder Menschenverstand*) that is his own prime concern, sharply distinguishes his work from the radically anti-systematic tendencies of *Popularphilosophen* such as Johann Georg Feder and Christoph Meiners.³¹

This underlying rationalism can be missed if one considers only the limitations that Reid sees in reason when it is understood speculatively as a mere faculty for ‘reasoning’—that is, for making formal deductive or inductive inferences.³² Analogously, Kant’s underlying rationalism can be missed if one considers only the limitations he sees in reason when it is understood merely speculatively, especially in a material mode as a faculty for making determinate theoretical claims altogether beyond experience. These points thus reveal a *second* methodological similarity: a balance of rationalism with *criticism*. Reid and Kant both attack what they take to be the objectionably speculative and esoteric claims of most traditional philosophy, especially the metaphysics of the schools and the earlier moderns. In this way, even if they both remain defenders of reason in a broad sense, they are also anti-dogmatic³³ in not letting any system ride roughshod over

²⁸ ‘Sense in its most common, and therefore its most proper meaning, signifies judgment’ (Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, vi. ii. 423a). References to these *Essays* are to chapter, section, and page in the William Hamilton edition (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1858). Cf. Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 196, and Beanblossom, ‘Introduction’, xxvi.

²⁹ See ‘Note on Texts and Translation’, in Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*; and Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, Appendix.

³⁰ Kant’s notion in the *Critique of Judgment* (§20) of the *sensus communis* is more closely tied to sensibility as such, but even this notion is relevant to him ultimately because of relations that it also has to our faculty of judgment.

³¹ Reinhold himself was deeply concerned with making philosophy popular, but by means of a systematic and Kantian orientation that contrasted with the eclecticism and anti-rationalism of the *Popularphilosophen*. See Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 43–4.

³² Reid criticizes the notion that we should ‘admit nothing but what we can prove by reasoning’ (*An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), i. vii. 71). References to this work are to the critical edition, ed. Derek Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

³³ Wolterstorff (*Reid*, x, 194) characterizes Reid as an ‘anti-rationalist’, but this terminology can lead to confusing Reid’s strictures about overly ambitious claims about reasoning with doubts about the value of reason as such.

the basic claims of common sense—especially by means of abstract arguments based solely on the reflective reason of a supposedly privileged and entirely pure philosophical standpoint. It is therefore no accident that the very first group of significant Kantians—Reinhold, Niethammer, and Erhard—distinguish themselves initially from later idealists by writing works that stress the philosophical significance of common sense for precisely this proper ‘populist’ reason.³⁴ In arguing explicitly that consistency with the *core* commitments of common sense is a ‘criterion’ that any proper philosophical claim should respect,³⁵ they are expressing, in their own way, the Reidian idea that a ‘burden of proof’ falls on those who would reject common sense.³⁶ As for Kant himself, his main point is perhaps best expressed in a lecture concerning ‘philosophical encyclopedia’, which says that what the Critical philosophy disputes is merely the extreme position that ‘*everything is already contained in common sense*’.³⁷ Similarly, Reid clearly allows that his own philosophical work is by no means a mere ‘sum’ of what is ‘already’ in common sense, for it must add numerous details that can be obtained only from the distinctive perspective of systematic thought.³⁸

Third, although both Reid and Kant deeply appreciate the need to supplement common sense with higher-order philosophical investigations, they are also clear that these investigations should *not* be understood as intended to be a direct *justification* of common sense as such.³⁹ Any attempted justification here is not only unneeded but also doomed. Moreover, because philosophy always requires some starting points—and, as far as Reid and Kant can see, these are ultimately the core judgments and commitments of common sense—denying these starting points would be not simply false but absurd, because common sense maintains a constant effect on us.⁴⁰ The initial use of common sense by both Reid and Kant is often simply a matter of taking advantage, from the start, of the fact that there are various vaguely defined but definitely objective perspectives—perceptual, mathematical, logical, moral, aesthetic—that guide us all before we take up philosophy. Reid’s words mirror Niethammer’s: ‘one shouldn’t

³⁴ See Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, chs. 14–16.

³⁵ See Niethammer, ‘Von den Ansprüchen’, 38; cf. Kant, B xxxiv, A 831/B 859, and *Prolegomena* (Ak. 4: 259, 278).

³⁶ Wolterstorff (*Reid*, 247) cites *Inquiry*, I. iv. 19: ‘philosophy has no other root but the principles of common sense, it grows out of them.’

³⁷ Kant, *Vorlesungen über Philosophische Enzyklopädie* (1775), ed. Gerhard Lehmann (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961), 59–60 (emphasis added); cited in Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 170. According to Kuehn, the text is most likely from 1775.

³⁸ Cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 107.

³⁹ See Wolterstorff’s helpful discussion of the sense in which philosophy does not ‘justify’ common sense, in ‘Reid on Common Sense’, in Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

⁴⁰ See Reid, *Inquiry*, II. vi. 33, and Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 223. For illuminating discussions of worries about an illegitimate circularity in positions like this, see Lemos, *Common Sense*, 36–47, and Michael Bergmann, ‘Epistemic Circularity: Malignant and Benign’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 49 (2004), 709–27.

try to prove what is not known by proof.⁴¹ What is crucial here is not so much what is believed, in the sense of entertained or formulated, but what is ‘taken for granted’ by each of us (to use some terms from Nicholas Wolterstorff’s very helpful quasi-Wittgensteinian discussion).⁴² Reid does propose a concise list of so-called general ‘principles’ of common sense, but this can obscure his main insight. This insight concerns the significance of our concrete *everyday* presumptions, presumptions that initially are not explicit beliefs, let alone philosophical reflections about their own status.

Kant is somewhat more cautious and, perhaps intentionally, often vague. In his moral and aesthetic writings, he gives only a few reminders of what he supposes we take for granted and as going almost without saying—for example, that some actions are genuinely obligatory and some things beautiful.⁴³ In his theoretical work, he presumes all along that it is proper to start by discussing ordinary things, such as houses and boats, which are taken to be not mere representations but objects of ‘experience’ in the sense of proper empirical judgment.⁴⁴ He also remarks, simply in passing, that we all share fundamentally the same space, hence something of the same mindedness as other humans, and he presumes we have an ability to ‘determine’ our consciousness in some objective manner in time.⁴⁵ These notions are literally so ‘taken for granted’, and Kant is so casual about his use of them, that it is no wonder that many readers, especially those obsessed with radical skepticism, have overlooked what Kant is actually doing at the first level of his system. And precisely because it can be so difficult to identify and characterize our ‘core judgments’ or ‘takings for granted’, it is understandable that Kant would want, at a second level, to organize their implications in categorical order. Whatever one thinks of the details of his second-level arguments, it is striking how clearly Kant’s use of his first level is consistent with all four notions that recent interpreters have taken to be central to Reid’s position—namely, that (a) core perceptual beliefs are not held for ‘reasons’, (b) denying them is absurd, (c) normal people cannot avoid taking them for granted, and (d) this is a matter of our ultimately contingent epistemic nature.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Cf. above, n. 22, and John Greco, ‘Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic’, in Cuneo and van Woudenberg (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, 139.

⁴² The notion of being ‘taken for granted’ is in the title of Reid, *Essays*, I, ii, and it is central to Wolterstorff’s persuasive account of the best way to make use of Reid’s notion of common sense (*Reid*, 224).

⁴³ See my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, 43–7, and Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 194–5.

⁴⁴ See above, n. 9.

⁴⁵ See Kant, A 42/B 59: ‘shared in . . . certainly by every human being’, and B 275: ‘The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves . . .’. Note that for Kant the premiss that there can be a determination of objective succession is a first step in an *argument* toward establishing a general principle of causality, whereas Reid appears to rest this principle directly on common sense.

⁴⁶ See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 227–31. Unlike Wolterstorff, I worry that calling Kant (in contrast to Reid) an ‘essentialist’ can obscure the fact that Kant also stresses the ultimate contingency of our forms of intuition.

These methodological points all go hand in hand with a *fourth* similarity between Reid and Kant, which concerns the first and most basic feature of their account of perception. This is their revolutionary *rejection* of the modern *way of ideas* and its whole approach to the problem of an external world.⁴⁷ This rejection involves two basic steps: an argument that our ordinary perceptual knowledge of the external world is *not* to be explained or justified as an *inference* from data, and a claim that it is especially not to be understood as arising from knowledge claims about mere *inner* data. Reid repeatedly denies that such an inference could be legitimate or explanatory even if the ‘Cartesian’ premiss of a starting point in immediate inner knowledge were granted.⁴⁸ But he also denies that we in fact ever have this kind of immediate knowledge, and he asserts that what we immediately know are rather, just as common sense presumes, the ordinary outer objects of everyday perception.⁴⁹

Although Neo-Reidians and others still suggest that this kind of epistemological ‘anti-Cartesianism’ is the very opposite of Kant’s view,⁵⁰ it is in fact central to the Critical theory of perception as well, especially in the A and B versions of what is called the ‘Refutation of Idealism’. In the A edition, Kant already stresses the inadequacy of any ‘inference’ from inner representations to outer objects.⁵¹ In the B edition, Kant repeats this claim and explicitly stresses that we have what he calls an ‘immediate’ knowledge of objects in space.⁵² By this he does not mean that we lack an inner life and are mystically fused with what is outside.⁵³ He means that our knowledge of outer objects is not gained in a mediate manner by *first* having *knowledge* merely of the inner as such.

Like Reid, Kant also claims that *determinate knowledge* of an immediate inner kind is not even available for us because our *immediate* mental life by itself *alone* is simply a flux of sensations. This point is consistent with allowing the existence of intentional acts within us that are successfully aimed at the outer world, and also with the possibility of higher-level states whereby we reflect back on ourselves as subjects and determine ourselves as empirical beings in light of what we know about the world at large. Recall that knowledge of what is outer is needed, according to the premiss of the Refutation, precisely not for bare ‘consciousness’ of one’s

⁴⁷ See Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 206; cf. above, Ch. 3.

⁴⁸ See Reid, *Essays*, I. iii. 51, and II. xiv. 185; cf. Greco, ‘Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic’, 138–9.

⁴⁹ See Reid, *Inquiry*, v. viii. 74, and *Essays*, II, xvii, 204; cf. Greco, ‘Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic’, 145–6.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 90, and Patrick Rysiew, ‘Reid and Epistemic Naturalism’, in John Haldane and Stephen Read (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 36.

⁵¹ Kant, A 367; cf. my *Kant’s Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 111–12.

⁵² Kant, B xli n. and B 276; cf. my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*, 115–16. This is not to deny that in the B edition Kant makes significant efforts to move away from the misleading ‘psychological’ language of the A edition—possibly under the indirect influence of Reid. See Kuehn, ‘Reid’s Contribution to “Hume’s Problem”’, 135–41.

⁵³ See below, nn. 66 and 110.

own 'existence' but rather for the 'determination' of ourselves.⁵⁴ The Refutation's premiss is not a claim advanced as internal to the way of ideas but is rather a common-sense presumption that Kant is using precisely to 'turn the tables'. He is showing how his philosophy, unlike 'psychological idealism', has the external resources to explain determinate knowledge of the psychological realm itself. This point is missed by later common-sense philosophers such as Moore, who claim to be presenting an alternative to what they mistakenly call Kant's 'request for a proof that the external world exists'.⁵⁵ According to Moore: "They would say "If you cannot prove your premiss that here is one hand, and here is another, then you do not know it." This view that, if I cannot prove such things as these, I do not know them, is I think, the view which Kant was expressing."⁵⁶ Here Moore is improperly projecting Reid's diagnosis of earlier modern philosophers onto Kant, and presuming that Kant also must have been a doomed anti-skeptic, starting with mere inner ideas and a dogmatic refusal to allow any truths not based on reasoning.⁵⁷

Fifth, in their *positive phenomenology* of perception, both philosophers insist that, while perception always involves sensation and imagination, what we normally attend to and intend⁵⁸ are not these components as such but rather the outer items that we 'objectivate' in taking up what Reid calls the 'suggestions' of the sensory.⁵⁹ This point may seem to some to be much clearer in Reid than Kant, but, in fact, as the German philosopher Gerold Prauss demonstrated in detail decades ago, Kant also relies explicitly and heavily on a model of perceptual experience in which we come to know external objects in the process of making an original 'reading' of them upon the occasion of sensation.⁶⁰ That is, we precisely do not infer from an inner given but rather *interpret* nature through it, just as we understand the sense of words through the general capacities and particular sensations we have, while

⁵⁴ Kant, B 277.

⁵⁵ See John Greco, 'How to Reid Moore', in Haldane and Read (eds.), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, 143.

⁵⁶ G. E. Moore, 'Proof of an External World', in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier, 1962), 148, cited in Beanblossom, 'Introduction', xlvii.

⁵⁷ Most misunderstandings of this point probably go back to a misreading of Kant's remarks at B xl n., which are directed against 'psychological idealism' (*not* skepticism in general) and any reliance on 'faith' in what Kant takes to be the non-rational sense encouraged at that time by Friedrich Jacobi. Kant's remarks are not about resolving the 'scandal of philosophy' by offering a new 'proof' of the external world from bare *Cartesian* premisses, let alone an *argument* for things in themselves (which is what Jacobi demands of philosophy). See below, nn. 66, 105, and 110.

⁵⁸ For Reid, what we attend to is only a subset of our mental life (see Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 21). A similar point is implied in Kant's distinction between representations as such and representations that are at least something 'to me'. See Kant, B 132, and my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 239.

⁵⁹ See Reid, *Inquiry*, vi. xxiv. 190; cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 79, 101.

⁶⁰ See Gerold Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), and *Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980). Cf. my 'Contemporary German Epistemology: The Significance of Gerold Prauss', *Inquiry*, 25 (1982), 125–38; and Rudolf Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 33–5.

not focusing on them, or on individual letters, as such.⁶¹ Both Reid and Kant thus rely on an *analogy* (but only an analogy) between our *linguistic* understanding of propositions (through signs), in arriving at a comprehension of determinate *sense*, and our *perceptual* understanding of the world (through signs) in arriving at interpretive beliefs about determinate *objects*.⁶²

In addition to using this positive account of perception, Reid supplements his response to external world skepticism with considerations that do not depend specifically on the rejection of the way of ideas.⁶³ This *sixth* similarity concerns the pluralistic nature of Reid's epistemology,⁶⁴ the fact that it allows a *variety of sources* of knowledge. Reid insists that the findings of perception and memory in particular should not be globally mistrusted, let alone dismissed in favor of the Cartesian source of mere 'inner consciousness' in the form of immediate states of feeling or introspective reasoning. This is the broader positive point behind his criticism of modern philosophy's enslavement to what he calls 'the principle of consciousness'.⁶⁵ Once again, the remarkable thing about Kant is that he agrees with all these points, even though his critics have tended to believe otherwise. Their beliefs may have arisen from confusions concerning Kant's emphasis on and understanding of the terms 'consciousness' and 'apperception'. Contrary to the tradition of English philosophy,⁶⁶ these terms are generally used in the *Critique* to signify not mere representation, awareness, or immediate introspection but *judgmental* states that have a determinate object, an object that Kant goes on to argue always requires, in our case, a spatial reference.⁶⁷ To suppose that Kant is an advocate of the 'principle of consciousness' is to forget the attacks on Cartesianism that are central to the extensive elaborations on the derivative status of self-knowledge in the *Critique's* Paralogisms and in numerous additions throughout the second edition.⁶⁸

⁶¹ See Kant, *Prolegomena* §30: '[the categories allow us] to decipher appearances, that we may be able to read them as experience'. See above, n. 60, and my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, 94.

⁶² There are, of course, differences between how signs function in language and in perception—but this need not be an objection to what is presented simply as an analogy and not an equation. See above, n. 60.

⁶³ One such consideration is the general anti-foundationalist methodological stance that takes our faculties and common beliefs in general for granted until something is shown to be wrong about them. See Greco, 'Reid's Reply to the Skeptic', 148–9.

⁶⁴ The relevant negative side of this epistemology is its thought that, however our mental life is conceived (for example, even if not in terms of an immaterialist way of ideas but as a set of physical stimulations), bare 'inferences' from this inner life alone will not be sufficient to explain how we ordinarily and properly arrive at determinate knowledge of something external.

⁶⁵ Reid, *Inquiry*, vii. 210.

⁶⁶ Kant's usage contrasts also with Jacobi's mystical claim that by intellectual intuition I see 'in one and the same indivisible moment that I exist and that objects external to myself exist'. Cited in Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 165, from *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* (1787), in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke*, ii, ed. J. F. Koppen and C. J. F. Roth (Leipzig, Gerhard Fleischer, 1815; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 175.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Kant, B 154.

⁶⁸ See the Preface to the second edition of my *Kant's Theory of Mind*.

A *seventh* and very closely related point concerns the *act* character of our original perceptual beliefs. As Reid stresses, perception is a matter of the proper exercise of appropriately focused ‘intellectual powers’, and it is not an entirely receptive process wherein we simply undergo input and a sequence of associations.⁶⁹ The charge has often been made that Kant’s account lacks this characterization of perception as something that is a genuine act, albeit not literally an action or exercise of our practical power. The temptation to make this charge—and to miss again an underlying similarity with Reid—can be explained as resting on a conflation of Kant’s distinct notions of sensation and perception, and perhaps also on an exaggeration of his famous contrast of intuitions and concepts.⁷⁰ Although Kant treats sensations and primitive feelings as receptive and *non-cognitive* events, the very first page of the *Critique* distinguishes these kinds of wholly passive facts from the *cognitive* acts of intuition and perception.⁷¹ Kant does, however, regard perception as *relatively receptive* in contrast to the higher processes of *merely conceptual* activity, and he also, simply in a shorthand way, globally contrasts the receptivity of sensibility with the spontaneity of the understanding or will as such. This may have kept some readers from seeing how for Kant ‘even’ our sensory perception⁷² is still an intentional act; it is judgmental and cognitive and not a ‘brute’ and indeterminate given.

Kant’s explicit use of the language of intentionality has an advantage over speaking, as some neo-Reidians do, of our perceptual beliefs as being ‘evoked’. This kind of talk can obscure the high degree of underdetermination within perceptual judgment, and hence its ineliminable element of interpretation.⁷³ The language of evocation rather than intention and interpretation may have arisen because of misplaced worries about threats to perceptual realism. The worries are misplaced because our immediate relation to objects can still be a matter of knowledge even when it involves interpretations that are something other than simple ‘evokings’ automatically determined in just one way. Without having to lapse into anti-realism, let alone any kind of whimsical deconstructivism, we can allow that the process of interpretation in ordinary perception, which ‘takes’ the world in one of a large number of possible ways, can still disclose how things are objectively.

The feature of intentional objectification in perception is closely related to an *eighth* similarity. Scholars often note that for Reid, unlike most philosophers now, the term ‘perception’ is *not* treated as a ‘*success word*’.⁷⁴ That is, Reid uses

⁶⁹ See Reid, *Essays*, II. iv. 254b; cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 74–5.

⁷⁰ Wolterstorff speaks of the ‘heavy Kantian line between acquaintance and conceptualizing [which—supposedly—overlooks how both] are manifestations of spontaneity’ (*Reid*, 76).

⁷¹ Kant, A 19/B 33.

⁷² See Kant, B 161; and cf. John McDowell, ‘Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint’, in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 3 (2005), 31.

⁷³ See, e.g., Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 127, and Greco, ‘Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic’, 146–7.

the term ‘perception’ to indicate an objectivating cognitive process, one that culminates in an appropriate and well-structured but not always true belief. Thus we can still have what Reid calls ‘perception’ even when we are undergoing a hallucination.⁷⁵ This way of speaking may not be standard in current philosophical English, but we can easily enough understand what Reid means, and those who cannot tolerate an expression such as ‘false perception’ can simply switch to language about immediate but non-veridical perceptual beliefs. It is striking in this context that the German term for ‘perception’—namely, *Wahrnehmung*—contains a term signifying ‘truth’ right within it, and yet it also is understandably used in contexts that can be non-veridical. Something similar holds for one of the main terms of the *Critique*—namely, *Erfahrung*—which Kant almost always uses for sensory experience that is meant to be true but that, just like the term ‘perception’ on Reid’s usage, can in fact be false. More specifically, *Erfahrung* signifies not mere sensation or representation, which by itself is too crude to be even possibly true or false, but rather an objectively structured perceptual *claim* to empirical *knowledge*,⁷⁶ a claim taken to be true until a defeater arises. It should not be surprising, then, that the theme of a ‘presumption of truth’, and a ‘propensity to speak truth’ (which is implied in the ‘literal’ meaning of the term, *Wahrnehmung*, which is ‘taking true’) even though success is not guaranteed, is also shared by Reid and Kant.⁷⁷ As with Reid, this reconstruction involves some admittedly jarring locutions, but those who cannot tolerate expressions in the *Critique* such as ‘false knowledge’⁷⁸ can simply switch to talking about knowledge claims that turn out to be unsuccessful.

A *ninth* similarity between Reid and Kant concerns a variety of features that can be listed under the common heading of ‘anti-sensationism’. A striking example here is the relatively oft-noted anticipation by Reid of Kant’s notion that we are acquainted with pure space in a way that is independent of all particular sensations.⁷⁹ Reid and Kant also share a concession to Hume in accepting that notions such as self, causality, necessity,⁸⁰ and morality are not based in sensation. Even more significantly, they share an objection to Hume in saying that these notions can nonetheless be legitimately used in a pure way without endorsing the typical transcendent inferences of traditional metaphysics.

Another basic difference, closely linked to many of these points, is that both Reid and Kant tend to focus their philosophy on ‘complete’ syntactic formations,

⁷⁵ On hallucinations, see Reid, *Essays* II. xxii. 338b; and cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 124–30, 224.

⁷⁶ See above, n. 9.

⁷⁷ On the ‘propensity to speak truth’, see Reid, *Inquiry*, vi. xxiv. 193–4; cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 175. A similar primacy of truth in Kant is discussed by Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant*, 86–7.

⁷⁸ See Kant, A 58/B 83; cf. Prauss, *Erscheinung bei Kant*, 89–91, and my ‘Contemporary German Epistemology’, 130.

⁷⁹ See Reid, *Inquiry*, vi. xxi. 176. Cf. Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense*, 176; Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 137; and Greco, ‘How to Reid Moore’, 145.

⁸⁰ On the need for objects to have modal properties, see Kant, B 142, and Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 89.

such as propositions and judgments,⁸¹ rather than mere terms, concepts, or ideas, let alone sensations, which were the prime focus of much of earlier modern philosophy. This point is also related to a significant similarity in how Kant and Reid discuss the origin of philosophical concepts. Just as Reid holds that our use of the concept of a faculty is not derived by typical empiricist abstraction but is 'evoked' upon the experience of the operation of a faculty, so Kant argues, already in his *Dissertation*, that the origin of our use of fundamental concepts is not to be explained by innateness or a comparison of sensations but by a distinctive awareness that arises in their being exercised.⁸² Kant is also committed to the view that neither the grasp of a concept nor its justified use can be explained in general by efficient causation, for he stresses that such an explanation is clearly impossible for the categories.⁸³

I turn now to the *tenth* similarity, the basic *metaphysical* resemblance of Reid's and Kant's views. The appropriate topic to begin with here is self-knowledge because it connects directly with the earlier discussion of the Refutation of Idealism, and it immediately presents what seems to be the most perplexing aspect of Kant's idealism. Kant's idealist account here is so provocative that friends and foes alike have raised two directly opposed kinds of claims about it. Some say that Kant so radically privileges the self that, because of a supposed foundation of the Critical philosophy in a 'principle of consciousness',⁸⁴ he makes it in some sense the most basic, if not the only, thing that exists (or at least is all that we can know). Others contend the opposite, that Kant denies all genuine self-knowledge because he turns all our knowledge, and thus even the self, into a mere construct, so that its ontological status is nothing more than a fiction.⁸⁵ In either case, the suspicious-sounding idealism of the Critical philosophy can seem worth contrasting with the view of figures such as Reid, who clearly allows certain knowledge of the self through common sense, despite his criticism of several aspects of Cartesianism.

So it may seem, but here again the complexity of Kant's thought and the unfortunate influence of various unnecessary presumptions have blinded interpreters from recognizing a significant overlap of sound common sense and the core of Kant's account of the self as such. The basic strategy of Kant's Paralogisms

⁸¹ See Reid, *Essays*, vi. i, 'Of Judgment in General'.

⁸² See already Kant's 'Inaugural Dissertation' (1770), *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*, §8 (Ak. 2: 395).

⁸³ See, e.g., Kant's critique of Hume's account of the concept of cause, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak. 5: 56). I see no reason why Kant could not allow our grasp of a concept to be explained by an awareness of its presence rather than by its causal effect on the mind (in contrast to Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 58, 151).

⁸⁴ See Wolterstorff on Kant in 'Reid on Common Sense', 95, which cites Reid, *Inquiry*, vii. 210: 'the spirit of modern philosophy is . . . to allow no first principle of contingent truths but this one, that the thoughts of our mind, of which we are conscious, are self-evidently real and true.'

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 55.

and Refutation of Idealism shows that what he repeatedly criticizes are simply the radically Cartesian and dogmatic spiritualist arguments about the self that now disturb most philosophers. Kant does emphasize the phenomenon of apperception, but his two most basic points contrast with earlier foundationalist views rather than with the position of Reid and Reid's heirs.

Kant's first point is that the judgmental nature of apperception is needed for knowledge as such, and, hence, that even determinate self-knowledge, as opposed to mere acquaintance, cannot arise—either with a phenomenal or a more than phenomenal status—from mere passive exposure to inner sense, or from some kind of primitive and active inner pointing.⁸⁶ Second, Kant stresses that human self-knowledge requires apperception to be combined with sensory data, so that the mere form of apperception itself, that is, the operator, 'I, or he, or it that thinks . . .' is also not enough by itself to generate even self-knowledge—with either a phenomenal or a more than phenomenal status. More positively, insofar as we can have determinate self-knowledge, and not merely an indeterminate sense that there is some subject indubitably aware of 'being',⁸⁷ our conceptual/apperceptive and receptive/sensory faculties always need to be exercised together (for example, to determine a specific temporal order).

Instead of picking up on these now relatively uncontroversial points, some interpreters still contend that Kant's view is that all our data are experienced initially as inner, and then, mysteriously, the mind, simply by using its power to 'organize concepts' and generate 'conceptual' schemes,⁸⁸ manages to turn this inner manifold into something that looks as if it is outer, so that we get the appearance of external things.⁸⁹ But this is precisely not Kant's own view. Even if, like Reid, Kant stresses the interpretive nature of our understanding, he also expressly denies, again like Reid, that a wholesale conceptual manufacturing of the very presence of the external is possible. A central claim of the Refutation of Idealism is that we are receptive beings who are such that our knowledge of objects specifically requires the primitive input of outer *sense*.⁹⁰ Such knowledge could never be generated by mere inner sense, reflection, imagination, or conception—that is, not by any of these individually, nor even by all together. This also

⁸⁶ See Kant, B 67–9 and B 152–4; and cf. my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 253–5.

⁸⁷ See Kant, B 429, and cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 157: 'Kant was not so mindless as to deny all acquaintance, all presence to the mind.'

⁸⁸ See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 103, 158–9. At p. 160, Wolterstorff contrasts the (allegedly) Kantian view that the mind structures matters in such a way that it creates a specific concept (e.g., dizziness) with the Reidian and (allegedly) non-Kantian view that the mind comes to a specific concept in recognizing a structure (i.e., property) that something already has. I see nothing in Kant that would prevent him from taking the latter view. Suspicions to the contrary can be explained as illegitimate projections from the distinct and limited doctrine (which Kant does hold) that our determinate knowledge of actual things is in part dependent on the specific forms of space and time, whose metaphysical status (for reasons that do *not* arise from the mere nature of concepts) is not transcendently real. See below, n. 99.

⁸⁹ Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 90, 103.

⁹⁰ See Kant, B 277 n. a, and B 147. This is not to say that Kant's argument is convincing.

implies that, unlike those who subscribe to a ‘principle of consciousness’, Kant constantly criticizes appeals to ‘reason and introspection’ alone, and he does not take them to be exhaustive forms of knowing that can replace the irreducible role of perception and memory.⁹¹ Someone who fundamentally distrusts perception and memory could not even make sense of the initial premiss of Kant’s Refutation of Idealism argument—namely, that there is ‘empirically determined’ consciousness of oneself ‘in time’.⁹²

Misunderstandings of Kant here are perhaps occasioned by such facts as that his epistemology, as rationalist, does stress the significance of our conceptual powers, and his metaphysics, as idealist, does conclude that there are reasons to characterize as ‘mere appearance’ all that we can theoretically and determinately know, even about spatial objects and our selves.⁹³ But these facts are not sufficient to support the radical allegations that, according to the Critical philosophy, either we ultimately make everything, or we ultimately are nothing. By themselves, the mere presence of rationalism and idealism do not begin to show that Kant’s very notion of a concept or of a self implies, or is meant to imply, that the self, or all else, is an illusion. Nor is this implied even if it is agreed that one way of formulating Kant’s view is that when we undergo ‘inner’ sensations we do not know ourselves but are in a state of undergoing ‘appearances to oneself of oneself qua noumenal’.⁹⁴ Despite what critics imply, this need not be a nonsensical idea—and in the end it may be strikingly similar to Reid’s view.⁹⁵ Part of its meaning is simply that, in merely undergoing such sensations, we cannot be *thereby knowing* what we *ultimately* are because, for Kant, mere sensing by itself is in general never knowledge at all. This is also not to say that we cannot ever know anything about our sensory states. The crucial point is that a chance for knowledge arises only when we get beyond the situation of simply undergoing states, and we come to have some kind of grasp of them—even to think of them merely in terms of dizziness, pain, or whatever other elementary concept seems right.⁹⁶

At this point, of course, critics can still object that Kant’s characterization of any knowledge we may obtain here is going to be couched, absurdly, in terms of appearance. Ever since the *Critique*’s first readers, there have been those who at this point want to insist that these states are not ‘appearances of anything at all.

⁹¹ Pace Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 205. In ‘Reid on Common Sense’ 96 n. 14, Wolterstorff claims that Kant is a foundationalist because he supposedly holds that all our knowledge must be based merely on the sources of ‘reason and consciousness [i.e. introspection]’.

⁹² Kant, B 275.

⁹³ The qualifications ‘theoretically and determinately’ are crucial but still are overlooked in some discussions. Cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 204, regarding a ‘Kantian sort of claim that sensations are no different more than how reality puts in its appearance to us’.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁹⁵ See below, at n. 113.

⁹⁶ See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 205: ‘Reid thought . . . it is in general extremely difficult to form accurate beliefs about them [sensations]—or indeed any beliefs about them. They are not unmistakable in their presented qualities.’ Cf. my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, 304. Kant is, to be sure, not always clear about how to speak about sensations.

They are reality. By no means all of reality, but definitely reality.⁹⁷ But surely the first thing that anyone should say about such states is that they certainly *are*, in one clear sense, appearances, because they really do appear. Hence, the issue must rather be what Kant can mean in going on to hold, as he admittedly does, that, *transcendentally speaking*, our knowledge even here is of ‘mere’ appearance.

This issue brings us finally to the point where Kant’s idealism *in general* must begin to be addressed as such, and where it might seem that whatever connections he has with Reid and common sense will have to turn out to be secondary after all. Note first, however, that, although this issue was reached by reflecting on objections to Kant’s epistemology and ontology of the self, we still have not come across any reference to arguments in Kant himself that contend that his position is meant to flow from notions such as the very idea of a conceptual scheme, a principle of consciousness,⁹⁸ a way of ideas, or the like. To reiterate: the ground of Kant’s idealism, whatever that idealism is exactly, and whatever it implies with respect to the especially perplexing phenomenon of self-knowledge, is definitely not to be found in these kinds of highly general notions.

The fact is that, ever since its first expression in his *Dissertation*, whatever ideality there is in our self-knowledge, must, like all Kant’s idealism, rest on specific considerations about the ultimate characterization of the *specific sensible* forms of space and time—forms that, for him, are precisely *not* to be fundamentally characterized as conceptual matters, or as brought about merely by the activity of the mind.⁹⁹ The step from the *Dissertation* to the *Critique* is nothing other than the globalizing argument that the claim of the ideality of space and time as forms of intuition, which is already asserted in the *Dissertation*, needs to be extended into a claim of the ideality of all our determinate theoretical knowledge, and thus to our self-knowledge as well, insofar as this turns out to be dependent on space and time after all. Those who have objected to its results have rarely wrestled with the inferences involved in the globalization as such.¹⁰⁰ Instead, they have simply expressed deep unease with the very notion of idealism and, in particular, with that notion being attached in any sense to either the self or the spatial domain.

Once Kant’s idealism, even of the self, is expressed as relying essentially on the claim that our determinate self-knowledge is inevitably parasitic on *spatial* knowledge, then the issue between Kant and his opponents needs to be focused on making sense of the basic claim that even spatiality (and therefore the self simply in so far as it and its temporality is dependent on spatiality) can be ‘mere

⁹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 157, 205. Cf. Hermann Andreas Pistorius, ‘Rezension von Kants *Prolegomena*’, *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 59 (1784), 345–6.

⁹⁸ Cf. Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 186.

⁹⁹ Kant does not argue that there must be illusion or ideality simply because we are aware of properties or concepts as such, e.g., equality. Concerns about ideality arise only with claims that are tied to the ontological status of the space and time.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of objections aimed specifically at the ideality of self-knowledge, see my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*, 280–9.

appearance'. I cannot argue that this claim is convincingly established, but I will argue it can be understood in a relevant way that is still at least compatible with sensible philosophy and ordinary common sense.

IV. 1780s IDEALISM AS A KIND OF REALISM

To have any chance of giving Kant's idealism a metaphysical but still plausible sense, it is important from the very beginning not to presume the wholly negative or psychological senses of the term 'idealism' in current English.¹⁰¹ One must ask charitably what a tough-minded scientific type like Kant could possibly have been thinking in presuming that there need not be anything absurdly threatening about his 'transcendental' or 'formal' idealism, an idealism that contrasts the existence of a thing in itself specifically with a 'mere appearance' status of space and time. There are two elements of concern here, the notion of a thing in itself and the philosophical notion of mere appearance. It would be good to be able to make sense of these notions, separately and together, in a non-absurd and yet also non-anodyne way.

The affirmation of things in themselves has no doubt had a very bad press, but, with reference to the issue of realism *as such*, it really cannot be a serious problem. Given Kant's espousal of a merely 'formal' idealism and his direct attack on psychological idealism, a straightforward assertion of things in themselves already implies what in *contemporary* terms is actually a realist position insofar as it allows the non-psychological reality of at least some 'matter'. Contrary to what Moore and others have supposed, there is no room in Kant's system for a global principle such as *esse est percipi*.¹⁰² Kant not only allows the existence of some 'transcendental matter' but also repeatedly expresses the dependence of our mental states on it. The very first page of the *Critique* proper stresses that we are receptive beings and 'objects are given to us'.¹⁰³ I believe this can be read as indicating *not an inference but a commitment* to the presumably unquestionable truth, which Kant often repeats elsewhere, that, whatever happens to be the case 'empirically', it is also true that we are affected by distinct things in themselves.¹⁰⁴ Questions about why he says this, and whether it coheres with other things that he says, must be distinguished from the fact that there is some straightforward realist meaning intended in what he says.

A problem can arise, of course, if it is presumed that by definition a 'thing in itself' simply *means* something that is altogether transcendent or unknowable, and/or if it uncharitably assumed that our access to things in themselves would have to be basically a matter of *inference*. But this uncharitable assumption does

¹⁰¹ See above, Ch. 3.

¹⁰² Cf. G. E. Moore, 'The Refutation of Idealism', *Mind*, 12 (1903), 433–53.

¹⁰³ Kant, A 19/B 33.

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g., Kant, A 387, B 428, A 494/B 522–3.

not have to be made, for one could rather see Kant as giving voice, from the beginning, to the common thought that we *take for granted* that there is reality, simply speaking, and that we are dependent on rather than creative of it.

Note that Kant never does try to prove this most basic thought,¹⁰⁵ and this can be not because he failed to work out a good inference that he was trying to develop but, rather, because he thought any such argument inappropriate. We even have evidence that, from early on, Kant's explicit response to a Berkeleyan idealism that allows only thinkers and thoughts is that there is no 'logical refutation' of this position; it is just not a view for us to take seriously, given how we are.¹⁰⁶ There is also evidence that Kant does not build experience-transcendence or unknowability into the very meaning of the term 'thing in itself' or ultimate reality. When he attacks transcendental realists in his Critical philosophy, he does not deny them the right to start with the bare concept of a thing in itself that, from all we initially understand, could be knowable in various ways; what he disputes is their particular ways of claiming to know it. Moreover, despite what many have supposed, Kant has no difficulty in giving a general meaning to the notion of a thing in itself as a cause or existent without making any empirical determination of it. His whole theory of pure concepts, and the problem that he sets for the transcendental deduction, begins with the point that they have a pure level of meaning that is *prior* to the spatiotemporal schematization that he eventually argues we need for making *determinate* theoretical claims.

In other words, we do best at the start if we consider that the concept of a thing in itself can be simply the concept of something that exists 'without qualification'. It is not as if we have to start with appearances, inner or not, and then try to build a bridge to what is not an appearance. Instead, we can—and do—start with the common-sense affirmation that something is without qualification, and that we are in some way receptive to it, and *afterwards* philosophical reasons can be considered for saying that specific features we use in empirical determinations might have to be characterized in some qualified way as 'mere appearance'. It is in going this route that Kant eventually—and only *after* completing the main steps of his transcendental deductions—decides to characterize the spatiotemporal as

¹⁰⁵ When Kant says that it would be absurd to say 'there can be appearance without anything that appears' (B xxvi), this can be taken as an unpacking of the meaning of the term 'appearance'—and not an *inference* to a separate reality in itself. This is consistent, moreover, with Kant's also believing (on other grounds) that there is something ontologically separate from spatial appearances. These points should not be confused with the 'satisfactory proof' Kant promises (at B xl n. a) of things 'outside us' (in place of a reliance on 'faith'), for this proof concerns an argument for empirical externality, i.e. objects that are 'external' in a specifically spatial sense and are conditions of our having determinate self-knowledge. Such an argument is given in the Refutation of Idealism (the text that Kant directly refers to here), and it is not a proof from a pre-epistemic 'Cartesian' basis, nor does its conclusion concern the issue of things in themselves.

¹⁰⁶ See Kant's early dismissal of Berkeley in *Metaphysik Herder* (Ak. 28: 43): 'logically he cannot be refuted, but rather by the assent of other human beings and one's own conviction', (*Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6).

such as ‘mere appearance’, transcendently speaking, whatever intersubjective reality it may have in our experience.

The relevant issue for now is not the detailed attempted justification of this claim but the problem of finding some kind of relevant positive meaning in the in-itself/mere-appearance contrast.¹⁰⁷ Here is an initial clue. Recall that when Kant uses the remarkably similar locution ‘end in itself’, he in no way means that other ends are not at all real. The ‘in itself’ of such an end indicates simply that its being an end does *not depend in a fundamental way* on other ends, ends that are conditioned. Similarly, in the context of Kant’s theoretical philosophy, it can be worthwhile to consider the hypothesis that the ‘in itself’ in a ‘thing in itself’ phrase signifies that something’s being a thing like this does not depend in a fundamental way on other things. It is true that Kant does not call the conditioned ends of practical philosophy ‘mere appearance’. From Kant’s perspective, however, there is in fact a significant ‘mere-appearance’ aspect to typical conditioned goods. What I mean is not simply his ethical view that there is something that is secondary about such goods, and in that sense they can be contrasted with what is ultimate. I also mean that all the ordinary effects of the unconditioned free choice of the will are, on Kant’s own account, spatiotemporal events in the empirical domain—events that he does call ‘mere appearances’.

Some have wondered how a supposedly free and even atemporal type of causation might have any phenomenal effect at all. But this seems to me to be a minor (and in my view not insoluble) problem compared to the problem that would arise if a free causing ‘in itself’ were the ground of an empirical event understood to be a mere appearance in the sense that it has no reality at all. That would be a very strange causal relation, truly beyond all bounds of sense. Even in his most metaphysical mood, Kant surely wants to affirm real effects and real value in what happens empirically—for example, that people are truly helped by us and not merely that there is an impression of being helped—even if he also believes that this requires some kind of non-empirical source. And this implies that spatiotemporal appearances as such need to be considered to have some kind of being, even if they are not to be called ‘things in themselves’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Note that in Platonism before Kant, as in German Idealism after Kant, the term ‘ideal’ is used primarily to denote a higher form of reality rather than the absence of reality. Kant often contrasts ‘ideal’ and ‘merely subjective’ (e.g., B 44). See below, Ch. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Somewhat similar metaphysical and ‘realistic’ perspectives on Kant’s idealism can be found in other recent interpretations that have explored an understanding of the thing-in-itself/mere-appearance contrast that is not psychological or epistemological but is defined in reference to a thing’s intrinsic properties or essence. See especially Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and cf. my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*, 7 and 267–70. A problem for such interpretations is that relational and contingent claims (for example, about freedom and affection) are paradigms of what Kant believes can be true about things in themselves in a metaphysical sense. (See my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, ch. 5.) The Kantian terminology of objects ‘in and for themselves’ may go back to G. F. Meier. See Ricardo Pozzo, ‘Prejudices and Horizons: G. F. Meier’s *Vernunftlehre* and its Relation to Kant’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 43 (2005), 197.

It is remarkable how often Kant repeatedly contrasts the thought of things in themselves as unconditioned items with the thought of mere appearances as conditioned items.¹⁰⁹ Recall also that the metaphysical mistake about spatiotemporality that Kant is most concerned with is precisely the notion that it amounts to a wholly independent entity, or to the features of one. Supposedly, when thought in this manner, spatiotemporality would characterize things with unconditioned but contradictory, and therefore impossible, dimensions (of absolute infinitude and finitude). Whether or not his detailed arguments on this point are convincing, the manifest structure of Kant's Antinomies is to argue that, precisely because spatiotemporal determinations *cannot be unconditioned* in their own categorial way, they should be called 'mere appearances' in contrast to things in themselves. Instead of taking this as a worthless argument to a wholly illusory conclusion, we can take it as an understandable, even if unusual, way of speaking that helps reveal the Kantian cash value of the philosophical term 'mere appearance.'

This hypothesis nicely fits the fact that Kant's opposition to each of the other major metaphysical theories that he considers can be expressed as a rejection of their implication that spatiotemporality has a kind of unconditioned status.¹¹⁰ Whether spatiotemporal characteristics are considered to be total illusions, or wholly independent things, or Leibnizian resultants of monadic determinations, or features of a Newtonian divine sensorium or Spinozistic substance, or of Humean independent impressions or Berkeleyan spirits—in all such theories the spatiotemporal contents as such are either themselves unconditioned or wholly within what is metaphysically unconditioned, and so could exist without anything outside of what they inhere in (leaving aside their general dependence on God, in typical theistic theories). Thus, Kant's doctrine of spatiotemporality as mere appearance appears to be distinctive precisely in

¹⁰⁹ See Kant, B xx, and cf. below, Ch. 6. This may seem to be an unusual procedure, but it is not as idiosyncratic as it appears now. A fundamental point in Hegel's discussion of the logic of 'appearance' (which picks up on many features of ordinary language) is that the basic philosophical notion of an appearance is the notion of something that is real but grounded in something more basic. Common sense and Kant alike often use expressions that indicate that something is an appearance of a thing when it is understood to be conditioned by the thing. Obviously, a detailed account needs to be given of other issues here, such as the status of the forms of space and time, and of our geometrical knowledge of them and the relation of this knowledge to their ideality. But I pass over this complication because Reid's doctrine is relatively close to Kant's here (insofar as he allows non-empirical knowledge of these forms), and the most pressing objections to Kant's idealism focus on the ideality of concrete contents.

¹¹⁰ Jacobi had a huge influence on the German Idealists precisely because he suggested that this implication showed that Kant's idealism is fundamentally like Spinoza's system. What Jacobi was overlooking was Kant's own common-sense commitment to a plurality of beings, rather than an all-embracing unconditioned being. My point is not that Kant has arguments to defeat Spinoza; it is rather that Kant takes for granted a position that rules out Spinozism—and he does so not by resorting, like Jacobi, to a special 'faith' that appeals to non-rationalist religion but by reminding us of what we supposedly all immediately believe, whether we are religious or not. See below, n. 111.

allowing concrete spatiotemporality to exist, but only in a strongly dependent way, as the conditioned effect of something real *and separate* from it.¹¹¹

One question that naturally arises here is, how should we relate the plurality of appearances we know to the plurality of beings with unconditioned power in themselves? My proposal is that Kant allows us to go along, as far as we can, with *common sense* in attributing these as we in fact already do, while not presuming arbitrarily that *logically* there could not be more—or fewer—such things in themselves than we suppose. This is again an apologetic approach. It is not a matter of *inferring certain* identity relations by means of some kind of yet-to-be-discovered perfect metaphysical or epistemological theory.

Obviously, much more can and should be said to shore up the historical credentials of this interpretation and to spell out its systematic ramifications. But, assuming that it at least provides a recognizable, even if surprising, metaphysical sketch of what could be the relevant way to understand Kant's obscure idealist language—how does all this compare to Reid? There are no doubt many differences, but the remarkable thing is that Kant's resemblance to Reid is also strong at the metaphysical level. Reid has the same ultimate metaphysical picture, according to which the workings of our mind and the promptings of the given generate experience together, while what makes this happen is in principle not within the sphere of our possible explanation. What we all know is something conditioned, and for Reid this is to be regarded as dependent on something unconditioned.¹¹² This point is not a mere concession of ignorance, a bare allowance that we cannot have any purely theoretical means for determining ultimate and unconditioned forces that *explain why* our experience has the general shape or particular feel or bare existence that it has.¹¹³ This much could all be true simply because, from a quasi-Humean view, there is nothing to be known here since there is only a brute sequence of events. But Reid and Kant do not go this way. They go along with what, for better or worse, is a view they take to be consistent with both our original common sense and its reinforcement in the implications of their own investigations into the limits of science and scientific philosophy. They mean to remind us that common reason can, and will and should, go on asserting that there is something unconditioned here.

¹¹¹ To say that the contrast of the unconditioned to the conditioned parallels the contrast between a thing in itself and mere appearance is not to say that the relevant notion of the unconditioned has to be that of the 'absolutely unconditioned'—namely, God. Kant thinks of God as unconditioned in existence but not exhaustive of reality. He also holds that our freedom can be unconditioned and not a mere appearance (because nothing outside us is responsible for it as such), and yet it is not absolutely unconditioned; it presupposes that our existence and various basic features that are the preconditions of freedom are given.

¹¹² Reid's work was edited by a notorious fan of 'the unconditioned', Wm. Hamilton.

¹¹³ On the idea that we ultimately are not able to explain the workings of the mind and causality, see Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 44, 260, 213, 254, 258; and cf. Kant, B 428.

It is also true, of course, that Reid does not choose abstract talk about things in themselves and the unconditioned. Instead, he speaks with easy familiarity, specifically in terms of the 'author' of our being,¹¹⁴ and he is willing even in his strictly theoretical language to make claims specifically about absolutely free human action and mental substance. Kant follows Hume in not taking this path—and after 1785 he holds to it all the more strictly because of the fanaticism that he fears could come from very influential non-rationalist popularizers of Reid such as Jacobi.¹¹⁵ Kant also follows Hume, against Reid, in not accepting universal principles such as causality, let alone substantive claims about art,¹¹⁶ to be on the same level as the immediate givens of common sense. Obviously, Reid lacks Kant's complex attempts to offer transcendental arguments for justifying various necessary features of experience within a tightly organized system. Even if we have difficulties with that system, Kant deserves credit for seeing that there are issues that need to be addressed by something more structured than Reid's procedures.

One acute secular observer, who did not draw as close a tie between Kant and Reid as has been done here, was very correct, I believe, in reminding us that 'God, freedom and duty, the spirituality of human nature, these are for Reid, as for Kant, the grave matters really at stake in the epistemological controversy'.¹¹⁷ He was also correct in saying that, for Reid, 'the duty of the philosopher' is 'to aim steadily and persistently at bringing the common human element of his intellectual life into clear consistency with the philosophical element'.¹¹⁸ It is a shame that this observer did not see how much this point also applies to Kant, as does his concluding quotation from Reid, that 'to a philosopher who has been accustomed to think that the treasure of his knowledge is the acquisition of his reason, it is no doubt humiliating to find' that 'his knowledge of what really exists, or did exist, comes by another channel', and 'he is led to it' as it were 'in the dark'.¹¹⁹ These words were noted by Henry Sidgwick, who is an appropriate mediator here, since they appeared in his discussion of common sense exactly 110 years ago, and exactly 110 years after the best-known work of both Reid and Kant appeared. Sidgwick's point is that Reid bore this humiliation, this truly Copernican displacement, without resentment. By having drawn attention in my own way to that 'dark' 'channel', I have been trying to show how similarly Kant

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Reid, *Inquiry*, vi. xx. 170.

¹¹⁵ See Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), chs. 2–4.

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., Reid, *Essays*, vi. vi. 4: 'Homer and Virgil, and Shakespeare and Milton had the same taste.'

¹¹⁷ Henry Sidgwick, 'The Philosophy of Common Sense', *Mind*, 14 (1895), 153.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 151.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 158. Sidgwick does not give the source of this quotation, but it is from the concluding paragraphs of Reid, *Essays*, ii, p. xx, 'Of the Evidence of Sense and of Belief in General'. Sidgwick substitutes 'his reason' for 'that reasoning power of which he boasts'.

reacted,¹²⁰ and how our seeing this now may help in bridging some of the dark channels still present between their traditions and between their revolutionary time and our own.

¹²⁰ See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, ch. 10, 'In Conclusion: Living Wisely in the Darkness'. Cf. Kant, 'Philosophie demütig macht' (philosophy makes us humble), Reflexion 939, perhaps 1776–8 or 1772 (Ak. 15: 41). I owe this reference to Lara Ostaric, and I am also indebted to many other scholars for help on specific points—especially Robert Audi, Neil Delaney, Paul Franks, Gary Gutting, Lynn Joy, Jane Kneller, Alasdair MacIntyre, Kristopher McDaniel, Fred Rush, Eric Watkins, and participants at recent meetings in Tübingen, Oslo, Rome, and Baylor.

6

The Critique of Metaphysics: The Structure and Fate of Kant's Dialectic

The impact of Kant's critique of metaphysics is deeply ambiguous. A vivid assessment by a distinguished and relatively sympathetic British reader in the mid-nineteenth century may still reflect the opinion of most analytic philosophers. According to Sir William Hamilton, 'Kant had annihilated the older metaphysic, but the germ of a more visionary doctrine of the absolute, than any of those refuted, was contained in the bosom of his own philosophy. He had slain the body, but had not exorcised the spectre of the absolute; and this spectre continued to haunt the schools of Germany even to the present day.'¹

Hamilton's words still provide a helpful structure for trying to understand and evaluate the full effect of Kant's treatment of metaphysics. They raise a set of unavoidable questions:

1. What is the 'older metaphysic' under attack by the *Critique*, and how does it express what can appear to be the 'body' of the 'absolute'? (See below, Section I, The Prelude of Kant's Critique.)
2. How does Kant's attack proceed?
3. Does it truly 'annihilate' this 'body'? (See below, Sections II and III, The Process of Kant's Critique and the Result of the Dialectic.)
4. What is the 'germ' in the 'bosom' of Kant's own philosophy that can appear as a 'spectre of the absolute', an absolute 'more visionary' than anything in the 'older metaphysic'? (See below, Section IV, The Poison of Kant's Critique.)
5. How did this 'spectre' develop after the *Critique*, and what is the relation of that development to the *Critique's* own basic position on metaphysics? (See below, Section V, The Kantian Postlude.)

¹ Sir William Hamilton, *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Robert Turnbull (New York: Harper, 1855), 25. Cited by Manfred Kuehn, 'Hamilton's Reading of Kant: A Chapter in the Early Scottish Reception of Kant's Thought', in George MacDonald Ross and Tony McWalker (eds.), *Kant and his Influence* (Bristol: Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, 1990), 305–47, at 335.

I. THE PRELUDE OF KANT'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

The complexity of the aftermath of Kant's critique of metaphysics is due at least in part to the fact that his own project is fundamentally ambiguous. The very first pages of the first edition *Critique of Pure Reason* use the term 'metaphysics' in contrasting ways. On the one hand, as signifying 'the older metaphysic', it stands for a traditional 'battlefield of endless controversies' (A viii) because it concerns questions that 'by its very nature' theoretical reason 'cannot answer' (A vii).² On the other hand, 'metaphysics' also stands for a fruitful new discipline, 'the only one of all the sciences that may promise that little but unified effort [namely, the effort of the Critical philosophy itself] . . . will complete it' (A xx). Similarly, the Preface to the second edition explicitly separates the successful first 'part' of metaphysics covered in the *Critique's* Transcendental Analytic of experience, which has 'the secure course of a science', from the troublesome second 'part' of metaphysics, which, according to the Transcendental Dialectic, fails in its attempt to fly 'beyond the boundaries of possible experience' (B xix). No wonder Kant frequently compared overly ambitious forms of rationalism—what Hamilton called 'the body of the absolute'—to a vain flapping of wings (see, e.g., A 5/B 9).

From the beginning, different schools of interpretation have focused on one or the other of these two aspects of Kant's concern with metaphysics. In the eighteenth century, Moses Mendelssohn expressed lament in characterizing Kant as the 'destroyer' of traditional metaphysics, whereas Karl Reinhold and his Jena successors heralded the *Critique* as the starting point for a new and completely scientific metaphysics.³ In the twentieth century, W. H. Walsh presented a sympathetic study of the *Critique* under the negative title *Kant's Criticism of Metaphysics*, while his illustrious predecessor H. J. Paton organized an apologetic commentary under the positive title *Kant's Metaphysics of Experience*. In general, mainline twentieth-century philosophers tended to praise rather than lament Kant's attack on transcendent metaphysics and to endorse a relatively modest 'descriptive' version of his immanent metaphysics of experience.

These different reactions, more often than not, follow familiar national patterns, though from the very beginning, there were also significant empiricist

² Passages from Kant's first *Critique* are all cited in this chapter as translated by Allen W. Wood and Paul Guyer *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Subsections of the *Critique*, e.g., Paralogisms, are capitalized, as are also terms that have a special meaning for Kant, such as 'Critical' and 'Ideas'.

³ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 2; *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, rev. edn., ed. George di Giovanni (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000); and Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

critiques of Kant offered from within Germany as well as influential speculative appropriations of his thought proposed from outside Germany (for example, Coleridge and the American transcendentalists).⁴ One reason for this variety of reactions has to do with complications concerning central notions such as the determination of ‘conditions of experience’. There is a basic ambiguity already in Kant’s famous statement that metaphysics concerns that which reason claims ‘independently of all experience’ (A xii). The term ‘independent’ can be used in different ways, signifying partial or total independence. When it indicates total independence, the statement signals the idea that what we are to learn about metaphysics is negative—namely, that we must always guard against any wholly ‘non-experiential use’ (A xii) of theoretical reason. But Kant uses the statement positively when speaking of what is a less than total independence—namely, a justificatory independence from any particular path of experience but not from the context of possible experience altogether (B 2). In this case it points to the ‘transcendental’ task of finding what is necessary in general for our experience—that is, for our being able to make empirical knowledge claims.⁵ More specifically, the main task of the Transcendental Analytic is the establishment of the a priori principles needed if sensible beings like us, in space and time, are to be able to make warranted theoretical claims about determinate objects at all.

An obvious problem here is that such claims, which are supposedly immanent and yet ‘partially’ independent of experience, can seem to empiricists just as questionable as the transcendent claims that Kant means to criticize. Kant’s immediate reply, no doubt, would be that the main traditional claims are the theoretical assertions of the ‘Ideas of Reason’—God, freedom, and immortality—and that these all go clearly ‘beyond all bounds of experience’ because they involve concepts ‘to which no corresponding object at all can be given in experience’ (A 3/B 6). A difficulty with this reply by itself is that a reader who recalls the details of the *Critique’s* positive metaphysics of experience could object that Kant himself makes many a priori ‘immanent’ claims about (‘permanent’) substance, (‘universal’ and ‘necessary’) causality, and (‘infinite’) space and time in such a way that it is also *not* the case that these items are themselves literally ‘given’ as ‘objects’. Instead, these concepts stand for general rules, ordering principles, or special frameworks with which certain (‘objective’) combinations of representations are claimed to agree necessarily—in a way that is, at best, evident only after considerable abstract argument. But, similarly, it would seem that, without relying literally on reference to any ‘given object’, many traditional metaphysicians of the kind Kant is criticizing (and this would include positions found

⁴ See *Kant’s Early Critics: The Empiricist Critique of the Theoretical Philosophy*, ed. Brigitte Sassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); cf. John Findlay, *Kant and the Transcendental Object: A Hermeneutic Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

⁵ See my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), ‘Introduction’.

throughout his own pre-Critical works) could claim as much for their favorite so-called transcendent concepts. For Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, and others, rigorous metaphysics implies that there can be our kind of experience only with God, freedom, and other unique features of subjectivity.

At this point Kant might add that his claim is more than simply that our experience will have to 'agree' with these principles. The *Critique's* distinctive point is that our experience is 'constituted' by them because they are essential to the construction of the spatiotemporal determinations that alone 'make' our (objective) experience possible, whereas it is supposedly not clear how this could be the case for the Ideas of Reason of traditional theoretical metaphysics (whatever their value may be for 'regulative', 'reflective', or practical claims⁶). But this response leads, in turn, to at least two further worries. First, it might be countered that there are ways—that Kant has not considered or adequately acknowledged—in which these Ideas, or ones like them, could turn out to be transcendentally necessary after all. It might, for example, be argued that Kant's own arguments point to something like a theoretical vindication of freedom in the sense of an unconditional presence of spontaneity in knowing, for how else are we to understand his own notion of rational argumentation and of a basic kind of 'synthesis' that is needed by all human understanding and 'can never come to us from the senses' (B 129)?⁷ There is little in the *Transcendental Analytic* that clearly shows why such a strategy *must* be forever rejected while never-directly-given but supposedly-always-required notions such as substance and cause can, at the same time, be allowed.

Second, a traditional metaphysician could retreat and argue that, even if Ideas of Reason do not have a clear role in constituting, that is, ordering, our spatiotemporal experience as such, they, or some other special metaphysical notions, might still have some other kind of warrant. Kant does insist that all proper philosophical assertions must be objective, not merely formal, and therefore must be synthetic, must use intuition, and must depend on our forms of space and time and all the restrictions that they involve. Each of these claims, however, is very controversial, especially if one is willing to retreat from the demand for certainty, which Kant cannot in any case easily claim for his own methodology. Contemporary metaphysics continues to thrive with rigorous general arguments concerning matters such as universals, substrata, properties, modality, essence, identity, and realism.⁸ Precisely because most metaphysical terms have a meaning that seems independent of any ordinary spatiotemporal characterization of objects,

⁶ See, e.g., Rudolf Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Thomas Wartenberg, 'Reason and the Practice of Science', in Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228–48.

⁷ This idea is stressed by interpreters such as Gerold Prauss, Henry E. Allison, and Robert B. Pippin. I note some problems with early uses of the idea in *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 5.

⁸ See, e.g., Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998).

one would not at first expect them to have to be justified in terms of some kind of transcendental role in structuring spatiotemporal determinations. By itself, this would not prove they are illegitimate unless we *already* have in hand some general and non-question-begging ‘principle of significance’ that restricts the claims of theoretical philosophy to concepts justified by reflecting on such a role. It has in fact been contended, by leading eighteenth- as well as twentieth-century interpreters (for example, Jacobi, Hamann, and Hegel; Strawson, Bennett, and Rorty), that Kant was relying on such a principle—but this contention has also been roundly disputed, and it is very hard to see how it can be relied on at the outset without imposing a kind of dogmatism (or concept phenomenalism) on Kant that would be just as questionable as whatever the *Critique* meant to criticize.⁹ It is striking, in any case, that ‘successors’ of Kant such as Hegel came to insist that, even after the *Critique*, numerous metaphysical notions, including versions of ‘infinite Ideas’ such as God, world, and mind, can be legitimated by theoretical philosophy for reasons that are not simply a matter of grounding spatiotemporal determinations—and that only a lingering empiricism kept Kant from acknowledging this himself.¹⁰ For these reasons, it should be clear (even if one has no sympathy with figures such as Hegel), that, if Kant’s philosophy is to have any chance of ‘complete’ and ‘scientific’ success in curbing metaphysics in a bad sense, the *Critique* needs at the very least to offer a systematic examination of all the Ideas of Reason allegedly central to metaphysics. Fortunately, this appears to be exactly why the largest part of the *Critique* is devoted to an extensive Transcendental Dialectic, and it is to a brief review of this section that we now turn.

II. THE PROCESS OF KANT’S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS: THE STRUCTURE OF THE DIALECTIC

The Dialectic proposes a general pattern for the errors of transcendent metaphysics. The pattern is not exactly what one might first expect—namely, the error of simply employing categories apart from their specific spatiotemporal schematization, for example, by making claims about substance without considerations of permanence. This is an error, but by itself it is accidental in the double sense of being neither fully systematic nor imposed by any special force. For Kant, dialectical errors are anything but accidental. They involve very special representations,

⁹ For a good treatment of Kant’s appreciation of the meaningfulness of metaphysical concepts, see James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ See Hegel: *The Essential Writings*, ed. Frederick Weiss (New York: Harper Perennial, 1974), 26 (*Encyclopedia Logic*, Introduction, § 6). For a Kantian critique of Hegel, cf. my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 6; and Paul Guyer, ‘Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism’, in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37–56.

designated as Ideas of Reason, which are systematically organized and give rise to inferences with a unique force, as if they were a ‘*natural* and unavoidable *illusion*’ (A 298/B 355).¹¹

The content of the Ideas is determined by ordered variations of the notion of something unconditioned, an idea that comes from making into a real principle what is only a general ‘logical maxim’ of reason—namely, to seek the condition of any particular conditioned judgment so that ‘a unity [of reason] is brought to completion’. This step involves the assumption that, ‘when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions . . . which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection)’ (A 308/B 364). The analytic connection of a given concept and its logical ground is, of course, not the same as the synthetic connection of a given thing and its real ground. Nonetheless, Kant claims there is a force making this assumption ‘unavoidable’ for reason—namely, the naturalness of taking ‘the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding . . . for an objective necessity, the [NB] determination of things in themselves’ (A 297/B 353).

The ‘connection of concepts’ Kant has in mind here comes from what he takes to be the peculiar office of reason to connect representations in chains of syllogisms: ‘we can expect that the form of the syllogisms [*Vernunftschluss*] . . . will contain the origin of special concepts a priori that we may call pure concepts of reason, or *transcendental ideas*, and they will determine the use of the understanding according to principles in the whole of an entire experience’ (A 321/B 378). The ‘determination of things in themselves’ that he has in mind here amounts to the thought of an unconditioned item or set of items corresponding to each of the syllogistic ‘forms’: namely, an unconditioned, i.e. unpredicable, *subject* of *categorical* syllogisms, an unconditioned (i.e., first) item for ‘the *hypothetical* synthesis of the members of a *series*’, and an unconditioned (i.e., exhaustive) source for ‘the *disjunctive* synthesis of the parts in a *system*’ (A 323/B 379).

To this ambitious scheme Kant immediately adds a further systematic proposal. He holds that the ‘unconditioned subject’ corresponds to the absolute ‘*unity* of the *thinking subject*’, the unconditioned first item of the series of hypothetical syllogisms corresponds to the ‘absolute *unity* [i.e., either an absolutely first item or a total series] of the *series* of *conditions of appearance*’, and the unconditioned ground of the disjunctive syntheses is ‘the absolute *unity* of the *condition of all objects of thought* in general’ (A 334/B 391). More specifically, the thought of an unconditioned subject is taken to lead to the Idea of an immortal self, that of the unconditioned appearance is taken to lead to the contradictory notion of a completely given whole of spatiotemporal appearances (and thereby to allow some undefeated conceptual space for the Idea of our transcendental freedom), and the

¹¹ For more details, see Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, rev. edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

notion of an unconditioned source for all thought is taken to lead to the Idea of 'a being of all beings', God (A 336/B 393; cf. B 395 n.).¹²

These proposed connections are only the first layers of Kant's ingenious architectonic. The Ideas are each determined further by the table of categories, so that the subject is considered as unconditioned qua substance, quality, quantity, and modality (hence there are four paralogisms of rational psychology), and the whole of appearances as unconditioned qua quantity, quality, causality, and modality (hence there are four antinomies of rational cosmology).

In the Paralogisms, Kant challenges rationalist arguments from the mere representation of the I to a priori claims that the self is substantial, simple, identical over time, and independent of other beings. Kant's ultimate concern is with showing that the unique and ever available character of the representation of the I, which is central to his own philosophy as an indication of the transcendental power of apperception, should not mislead us into claims that it demonstrates a special 'spiritual' object—that is, something that necessarily can exist independent of whatever underlies other things. But, although Kant properly stresses that our theoretical representation of the I does not by itself provide a determinate intuition of the soul as a special phenomenal or noumenal object, it is not clear that his exposure of certain fallacies directly undermines *all* traditional rationalist claims about the self.¹³

In the attack on rational cosmology in the Antinomies, Kant 'skeptically' contrasts opposing sets of a priori claims about the division, composition, origination, and relation of dependence of existence 'of the alterable in appearance' (A 415/B 443). The theses are: the set of appearances is finite in age and spatial extent, composed of simples, containing uncaused causality and a necessary being. The antitheses are: it is given as infinite in age and extent, divisible without end, and without uncaused causality or a necessary being underlying it. Kant challenges these assertions by pointing out ways that the indirect arguments for them fail, since the denial of the opposite claim does not entail the assertion of the original claim. Thus, one can escape the antinomies by avoiding the general assumption that either, because no endless series is given, there must be an absolute end in composition, division, generation, and so forth, or, because no end can be given as unconditioned, there must be a series given absolutely without end. (Here Kant is relying on a distinction between coming to an end in fact, and knowing that there must be a final end, as well as between being able to continue a series *in infinitum* and having an actual infinity in one's total grasp.)

¹² For a comparison of Kant's account with the 'genealogies' presented by later philosophers, see Alain Renaut, 'Transzendente Dialektik. Einleitung und Buch I', in Georg Mohr and Marcus Willaschek (eds.), *Immanuel Kant/Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 353–70.

¹³ See my *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); see also above, Ch. 2.

In the last two Antinomies Kant discusses the causal and modal status of an appearance in general in the same kind of 'open-ended' way that he treats the phenomenal characterization of the self: it is an a priori truth that we can go on without end in seeking empirical acts of causality impinging on such an appearance, and empirical beings upon which it is dependent, and yet this does not yield a *given unconditioned* series but always leaves open a possible involvement with some (non-given) non-empirical causality and non-dependent being.¹⁴ Thus, while Kant can distinguish this result from dogmatic claims that there must be, or that there cannot be, a first causality and a non-dependent being, he still leaves open (for grounding elsewhere) both the assertion that there must be a priori laws governing phenomena and the idea that there is some ground for assuming something beyond phenomena. His discussions fit the metaphysical tradition insofar as they still entail, as Leibniz would want, that all items within the spatiotemporal field are thoroughly governed by a principle of sufficient reason, and also, as Newton would want, that they are located in irreducible (although not absolutely real) forms of space and time.

Just as one should not be wholly taken in by the anti-rationalist tone of the Dialectic, one also should not assume that its architectonic has a sacrosanct structure. Like much of the Analytic, it may have been the product of a series of hasty rearrangements,¹⁵ and its final form contains some surprising oddities. The discussion of the Idea of God largely ignores the table of categories, while the treatments of the self and of the world seem to pick arbitrarily from that table, each using only four of the six main headings (quantity, quality, substance, cause, community, and modality). Thus, the issue of the agency of the self, which was considered a proper categorial topic in notes prior to the *Critique*, mysteriously disappears from the discussion of rational psychology, whereas the very basic question of the substantiality of phenomena in general is not posed directly (A 414/B 441). It is unclear why the notion of an unconditioned starting point for categorial syllogisms should lead to an ultimate subject considered only in terms of the psychological capacity for thinking, just as it is unclear why the nature of the thinking subject should not be considered (as it was by many rationalists) as a part of the general theory of the world. The discussion of rational cosmology supposedly is to consider the world only as appearance (which is not the same as assuming that it is only appearance), while the discussion of the subject can, and does, shift between regarding it as a phenomenon or

¹⁴ Kant treats the second antinomy, unlike the last two, as involving a 'heterogeneous' as opposed to a 'homogeneous' series, but it is not clear that the traditional notion of an underlying simple being is best thought of as homogeneous with a series of divisible parts. See A 414/B 441.

¹⁵ See Paul Guyer, 'The Unity of Reason: Pure Reason as Practical Reason in Kant's Early Concept of the Transcendental Dialectic', *Monist*, 72 (1989), 139–67.

as something beyond appearances. This distinction is not cleanly maintained, however, since sometimes (for example, in the consideration of the simplicity of the components of the world) arguments about cosmology introduce non-phenomenal considerations (albeit usually in a way to be criticized—but the same is true in the Paralogisms), and sometimes (for example, in the Second and Third Antinomies, at A 463/B 491) they consider psychological examples after all.

These oddities do not present a very severe problem as long as it is not assumed that the three Ideas need to be approached in fully parallel ways. And in fact this is not a fair assumption, since Kant makes clear that he has very different views about the Ideas. Whereas he argues that rationalist claims about the self are fallaciously inflated, he does not do much to rule out the possibility of a consistent, albeit very formal and negative, pure theory of the ultimate nature of the self, for example, as necessarily immaterial and rational. Cosmological claims, in contrast, supposedly lead to contradictory theses that are resolvable only by transcendental idealism. According to the result of the Antinomies, it is wrong to say that the sensible world is determinately either of necessarily finite or given infinite magnitude, although supposedly arguments for each of these would succeed if transcendental realism were true.¹⁶ Here the main problem is not a lack of knowledge or detail. Rather, for certain questions—for example, how old is the spatiotemporal world in itself?—there is supposedly no sensible answer at all, since there is no quantity for a whole of this sort ‘in itself’. But this pattern of argument applies at best to only the first antinomy; for most cosmological issues, a fairly extensive rational doctrine (of phenomenal laws and noumenal possibilities) is allowed and is outlined in part in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.¹⁷ Finally, the theological Idea is like the psychological Idea in not leading to contradictions, but also somewhat like the cosmological Ideas in providing a relatively full doctrine of attributes, though for Kant their instantiation is left without support until one shifts from theoretical to practical considerations. We thus gain from rational theology the ‘transcendental ideal’ of a perfect and necessary being, even if speculative arguments all fail to establish its existence.¹⁸ Even on a charitable reading that accepts the validity of all of its particular arguments, the Dialectic excludes only a very specific set of claims and not the truth of all traditional metaphysical doctrines.

¹⁶ For more detail on the arguments of the Antinomies, see my ‘The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, 272 n. 5, 275 n. 15, and my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques*, ch. 3; Eric Watkins, ‘The Antinomy of Pure Reason, Sections 3–8’, in Mohr and Willaschek (eds.), *Immanuel Kant/Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 447–64; and Henry E. Allison, ‘The Antinomy of Pure Reason, Section 9’, in *ibid.* 465–90.

¹⁷ See Eric Watkins (ed.), *Kant and the Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ See Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Rational Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), and *Kant* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

III. THE RESULT OF THE DIALECTIC: HOW MUCH DID IT 'ANNIHILATE'?

In addition to the various limitations just noted in Kant's treatment of *specific* theoretical claims in the Dialectic—limitations implying that for Kant many of the notions of traditional rational psychology, cosmology, and theology can still be very useful for ordering our *thinking* about issues in these fields—there are some *general* limitations in his own position on the limitations of reason. What is clearly distinctive about Kant's criticism is that it is an argument about principled limitations of *theoretical* reason as constitutive.¹⁹ Kant distinguishes two fundamental uses of reason, practical and theoretical (or 'speculative'), and it can never be emphasized enough how often he stresses that our reason *can* establish practically all the most important claims that he says it cannot *establish* theoretically. According to all three *Critiques*, pure practical reason turns out to be right in its basic conclusions that we should believe there is a God, absolute freedom of choice, an immortal soul, and a 'highest good' involving a providential end for those who act properly (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason* [Ak. 5: 122–34] and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §87). These claims are not merely to be treated as true, with a literal personalist and theist meaning; Kant also goes out of his way to try to show that they are grounded in adequate considerations of *reason*.

Kant calls his postulates 'practical' simply because they have the peculiarity of resting on (a) at least one essential premiss that asserts an irreducible and pure normative truth (that is, that there are categorical obligations in Kant's sense), something resting ultimately on a pure practical 'fact of reason' for which he thinks no purely theoretical or even practical-prudential basis is possible.²⁰ Kant's position also depends on (b) the theoretical truth of transcendental idealism, which he believes provides the only way to protect our metaphysical commitment to (a) from what would otherwise be a sufficient ground to defeat it—namely, the claim that the laws of nature entail that we are absolutely determined and hence, not free moral agents. (This is apparently the only such ground that Kant believes we have an evident theoretical need to defeat, although there are other problems, such as fear of a fatalistic theology, which he treats as worth at least neutralizing.) Recall that a transcendental realist reading of the results of the Transcendental Analytic (in particular, the Second Analogy) entails that all the states of our life fall under *and only* under deterministic spatiotemporal laws of nature. For this reason the Third Antinomy of the Transcendental Dialectic is constructed to show that the transcendental ideality of space and time established earlier in the *Critique* leaves room for us to continue nonetheless to regard our actions as, for all we know, the result of an absolutely spontaneous

¹⁹ See above, n. 6, for literature on Kant's regulative/constitutive distinction.

²⁰ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, ch. 10.

non-spatiotemporal ground, a moral will freely following a moral law. Hence, even if our actions, in their spatiotemporal side, are all in accord with natural laws and conditions, the main implication of the *Critique's* theoretical philosophy is that they might *also* fall under non-natural laws and conditions.

All this shows that Kant's Dialectic does indeed have a complicated structure, with mixed positive/negative and practical/theoretical aims. Hamilton's suspicions are thus easily understandable, for, with such a complex 'body' of metaphysics undergoing dissection in such a complex way, it is not surprising that some 'germ' or 'spectre' of the 'older metaphysic' might seem able to escape. But there are very different possible diagnoses of the most relevant danger here. For some, a 'visionary' residue may seem to be present if any non-empiricist claims are allowed at all. But it has already been noted that the very first steps of the transcendental philosophy must leave room for making some pure theoretical claims that go beyond experience in some sense, and especially beyond any mere contingent summation of impressions. To disallow this much would be to take back all of the Analytic and to undercut any distinctive positive value in the *Critique's* project.

A more appropriate worry concerning the 'visionary' would focus on the core *spiritualist* claims of the older metaphysic. That worry would be warranted if the *Critique* in any way encouraged theoretically establishing something like a Cartesian or Crusian dualism, a Malebranchian occasionalism, a Leibnizian pre-established harmony of monads, or a Berkeleyan spiritualism. It should be clear by now, however, that the *Critique* is directed entirely against all arguments for determinate claims such as these, even if it might not unconditionally demonstrate that they all must be false.²¹

There remain, nonetheless, at least two other very relevant notions that are directly connected with the Dialectic and that can raise (and have raised) understandable worries about a relapse to a 'visionary' metaphysics—namely, the notions of *idealism* and the *unconditioned*. The strategy of the Dialectic is precisely to stress that reason by its very nature makes a demand for the unconditioned, and that Critical philosophy responds best to that demand by validating a distinctive form of idealism (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, book II, and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 57, observation 2). This is enough to suggest that, at least at a first glance, some concern about a 'spectre of the absolute' can seem proper after all.

The worries about the unconditioned and about idealism need to be dealt with separately, although they also turn out to have important connections with one another. In presenting his position specifically as 'transcendental idealism', Kant repeatedly explains that his is a merely 'formal' variety of idealism, meaning

²¹ For more details, see my 'The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology', 255–72.

that there is an irreducible reality of 'stuff' that remains completely independent of 'us', even though the specific a priori forms of our experience, and all that depends on them, do not (see *Prolegomena* [Ak. 4: 337] and B 519 n.). The *Critique* never denies that there are items other than our mind, and it even notes that what we at first characterize as a mind can have an underlying reality that is not psychological at all (B 427–8), since the transcendental ideality of space and time entails that in itself our self definitely cannot be mental in its ordinary temporal sense. It is precisely for that reason that the indirect argument for transcendental idealism relies on considerations concerning only the relational characterizations of the sensible world through determinations of space and time.

It should be obvious that the ideality of such relational properties does not immediately endanger the reality of the intrinsic non-relational features of things. But worries that the *Critique* still involves a radical and 'spectral' type of idealism can arise from understandable sources. First, the most relevant 'cousins' to Kant's philosophy here, the views of Leibniz and Berkeley, combine a claim of the non-ultimacy of spatiotemporal determinations with a position that does not leave any kind of non-mental things as ultimate realities. This position, however, is commonly understood as relying on a peculiar insistence on the reducibility of spatiotemporal determinations to intrinsic mental properties (perception and appetite in monads for Leibniz, perceptions within individual spirits for Berkeley) that Kant consistently and emphatically *denies*.²² This is an important reminder of how, given the specific character of Kant's unusual position, the unattractive idealist consequences of other philosophies that are critical of the reality of the spatiotemporal as such should never be projected directly onto him.

Nonetheless, there is an understandable second worry that arises from a comparison with Kant's other philosophical cousins, the naturalist heirs of Locke and the scientific revolution. Modern scientific realists welcomed the non-reality of secondary qualities precisely because they held that spatiotemporal qualities could adequately secure and characterize the independent reality of matter alone (that is, 'matter' not merely in a general philosophical sense but in the specific physical sense that modern science uses). Hence, any philosophical doubts about these qualities can still seem to undermine any notion of mind-independent reality as such. There are various ways for Kantians to respond to this worry. One strategy would be to note that science itself can and has entertained the possibility of *other non-mental* primary qualities that could underlie the relational determinations of the space or time that we know—and there is no reason that Kant's ontology cannot be understood as leaving room for an analogue of this position.²³

²² See above, Ch. 3.

²³ This line of thought is suggested by ideas from Wilfrid Sellars, and, more recently, Daniel Warren, *Reality and Impenetrability in Kant's Philosophy of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Alternatively, it has been proposed by some interpreters that Kant's distinction between the in itself and the ideal is nothing more than the distinction between the relational and the intrinsic. On this 'humble' reading, the Critical ideality of features such as space and time need not have anything to do with specifically mentalistic forms of idealism, and so there is nothing to be feared by a sophisticated scientific realist. For this view, transcendental idealism simply expresses a kind of 'humility' about our not being able to penetrate, in any of our actual explanations, which are all relational, to the ultimate and underlying intrinsic features of things.²⁴ A hint of something close to, but not quite the same as, this kind of view can be found in a passage of the *Critique* that stresses that things cannot be understood as composed of relational properties *alone* (A 49/B 66). This point does not go far enough, however, and, aside from a lack of adequate support elsewhere in the *Critique*, the 'humble' interpretation has, I believe, the weakness of encouraging an overly 'optimistic' reading of Kant's views of body and the material domain as such. The Critical Kant (in contrast to some of his pre-Critical views) does not suggest that there could be any kind of intrinsic and *literally* bodily, and in *that* sense material, character for things in themselves—and for an obvious reason, since for him spatiality is not only relational and ideal but also essential to the very definitions of our notions of body and matter.²⁵ Nonetheless, the *Critique* does leave room for some other (for us unimaginable) kind of non-mental stuff to compose things in themselves, and so some kind of non-'haunted' Kantian realism could remain even without the 'humble' interpretation.

This interpretation is also suspect because it is not true, in any case, that Kant's position requires the features of things in themselves as such to be only intrinsic rather than also relational. It is precisely at the level of things in themselves, after all, that Kant is most concerned with allowing relations of grounding and free causing: between us and our temporal effects or empirical character, between things in themselves and our 'affected' perceptions, and also between God and other things, especially as a condition for the realization of the highest good. The obvious way for Kant to understand the crucial characteristic of absolute freedom of choice is precisely as relational, and it is clear that for him this must be a characteristic concerning things in themselves, rather than mere phenomena, since according to the Second Analogy phenomena as such must remain described simply by laws of nature.

The preceding considerations introduce one of the most common of all objections to Kant's metaphysics: The *Critique's* transcendental idealism seems able to escape skeptical or mentalistic absurdities only at the cost of introducing causal relations between things in themselves and phenomena, relations that directly conflict with the *Critique's* own transcendental limitations on what we can

²⁴ See Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁵ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, ch. 5.

mean and know. This objection, however, commonly presupposes that Kant can allow only concepts of causality that are spelled out entirely in spatiotemporal terms. This presupposition involves a conflation of the pure and (spatiotemporal) schematized senses of the categories, and can be defeated by Kant's explicit and repeated reminder that we have a pure notion of cause, one that derives from general logical features of the understanding and that need not be *defined* in terms of any specific forms of sensibility, let alone space and time in particular (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:50–7).

A fallback form of the objection is to contend that, even if non-spatiotemporal causality could make some sense, it would still be wrong for Kant to allow the *assertion* of such relations, since this would go beyond the restriction of our theoretical *knowledge* to spatiotemporal determinations. This is a shrewder objection, but there is a response to it as well, once it is understood that Kant does not present or need to understand the assertion of the mere existence of pure causal relations between things in themselves and phenomena (which he explicitly suggests our considering at A 534/B 562 ff., and in many later discussions of our free action as moral agents) as grounded in a theoretical *inference within* his system. It is perfectly open to him to *begin*, as he in fact does, with various common pre-philosophical notions, such as that we all allow that we have common forms of sensibility (see, e.g., A 42/B 59, 'to be sure, it pertains to every human being'), that we all are finite receptive subjects, 'receptive' to something existent that we are not responsible for; and that we all may continue to assume this (as we all do²⁶), without any ground to believe otherwise—and then to say, *later*, because of transcendental idealism, that this independent being must have some non-sensible features.

Starting from such common assumptions still leaves a lot for philosophy to do. There remains the task of working out the Analytic of the specific structures within our experience, and there is also the general philosophical question of what to say about whatever exists in itself. This question can be properly pursued by recalling the general pure ('non-schematized') features of the categories and by considering what properties we definitely should *not* attribute to the in itself as such, given what the *Critique* teaches about our pure forms of experience and the possible ways of explaining them. Here the main implication of Kant's idealism is simply that the structures of spatiotemporality *cannot* be used to determine the in itself. Given the clarifications made earlier, there is nothing in this result that suggests, let alone entails, that we should give up thinking that there is some reality, aside from our own mind, responsible for our encounter with experience. Moreover, if it were supposed that we may assert only items that

²⁶ See, e.g., *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226 (Ak. 29: 928): 'This error [that bodies do not exist] is likewise refutable neither from experience nor *a priori*'. For another perspective, cf. Paul Guyer, 'Kant on Common Sense and Scepticism', *Kantian Review*, 7 (2003), 1–37.

are licensed by scientific spatiotemporal determinations, then, in Kant's view, we would absurdly also have to forfeit our constant thought of ourselves as spontaneous agents.

Note that the crucial pre-philosophical thought of our free causality fits in with, but is not prior to, the thought of our being receptive.²⁷ The thought of our freedom takes the natural form, after all, of asking about how we should choose among some options that we understand precisely as given rather than created by us. Note also that this acceptance of a thing in itself grounding our experience, which Kant repeatedly asserts,²⁸ is in no tension at all with the specific negative conclusions of the Dialectic. We have not 'flown' to any *determination* of the in itself in terms of a specific quantity or quality (simple, or endlessly complex), and we have not made any theoretical claims about it as rooted in an uncaused causing rather than only caused causings, or in a necessary being rather than something contingent. We also do not claim to know theoretically if it is some kind of special mind-like (i.e. mental in some way, but not non-temporal in itself) finite being after all, or how, if at all, it is related to some kind of infinite being. The upshot of the *Critique* is, therefore, a kind of realism combined with theoretical agnosticism on most traditional positive claims in psychology, cosmology, and theology. Nonetheless, this is a metaphysical position and not an entirely contentless 'standpoint', not a mere allowance that there is some X that could be anything. It involves a commitment to some absolute truths: the in itself is definitely not spatial, temporal, material, or mental in any ordinary (temporal, natural) sense, and yet it must be such as to allow for a form of experience that has very specific a priori structures for a receptive subject. Moreover, whatever is in itself must be compatible with the general categories of thought, which, Kant insists, allows for considerable practical determination by us.

All this may show that, even when Kant's particular version of idealism is given a somewhat non-humble metaphysical interpretation, it still need not engender the specific worries that apply to other forms of idealism. But it does not follow that the actual legacy of the *Critique*, that is, the way it was taken up by its best-known successors, was not determined by these worries. In general it is possible for the most common appropriations of a highly original and complex philosophy to be based on significant misunderstandings, and this seems to be the case with Kant's philosophy. It is also quite possible that reactions to Kant's

²⁷ Manfred Frank notes that the Jena romantics used this Kantian idea against Fichte. See his *Selbstgefühl: Eine historisch-theoretische Erkundung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), 37, and cf. his *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

²⁸ See Kant's late work (1804), *What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*, trans. Ted Humphrey (New York: Abaris Books, 1983), Ak. 20: 290; and *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 213 (Ak. 29: 857), 'They show us merely the appearances of things. But these are not the things themselves. They indeed underlie the appearances', and 217 (Ak. 29: 861), 'But there still must be a transcendental cause from which this appearance arises. This cause is unknown to us since it does not belong to the sensible world.'

metaphysics that did not involve an entirely correct understanding of him led to many important philosophical insights that may not have occurred otherwise. Developments in the aftermath of the *Critique* were heavily affected by a host of progressive and epochal changes. Events such as the French Revolution, the Weimar renaissance, and the general upheavals of late-eighteenth-century German social and university life played a role in Kant's reception that often outweighed the intricate and rarely followed technicalities of the *Critical* texts.²⁹ There is, however, one 'technical' concept at the center of the *Critique* itself that figured heavily in the reaction to these events and had a central influence in shaping thought after Kant. This is the troublesome notion mentioned earlier of the unconditioned, which can no longer be avoided.

IV. THE POISON OF KANT'S CRITIQUE: THE DEMAND FOR THE UNCONDITIONED

In the second edition Preface to the *Critique* Kant directly connects the concept of the unconditioned not only with the traditional demands of the 'older metaphysic' but also with reason as such: 'that which necessarily drives us to go beyond the boundaries of experience and all appearances is the *unconditioned*, which reason necessarily and with right demands in things in themselves for everything that is conditioned' (B xx). He goes on to explain that his transcendental idealism will dissolve the antinomies and show that '*the contradiction disappears*; and consequently that the unconditioned must not be present in things insofar as we are acquainted [*kennen*] with them (insofar as they are given to us), but rather in things insofar as we are not acquainted with them, as things in themselves' (B xxi). Finally he adds, clearly having in mind the positive results of the second *Critique*, 'what still remains for us is to try whether there are not data in reason's practical data for determining that transcendent rational concept of the unconditioned, in such a way as to reach beyond the boundaries of all possible experience, in accordance with the wishes of metaphysics, cognitions a priori that are possible' (B xxi). In other words, Kant is not only saying that the 'unconditioned' is demanded by reason 'with right', but he is also immediately and explicitly indicating that it is present within his own system. He does not refer merely to a spurious unconditioned in the thoughts of other systems or in the mistakes of some kind of totally suspect faculty. The issue he focuses on, remarkably, is *not* the mistake of affirming the unconditioned as such but instead that of treating what is sensible as if *it* could be unconditioned.³⁰ Given passages like this,

²⁹ See esp. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks, trans. James Hebbeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³⁰ 'All antinomies rest on this, that we seek the unconditioned in the phenomenal world, which simply will not do' (*Lectures on Metaphysics*, 362 (Ak. 28: 661); cf. 359 (Ak. 28: 658)).

and what we know of philosophy immediately after Kant, it can again seem that Hamilton was on to something in speaking of a ‘germ’ in the ‘bosom’ of Kant’s own philosophy, something with some role in the development of the ‘more visionary doctrine of the absolute’ that came to ‘haunt the schools of Germany even to the present day’.

There are, nevertheless, enormous differences between the Critical affirmation of the unconditioned and its role in other philosophies. Kant immediately restricts ‘determination’ of it to the ‘the practical standpoint’, and he continually emphasizes that using it to characterize anything empirical is improper and leads to contradiction. Nonetheless, a natural way to read his discussion as a whole is to take it as saying that things in themselves definitely must be thought of as unconditioned, that something conditioned is given to us, and that, given any conditioned item, reason must regard ‘the series of conditions as completed’ (B xx). Nowhere does Kant take away the presumption that we are confronted with something literally ‘conditioned’. This is not a minor point. A Humean might say, for example, that an impression simply exists. It may be contingent in the sense that it is not contradictory for it not to have existed. But this does not mean that it is literally ‘given’ in the sense of having to be ‘conditioned’—that is, depending on something else. Even if it is analytic that whatever is called ‘conditioned’ requires ‘a condition’, it is not analytic that what confronts us is ‘conditioned’. And yet, *that* the given is conditioned does seem to be a constant *theoretical* position for Kant. We are finite, *receptive* minds that take data to be not simply present but to be given to us (see, e.g., A 19/B 33, the first paragraph of the *Critique* proper), and ultimately, given transcendental idealism, we have to regard them as themselves conditioned in a more than empirical sense.³¹ Some might wish that Kant had held to the thought that what is empirical is conditioned in a merely empirical sense (and so might not need, as the syllogism goes, a non-empirical condition), but in fact he does not restrain himself in this way. He speaks, for example, of ‘the [NB] existence of appearances not grounded in the least within itself but always conditioned’ (A 566/B 594), and he says, ‘appearances [that] do not count for any more than they are in fact, namely not for things in themselves . . . must have grounds that are not appearances’ (A 537/B 565). That is, the empirical data require something conditioning them, something thought of as itself not empirically conditioned, and hence something that is in that sense unconditioned.³² There is a ‘smoking gun’ in the text after all, a kind of ‘spectre’ that is not fully ‘exorcised’.

³¹ Kant does not logically exclude the idea that this condition might be a greater being that includes, and so is not really distinct from, us, but in fact he never expresses sympathy with this Spinozist alternative.

³² Note that for Kant the real feature of being conditioned is not the same thing as contingency. A main point of the Fourth Antinomy is precisely that, for all we know, something conditioned might—or might not—depend on a being that is necessary, and that all that this being conditions might then necessarily follow from it as well (A 562/B 590; A 564/B 592). Thus, something could

For some, the unconditioned might seem more palatable if we keep in mind that Kant explains that reason can think of it as taking the form of either an unconditioned complete series of beings or a single being that is unconditioned (A 409/B 436–7; A 483/B 511), and so it by no means has to be a *typical* ‘spectral’ being. The general idea here seems to be simply that, in order for something to be, it must ‘completely’ or ‘absolutely’ have ‘whatever it takes’ to be. After all, how could something hold in reality while the ‘complete’ conditions needed for it to be, *whatever they are*, would not hold? In particular, how would that be possible with what we really are given? It is true that, since the conditioning relation is naturally thought of as a relation between two distinct items, then, given the definition of a particular thing or state that is conditioned, it is a logically synthetic and uncertain claim that some other *particular kind* of thing or state exists as its condition. But *as long as the Critique* holds that for us the sensible as such is *given* in the sense of being itself *conditioned*, and that the domain of spatiotemporal sensibility by itself can never constitute a ‘complete’ ground that does the conditioning, then it does appear to require *something else* ‘with right’ for what is given to us.

This conclusion leaves open, of course, exactly what it is that is needed. Perhaps there is some non-sensible, but finite and single feature or act or being that conditions the relevant conditioned item, or perhaps there is an endless (non-sensible) sequence of conditions for the conditioned. It does not follow that this unconditioned is anything very remarkable, for example, mental, absolutely necessary, or God-like. Kant is perfectly willing to call items ‘unconditioned’ that are unconditioned only in a specific respect and not altogether, and he nowhere gives a general argument that something could not simply have a finite property F ‘without condition’. One can imagine some traditional philosophers saying that something could not simply be F without some greater G making it be that way, but Kant’s arguments do not have this kind of general pattern. He starts with the fact that we see particular temporal or spatial or causal ‘slices’ of something conditioning something else, and so on and on, and hence we naturally look for further conditions of that type in each case, but he does not presuppose that properties as such must be really conditioned simply because they are properties. (Kant does hold that the *concept* of each finite property can be regarded as a limitation of the concept of the properties of an *ens realissimum*, but his theoretical philosophy does not claim that there really must be such a being, or that in general there must be more eminent properties than the ones with which we are actually acquainted.)

From all that has been presented here, it also does not follow that Kant was clearly right in his own considerations to insist that no sensible features, either those that seem finite or those that seem infinite, could themselves provide something unconditioned. This has to be settled by an evaluation of all the specific

be, in a sense, both conditioned and necessary; ‘empirical contingency’ is not proof of ‘intelligible contingency’, i.e., metaphysical non-necessity.

arguments of the Antinomies, which cannot be attempted here. Any proper evaluation of them, however, would have to keep in mind that Kant goes so far as to contend that the problem with sensible appearances is *not*, as some might suspect, basically a matter of their being *not all given* to any actual finite mind like ours. Kant states that the fact that appearances are not an ‘absolute whole’ or thing in itself follows *even if* you ‘assume that nature were completely exposed to you; that nothing were hidden to your senses and to the consciousness of everything laid before your intuition’ (A 482/B 510). For him there is something about the content of ‘empirical cognition’ *as such* that precludes a ‘consciousness of its absolute totality’ (A 483/B 511), which in turn precludes its being a thing in itself. In other words, the problem with sensible appearances does not seem to be that we do not have a kind of ‘God’s eye view’ on them. We ourselves might well have something like that view insofar as we could, with Kant’s encouragement, imagine *them all* ‘laid before’ us so that nothing is hidden. The problem is not with *our view* but, rather, with *them*.³³ That is, the kind of whole that appearances would constitute even on a clear and complete view would still not be ‘an absolute whole’, and ‘it is really this whole for which an explanation is being demanded in the transcendental problems of reason’ (A 484/B 512). Kant also expresses this view by saying, ‘with all possible perceptions, you always remain caught up in *conditions*, whether in space or time, and you never get to the unconditioned’ (A 483/B 511). Here, contrary to our contemporary inclinations, I take him not to be expressing skepticism about the unconditioned as such but to be allowing reason to hold that there is something unconditioned, and then to be stressing that no set of spatiotemporal features could ever reveal it as such. The error of dogmatism (or ‘transcendental realism’) then is not a general matter of holding on to an affirmation of things in themselves and of something in some sense ‘unconditioned’; it is rather a specific matter of trying to *determine* the in itself by making spatiotemporal features (‘forms of sensibility’) themselves into something unconditioned.

This may seem to be an unusual charge, but in fact it is directly relevant to all of Kant’s major opponents: Leibniz, Newton, Berkeley, and Hume. He charges all of them, quite understandably, with making spatiotemporal features into (in principle) transparent beings of a particular unconditioned kind. For these philosophies the features do in fact exist either as mental items on their own, as with Hume’s impressions, or as determinate ultimate features of reality simply by being components of a mind. For Berkeley, they exist in our mind; for Newton, in God’s mind; and for Leibniz the features themselves are taken to be relational, but the intrinsic features that they reduce to upon ‘clarification’ turn out to be properties of independent monads. For Kant, in contrast, the spatiotemporal sensible features we are acquainted with require a condition in a being

³³ Here Kant is actually agreeing with something that Hegel wanted him to say. See above, n. 10, and cf. my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 301–2.

that, whatever it is, is definitely unlike them.³⁴ The characterization of the thing in itself as unconditioned is thus compatible with the transcendental ideality of the spatiotemporal and conditioned—and can even be understood as part of the Dialectic's very argument for this ideality—and yet this characterization is also a reminder of how Kant's position is not at all a 'visionary' idealism, or a speculative mentalistic view like that of his main predecessors. The position is also a form of realism insofar as it definitely asserts that there is something concrete distinct from us that is precisely not to be understood as the mere product of a mind—neither our individual nor group mind, nor even the divine mind.

On this reading it turns out that there is a very close relationship between the unconditioned and the ideal, a relationship that is very helpful in understanding how things in themselves relate to appearances. If causal and other relations are possible here after all, one might wonder about the point of making such a sharp, metaphysical distinction in terminology. My proposal is that we understand the relation between the sensible and transcendently ideal, on the one hand, and the thing in itself, on the other hand, as just what Kant repeatedly indicates it is—a relation of several kinds between the conditioned and unconditioned. This sort of relation allows the peculiar 'intimacy' that Kant needs if he is to keep to the language that he uses about a 'ground' of appearances and about our freedom acting as an intelligible cause on sensible effects. At the same time, the special meaning of 'unconditioned' allows for the unique heterogeneity that Kant clearly takes to hold between things in themselves and appearances. This heterogeneity is in fact very helpful because it implies that the sensible items that are appearances in a transcendental sense do *not* stand to be 'corrected' in any internal *epistemic* way by the notion of things in themselves (and so there is no 'God's eye view' that is a 'measure' of them)³⁵—unlike appearances in an empirical sense, which can be corrected by other sensible appearances, so that we come to a proper objective view of spatiotemporal phenomena as such. Items that are called appearances in a transcendental sense simply have to be understood as having to have 'complete' grounds beyond themselves—in some cases, grounds that allow empirical givenness to occur at all, in other cases, grounds that may allow specific relations such as free causality to take place. The point of calling something a mere appearance in this sense is not to claim that it fails to exist at all but is rather to say that it (including all our empirical mental properties) requires something else, something of a much more fundamental kind, to exist as it does.

³⁴ Kant begins also with the thought that the thing in itself of appearances is not God, since his theoretical perspective by itself provides no grounds for even introducing an assertion of God's existence; and so later, when through practical reason he does assert God's existence, he does so in a context where it is presumed that God as a thing in itself is not identical with the thing in itself underlying appearances. Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak. 5: 102).

³⁵ This is a worry, for example, in Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 'Introduction'; and John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3–6, 41–4.

This point is not a matter of how the term ‘appearance’ is understood in general. The term can also be used in a different way, say by phenomenologists, as designating a kind of sheer presence, without any contrast with things in themselves. Kant’s main use of the term, however, rests on reasons he gives for saying that the specific features we are given through our forms of sensibility are ‘mere appearances’ *in the sense that* they cannot be self-grounded. The reasons are given in the arguments of the Aesthetic, Analytic, and Dialectic to the effect that any non-spatiotemporal properties that we can determine must depend on spatiotemporal ones, and that (especially because of the First Antinomy) these properties in turn must depend on something else. The cogency of this argument is not transparent, but my main point is simply that it is the natural way to understand the main point at the heart of the *Critique’s* Dialectic, and that it alone leaves Kant with enough of a non-humble metaphysics to have the chance he needs for preserving his own very substantive practical views. The argument’s exposition admittedly involves terminological complications that can understandably give rise to the kinds of ‘visionary’ notions that later interpreters demanded—and then regretted—but it also leaves Kant’s own system at least free of the troubles of the mentalistic versions of idealism with which it is often confused.

V. KANTIAN POSTLUDE: THE LEGACY OF THE ‘SPECTRE’ OF THE UNCONDITIONED

1. To indicate that this reading is not as far-fetched as it might seem to analytic readers, I turn to a brief sketch of the (still relatively little known) immediate impact of Kant’s critique of metaphysics. The quotations that have been given concerning the unconditioned may seem to rely on unusual passages. In Kant’s own time, however, there was no more common concern among philosophers than the unconditioned, or, as it came to be more commonly called, ‘the absolute’. As many scholars have documented, the search for the unconditioned was the dominant agenda of the generation of the Pantheism Dispute, the controversy awakened by Jacobi’s reading of Lessing, Spinoza, Hume, and Kant.³⁶ ‘We seek everywhere the unconditioned [*das Unbedingte*] and find only the conditioned [*Dinge*]’ became the watchword for post-Kantians of every stripe.³⁷ One might at first suppose that this concern was something that Kant came to only

³⁶ This point has been emphasized often by Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank. See also *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel ‘Allwill’*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1994); Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), ch. 2; and Paul Franks, ‘All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold and Maimon’, in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 95–116.

³⁷ Novalis, *Pollen*, #1, as translated in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9. Cf. Charles Larmore, ‘Hölderlin and Novalis’, in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 141–60.

with the remarks about the Dialectic cited earlier from the second edition Preface of the *Critique* (1787), which appeared only a couple years after the height of the Pantheism Dispute (1785). In fact, however, the crucial idea that in sensible experience we ‘always remain caught up with *conditions*’ was, as just noted, already explicit and central in the first edition *Critique* (A 483/B 511). What Kant’s successors did was combine this thought with a host of their own pressing concerns. Five major strands of reaction to Kant’s notion of the unconditioned can be distinguished: Jacobi, Reinhold-Fichte, Early Romanticism, Schelling-Hegel, and neo-Kantianism.

2. F. H. Jacobi dominated the first phase of reaction, which colored all the others even long after the details of his work were forgotten. It was Jacobi who combined the interest in an unconditioned with the attitude of what he called faith [*Glaube*] and a dismissive view of all forms of modern non-theist theoretical philosophy. For the improper reasons noted earlier, he took the notion of the thing in itself to be directly contrary to the main doctrines of the Critical philosophy, and he suggested that Kant’s theoretical account of experience could at best amount to little more than a Hume-like cavalcade of private ideas, ideas that happen to be tied together by the laws of the Analogies and hence leave us subject a priori to determinism or worse. Given this bleak view of theoretical philosophy, Jacobi preached the alternative of a return to revelation and intuition. His engaging personal manner, his Hume-like emphasis on the feelings of the common man and the limits of reason (in contrast to ‘belief’, *Glaube*), his highly popular literary efforts, and his intense religiosity of a kind peculiar to the modern German tradition, all gave him an influence that goes far beyond what one might expect from a study of his philosophical texts alone.³⁸ His role in bringing to light the significance of Spinoza’s philosophy, even if he was ultimately unsympathetic to it, also made it a major task for other readers of the time to find some way to relate Spinoza’s appealing naturalistic interest in an unconditioned to the mysterious uses of this term in Kant’s texts. In the end, Jacobi represents the option of what can be called a *non-philosophical flight to the unconditioned*, one that replaces Kant’s detailed arguments for making a nuanced distinction between apparent and underlying features with a hasty and non-rational affirmation of a truly ‘visionary’ absolute. It is no surprise that Jacobi would also have an influence on the genuinely ‘spectral’ strands of later continental thought.

3. A second main line of reaction was ushered in by Reinhold and Fichte. They sought to overcome Kant’s indeterminate theoretical notion of the thing in itself by finding a privileged form of representation that would allow a completely unified and systematic type of immanent metaphysics. For them, the

³⁸ See, e.g., Nicholas Boyle’s account of Jacobi’s encounter with Goethe, in *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. i (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 182–4.

unconditioned stands not for a special transcendent *thing* that is a metaphysical condition for sensible appearances but instead for a transparent philosophical *principle* of subjectivity that can ground a totally autonomous philosophical science.³⁹ They followed Jacobi in taking a transcendent and causal thing in itself to be literally impossible for any post-Critical thought, but they resolved not to abdicate the priority of rationalist philosophy itself, while also not allowing any kind of non-libertarian metaphysics, or falling back into a position that would be vulnerable to skepticism or reduce to a form of subjective idealism.⁴⁰ In Fichte's most significant phase, the unconditioned reveals itself in forms of immediate self-consciousness and categorical commands of morality that supposedly do not require, as an a priori theoretical argument for their possibility, the 'letter' of Kant's metaphysics of transcendental idealism. The existence of the subject's absolute freedom, and then of a social and natural world to accommodate its aims, was taken to be a first certainty. Since Fichte rejected Kant's thing in itself while holding on to the language of idealism, English readers have tended, until recently, to misunderstand his view as a form of subjective idealism.⁴¹ This is highly unfair, since Fichte's system is adamantly committed to presenting knowledge of a thoroughly objective domain, and it is even more radical than Kant's in rejecting any possibility of literally spiritual and transcendent entities. Nonetheless, in placing so much emphasis, for methodological purposes, on considerations of self-consciousness and morality, Fichte played into the hands of opponents even within his own tradition. His absolute is 'visionary' not in a literally transcendent sense but because it involves an overly ambitious secular version of Kant's doctrine of the postulates of pure practical reason, a version that makes reality necessarily and fully transparent (albeit asymptotically) to human efforts. The main danger of the Fichtean option is that it neglects a detailed reconsideration of the full theoretical and natural *prerequisites* of the very substantive practical-rational claims needed in any truly Critical philosophy.

4. A third broad reaction to the Kantian metaphysics of the unconditioned, which can be touched on only very briefly here, consists in the sketches offered by the 'Jena circle' of philosophers such as Johann Benjamin Erhard and the Early Romantic figures Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) and Friedrich Schlegel. The members of this group were distinctive because they were all willing to accept a fundamentally agnostic metaphysics without either abandoning philosophy altogether or claiming it could ever be organized into a complete

³⁹ See Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, chs. 8–18.

⁴⁰ The problem of skepticism was acute at this time because of G. E. Schulze's *Aenesidemus* (1792), which conflated Kant and the early Reinhold and attacked them for not having an adequate response to skepticism. See Daniel Breazeale, 'Fichte's "Aenesidemus" Review and the Transformation of German Idealism', *Review of Metaphysics*, 34 (1980–1), 545–68.

⁴¹ See, e.g., George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Scribner's 1915), ch. 6.

foundational system.⁴² Since, at their best, they each, in their own way, allowed a non-sensible thing in itself without claiming any uniquely privileged and transparent moral, religious, or aesthetic determination of it and without demeaning the robust empirical realism and categorial organization of nature that Kant also wanted to emphasize, it can be argued that they are the closest heirs of the Critical philosophy, even if it has taken centuries to recognize them as such.

5. A fourth immediate reaction to Kant was the ‘absolute idealism’ developed originally in the work of the early Schelling and Hegel and their project of a constitutive and organic *Naturphilosophie*.⁴³ Schelling is particularly relevant because he was the first of the Tübingen trio (Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin) to gain influence by publishing his systematic views. The main theme of his first writings is the project of uniting ‘dogmatism and criticism’—that is, of combining the appealing naturalistic metaphysics of the unconditioned that he takes Spinozism to represent with a more modern account of the dynamic faculties of mind that Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte develop in their concern with autonomy. Schelling strongly encouraged Hegel to jettison all notions of a transcendent thing in itself, just as ‘The Earliest System Program of German Idealism’ (1796 or 1797) expressed the Tübingen trio’s commitment to hastening a completely immanent realization of Kant’s postulates of pure practical reason.⁴⁴

What distinguishes the approach of Schelling and Hegel is an insistence on returning theoretical metaphysics to a position of methodological primacy and exhaustive ‘scientific’ systematicity. They each claim in their own way to give a rational derivation of the necessary development of self-determination throughout the objective realm, especially in detailing the non-mechanistic aspects of nature and the positive dialectical aspects of history that both Kant and Fichte neglect. Their position is called ‘absolute idealism’ not because it makes everything ‘ideal’ in some literally mental sense but because it holds that what is ‘absolute’—that is, unconditioned—is simply the *whole* of (broadly) natural reality, and that this whole can be proven to have a fundamentally

⁴² See especially Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*.

⁴³ See Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pt. IV; and Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Poetry and the Organic in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ The authorship of this piece is much disputed. See the translation by Daniel Dahlstrom in *The Emergence of German Idealism*, ed. Michael Baur and Daniel Dahlstrom (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 309–10. Cf. Klaus Düsing, ‘The Reception of Kant’s Doctrine of Postulates in Schelling’s and Hegel’s Early Philosophical Projects’, in *ibid.* 201–37.

rational and teleological, and in that sense 'ideal', structure.⁴⁵ Like Kant, they also call space, time, and sensible features 'mere appearances', and like him they take this to signify not that these items are private or merely psychological but that they have a ground in some more basic entity, an entity that is not literally a monad-like mind.⁴⁶ The difference between them and Kant is that their unconditioned, unlike his, cannot be a particular thing in itself, or group of them, but must be an all-inclusive whole, an absolutely unconditioned structure that allows us to determine it—that is, to know and fulfill it. An advantage of their position is that it blocks all transcendent mysteries and fits more closely with the now common unrestricted understanding of the term 'unconditioned'. A problem for their position (eventually emphasized by Schelling himself), aside from the details of the particular arguments they present, is that the core content of their program seems directly to threaten the very commitment to absolute individual freedom that was the prime motive for developing a Critical philosophy in the first place. This alone does not show that their position involves more of a relapse into dogmatism than does Kant's, but it does indicate one reason why the presentation of their view is much more esoteric than the *Critique*. Even if absolute idealism does not deserve blame for being 'visionary' in the full sense that Hamilton implied, it still makes that blame understandable.

6. The fifth line of reaction to Kant's critique of metaphysics has a character very unlike the others. This broadly scientific line does not necessarily deny Kant's interest in the thing in itself, or his underlying moral motivations, but what it takes to heart most seriously is the lesson that there is definitely a systematic problem in continuing metaphysics in the old style, with the assertion of absolute necessities of any kind. For these later Kantians, the best tactic is always to begin, as Kant himself did, by considering what structures are required by the most advanced exact sciences of one's time, and then reflecting astringently on what, if anything, remains left over for philosophy once all these structures are characterized with full precision and generality.

This approach is most familiar to us now from neo-Kantians of the late nineteenth century such Hermann Cohen, Alois Riehl, and Heinrich Rickert, but it can also be found in earlier strands of thought such as the school of J. F. Fries (who taught in Heidelberg in 1805 and was called to Jena in 1816), which

⁴⁵ Cf. Hans-Joachim Glock, 'Vorsprung durch Logik: The German Analytic Tradition', in Anthony O'Hear (ed.), *German Philosophy since Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 145.

⁴⁶ See Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §§ 45, 50; and cf. my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 276 n. 18.

was developed further by Leonard Nelson.⁴⁷ More recently, Michael Friedman has reinvented this tradition by explaining how Cassirer, Schlick, Reichenbach, Carnap, and other leading twentieth-century figures can be understood as having developed a rigorous new kind of Kantian program that uncovers principles that are a priori in the significant but limited sense of being constitutive rules for a basic scientific framework within a particular era.⁴⁸ This way of continuing Kant's critique of metaphysics obviously seems less likely to make the mistake of falling back into the clutches of introducing questionable 'visionary' metaphysical programs, an error that dogged Kant's immediate successors. It has not itself, however, been free of excessive optimism about being able to present a fully unified account of science and philosophy. A further disadvantage of the approach is that it has tended to lose touch with Kant's concerns with ordinary experience, which clearly interested him as much as any particular scientific developments, and which still might yield some most general 'life-world' structures that can remain constant throughout scientific change. Edmund Husserl's later work moved in this broadly Kantian direction at the same time that the deep historicism of his student, Martin Heidegger, pushed most Continental philosophy in the opposite direction, away from any genuinely Kantian approach.⁴⁹

Neo-Kantianism that is based entirely on a reconstruction—or critique—of current scientific frameworks tends not to have much to say in detail about classical metaphysical problems such as the philosophical thematization of a general distinction between appearances and things in themselves. To the extent that these kinds of problems do continue to animate contemporary analytic discussions (see, e.g., Sellars, Strawson, Putnam, Stroud, and McDowell) of transcendental arguments in a fruitful way that does not depend on specific problems of current scientific frameworks, it can be said that at least some of the underlying spirit of Kant's critique survives in our own time—even while what may have mattered most to him in the Dialectic, the discussion of the unconditioned, stays in the shadows.⁵⁰

7. In retrospect: Kant's own Critical metaphysics, with its full arsenal of serious commitments to transcendental idealism, transcendental freedom, and a complete transcendental philosophy that 'will come forward as a science', has

⁴⁷ See Leonard Nelson, *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1965). Cf. Klaus Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Otfried Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 221.

⁴⁸ See Michael Friedman, *Dynamics of Reason* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2001), and *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ A significant exception is Gerold Prauss, *Die Welt und wir*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzlar, 1990–9). On Heidegger's misreading of Kant, see Dieter Henrich, 'Über die Einheit der Subjektivität', *Philosophische Rundschau*, 3 (1955), 28–69.

⁵⁰ See, however, Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

few ‘bosom’ companions. His modern predecessors were all too mentalist; the empiricist ones too skeptical and psychological, the rationalist ones too dogmatic and spiritual. His best-known German successors created a new idealism that avoids these flaws, but they and their followers gave up too soon on either a genuine metaphysics of nature (Reinhold, Fichte) or a genuine metaphysics of individual freedom (Hegel). The scientific neo-Kantians have tended not only to go beyond the specific errors of past groups but also to give up on classical metaphysics altogether. This leaves only the figures of the Jena circle and Early Romanticism—but, although they are not anti-systematic as such, their fragments introduce a deep sense of history and relativity that surely takes them beyond Kant’s own strict program as well.⁵¹ A supposedly childless professor, Kant the metaphysician left behind a fertile family of illegitimate heirs.

⁵¹ On the relation of Kant and the romantics, see below, Ch. 9, as well as *Novalis: Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Fred Rush, ‘Kant and Schlegel’, in Volker Gerhardt, Rolf Horstmann, and Ralph Schumacher (eds.), *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung. Akten des IX. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses* (Berlin/New York: deGruyter, 2001), iii. 622–30.

PART II
REINHOLD AND AFTER

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Reinhold's *First* Letters on Kant

I. REINHOLD'S 'SHORT CRITIQUE'

It was a world-changing event when Reinhold's *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* appeared in its original 'short' version as a series of articles published from August 1786 to September 1787 in the *Teutscher Merkur*. Now that Reinhold's work in general is again receiving more attention, his first presentation of the Critical philosophy deserves special consideration. It has gone largely unnoticed in the Anglophone world altogether, and even in the very tradition that it created in German Idealism and its aftermath, the distinctive nature of its influence is still all too often forgotten.¹

After several imitations and unauthorized versions, a book version of the *Letters*, roughly twice as long as the set of original articles, was published in 1790. It made a series of terminological changes, added a few new themes (for example, aesthetics), and expanded the format from eight to twelve letters. A second volume of *Letters*, with important contributions on topics such as law, politics, and the will, was added in 1792. In the twentieth century the two volumes of the 1790s were reissued together in a single volume, but not in a way that allows readers to see exactly what the extensive changes were that had been made after the original version.² Although it is the 1790s version that is now cited most often, because of its much greater availability in libraries, it is best to encounter the *Letters* first in the compact format of the journal version. This version reveals Reinhold's original attitude most directly, and it is the one that all by itself is the main reason why Kant's work—and then Reinhold's teaching in Jena³—suddenly became the center of attention for the whole next generation in Germany and the prime source of the Classical era of German philosophy.

¹ Parts of the following essay overlap with revised sections of my introduction in Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, ix–xxxv). That edition uses the first version as the basic text and includes all the lengthier additions from 1790 in an Appendix, but it is not a critical edition noting all changes.

² Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923). The 1790 version did not make significant cuts, but its additions very much interrupt the structure and flow of the original argument in many places.

³ On Kant's reception, see the letter to Kant by D. J. Jenisch, 14 May 1787, and cf. L. H. Jakob's letters to Kant, 26 March and 17 July 1786, and Reinhold's letter to Kant, 12 Oct. 1787, which refers to him as the 'second Immanuel', in Kant's *Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Schöndörffer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1972).

In order to understand this turning point properly it is very important to approach it at first in terms of the philosophical context in which the *Letters* appeared in 1786, before any of the later advances in the revolution that it helped cause. This means that, at least for a while, current readers need to bracket what they know of not only Kant's own later work but also the many significant and rapid developments that occurred in Reinhold's interpretation of Kant, in the establishment of his own philosophy, or series of philosophies, and in the speedy reactions to Reinhold by his many readers—a very significant group in Jena alone.⁴

In its original conception, the *Letters'* portrayal of the Critical philosophy is necessarily limited to Kant's work prior to the second, or B edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787). Its focus is basically the 1781 A edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, although, as was all too often the custom then, Reinhold does not even bother to offer any proper references to the text. Since the two other books by Kant that were published later and called *Critiques* were not yet finished, let alone available, the original *Letters* naturally proceeds as if there is only one *Critique*, and as if Kant's work is already complete in principle even if not carried out in full detail. What is remarkable, however, is that in almost all cases Reinhold does not cite the full title of Kant's work, or simply say 'Critique', but speaks instead of 'the critique of reason'.

Reinhold never makes explicit his rationale for omitting the word 'pure', but this tactic can be understood as presumably his way of indicating from the start that his concern—like Kant's as well—is not merely with a book but rather with the very notion and whole movement of a critique of reason. By also not citing pages of the *Critique* directly, and often not naming Kant at all, Reinhold's procedure reinforces the thought that the critique of reason is a general project, one that might be carried out in a number of places—perhaps in ancillary works by Kant, or perhaps in efforts by supporters, such as the *Letters* itself. Moreover, Reinhold knew from the start that his readers already had access to other Critical works of the 1780s, most notably Kant's *Prolegomena* (1783), *Groundwork* (1785), *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), and essays on Enlightenment (1784) and history (1784, and January 1786), and this fact could provide yet another reason for his using the term 'critique' in a more general sense. But even though these other famous works may well form a backdrop for the discussion in the *Letters*, it is remarkable that they too are not referred to directly. In contrast, Kant's *Berlinische Monatschrift* essay 'What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?' is quoted extensively at one point (in the Third Letter, January 1787, p. 22), and it certainly fits in perfectly with the main theme of the *Letters*, but the fact is that this essay was not published until October 1786, and hence it could not have determined the first two installments and

⁴ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

overall conception of the *Letters*. The appearance of Kant's essay does, however, conveniently substantiate Reinhold's original project, and it reveals his unusual ability to anticipate philosophical events right before their occurrence and, more generally, to be historical in a way that points as much to the future as to the past.

Whatever its source, there is a very significant philosophical complication arising from Reinhold's omission of the word 'pure' in his constant use of the short phrase 'critique of reason'. The advantage of his phrase is that it calls attention, all the more easily, to critique as a general process, and hence as a process that can, and does, involve two kinds of double meanings. It concerns reason in the double meaning of something that is carried out *by* and applied *to* reason; and it concerns critique in the double meaning of something *negative*, in the sense of an attack, and something *positive*, in the sense of a knowledgeable assessment and vindication (as in the English term 'literary criticism'). The disadvantage of Reinhold's short phrase is that it is misleading about exactly what Kant means to attack and what he means to vindicate.

It is important for Kant to use the term 'pure' in his title because his book's intent is to criticize—in the sense of 'attack'—not reason *in general* but *only* those *theoretical* uses of reason that try to proceed *too* 'purely', that is, without recognition of our need to refer to sensory, spatiotemporal contexts in order to make warranted *determinate* claims. Reinhold's main point is that Kant means to vindicate reason in its practical use, and thereby to silence those who are totally negative about reason. Thus, an initial way one might try to express Kant's project is to say that the *Critique* is written to *limit theoretical* reason, especially in the face of dogmatic rationalism or supernaturalism, and to *liberate practical* reason, especially in the face of dogmatic empiricism or skepticism. To be accurate, however, some important qualifications must be added, qualifications that Reinhold generally fails to provide.

It should be made explicit, for example, that for Kant it is only 'pure' practical reason that needs to be liberated, whereas practical reason in general is itself subject to critique in the form of a limitation of its pretensions, that is, of claims by those—such as skeptics or instrumentalists—who hold that it has no pure use and cannot set and achieve goals of its own. Furthermore, it should be made explicit that theoretical reason, and traditional non-practical metaphysics in general, is not all bad. Kant does stress that problems arise when our theoretical reason is unwilling to be 'impure' at all *and* then tries to make pure determinate claims without taking into account the restricting conditions of our specific forms of sensibility. Hence, a 'critique of pure reason' is needed in the negative sense of a challenge, by reason in general, of the extravagant determinate claims that theoretical reason makes in trying, for example, vainly to deduce immortality from the bare theoretical representation of the I. Nonetheless, even this criticism of reason is something that is, and has to be, carried out by theoretical reason itself. In this way the *Critique* also serves as a vindication of the operations of pure theoretical reason, even at the same time that it undermines specific claims that

some advocates of reason have made. That is, given that its criticism can proceed at all, there must be a general, legitimate capacity granted to our theoretical reason as such, something accepted from the start (even if only tentatively), before there can be any sensible further move to anything else, such as a satisfaction in practical reason.

This 'metacritical' point is often brought up as an objection to the *Critique*, but there is no reason to presume that Kant cannot, like the rest of us, fit it into his thought from the outset, and in fact he does so, in constantly, and understandably, speaking non-problematically about reason investigating itself (e.g. A xiv). Kant's *Critique* by no means implies that reason as such, in the general sense of rationality and reflection, is inherently restricted and can deal only with appearances; his Critical arguments all concern only exposing very specific kinds of extravagant claims. Of course, in order to understand, in a detailed and positive way, this general formal capacity of our theoretical reason to discover fundamental limitations, the capacity must be able to be spelled out more specifically. Kant does this systematically by means of an account of completely general 'forms' of judgment that carry with them distinct meanings (e.g. affirmative, negative, singular, plural, categorical, non-categorical) that are understandable despite their purity. He also holds that this implies that there are general ways of thinking 'materially' about whatever it is that can be judged, for example, in terms of quality, quantity, and relation. Since these forms and categories obviously can be distinguished from each other, Kant must, and does, allow that they have distinctive meanings even when they are still entirely pure (and even if more than merely logical) in the sense of not being restricted to any specific spatiotemporal schematization. This point is still Critical and not dogmatic because it goes hand in hand with Kant's main Critical argument, which is that it is illegitimate for us to move beyond these ways of *mere thinking* to make *theoretical, determinate, and justifiable claims* without relying on something more than pure theory, such as either spatiotemporal sensibility or the claims of pure practical reason.⁵

From all this it should be clear that, if anyone is engaged, as Reinhold is, in trying to use Kant to save the reputation of reason itself, then the only way to do this, with any content, is to work out a detailed positive account showing how our reason (in its broadest sense) can work theoretically *both independently of and together with* our sensibility, and/or how it can work practically, that is, together with pure morality. The theoretical strategy is the one that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* itself emphasizes, although it says enough at least to indicate how, on the basis of the theoretical strategy, the practical strategy is then also possible. Reinhold's *Letters*, in contrast, starts by focusing almost entirely on the practical strategy by itself, and on how it serves Kant's enlightened moral and religious aims. Hence, even when the *Letters* itself does eventually take up some theoretical

⁵ All the italicized qualifications are extremely important—and all too often forgotten in many interpretations.

questions that are unavoidable (especially in the second half of the text) when discussing topics central to philosophy such as epistemology and the pure nature of the self, it runs into some very serious perplexities. Reinhold does not falsify Kant's theory of mind, but the presentation of that theory in the *Letters* is seriously incomplete. In moving too quickly to practical reason, the *Letters* starts a whole tradition of looking at Kant that fails to attend carefully enough to the Critical notion of theoretical reason itself, and especially to the specific ways in which it is bound down by, and yet also free from, the conditions of spatiotemporality.

One look at the titles of the individual letters immediately reveals Reinhold's momentous decision to turn attention away from the abstract epistemological issues at the heart of the *Critique's* arguments—what Reinhold admits are its 'inner grounds' (p. 187 n.)⁶—and toward its concrete practical and religious 'results'. At this time, these results had been discussed by Kant himself only briefly or indirectly, in remarks in the last sections of the *Critique* (especially the Solution of the Third Antinomy, A 546/B 574–A 557/B 585, and the Canon, A 795/B 823–A 830/B 858) and the short essays of the mid-1780s.⁷ Reinhold's uncanny ability to capture Kant's ultimate positive aims contrasts with other readers at the time, such as Mendelssohn, who took the *Critique* to intend an 'all-crushing' attack on metaphysics. This was a common and understandable reaction, since Kant claimed to have refuted all theoretical proofs in the traditions of rational psychology, cosmology, and theology. This situation gave Reinhold a chance to gain fame by effectively bringing out, in contrast, the neglected affirmative goal of the Critical system. It is almost as if Reinhold was clairvoyant about the position that Kant was to elaborate only later, in the full presentation of the moral argument for God in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). This point can be totally missed if one reads only the 1790 *Letters*, because by then Kant's later works had become available and Reinhold could have rephrased his exposition radically in light of that fact, although it turned out that Reinhold had been so accurate in advance that he did not have to do anything more than make incidental changes in formulation.

There is a negative side, however, to Reinhold's original shift of focus toward later, more popular and 'spiritual' themes. This shift makes the value of the Critical philosophy seem to hinge entirely on Kant's highly controversial moral argument from pure practical reason and the implications of his unusually demanding notion of duty. According to this argument, we all ought to strive for the 'highest good', i.e. a situation with an ideal coordination of justice and

⁶ From the beginning of the Fourth Letter. References in parentheses are to the pages of the original version of the *Letters* in the *Teutscher Merkur*.

⁷ See Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent' (1784), 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' (1784), and 'Conjectural Beginning of Human History' (1786), all in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).

happiness, and therefore we must ‘postulate’ the conditions that appear necessary to the rational possibility of hoping for this end—namely, our own immortality and a God with the requisite power, knowledge, and goodness. The approach of the *Letters* turns attention entirely away from the crucial beginning and middle sections of the *Critique*, which define the core of Kant’s system and establish the metaphysical preconditions of the moral argument: the proofs of the synthetic a priori structures of space and time, the Transcendental Deduction of the categories, the Analogies argument for the principle of causality, and the restriction of all our determinate theoretical knowledge to a realm of space and time that is transcendently ideal and not characteristic of things in themselves.

Reinhold made something of an effort to make good his relative neglect of Kant’s theoretical philosophy by beginning to develop, soon after the original *Letters*, a new system of his own, the so-called Elementary-Philosophy (1789),⁸ which was supposed to provide a fully general and more adequate theoretical basis than Kant’s first *Critique*. This was the first of many attempts, by Reinhold as well as his followers, to discover ‘inner grounds’ better than Kant’s own for the sake of more effectively achieving what they took to be ‘in spirit’ the same admirable ‘results’ that the *Critique* promised.⁹

Unfortunately, Reinhold’s project, like all the later idealist systems that are dependent on its general structure, never overcomes the problem of an all too ‘short’ theoretical treatment of the meaning and grounds of Kant’s idealism, and a disregard of its essential relation to the specific structures of our spatiotemporal sensibility.¹⁰ The effects of this problem can be found already in the final sections of the first *Letters*. The use of an all too short formulation of the very title of the *Critique* already in the ‘short version’ of the *Letters* signals a significant lack of appreciation for the specific problem of sustaining *pure* claims of reason. This is a very surprising situation, given that the *Letters* is devoted precisely to saving not merely the practice of religion and morality but also the philosophical claim that there are pure, i.e. nonspatiotemporal, beings, such as God and our immortal souls. Amazingly, Reinhold—unlike Kant—does not even try to present any theoretical (i.e., entirely metaphysical or epistemological) ground of his own for thinking that there really can be such beings, nor does he even review the relevant parts of Kant’s philosophy. This leaves the very meaning of his assertions of God and immortality especially mysterious, and so it is no wonder that later idealists felt compelled to take a new approach.

⁸ See esp. Reinhold, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (Prague and Jena: Wiedtmann and Pauke, 1789).

⁹ This strategy is most striking in cases where Kant and Reinhold still think of God as literally existing as a transcendent person, whereas later writers allow no more than that God exists ‘in spirit’, i.e. in the fulfilled spirit of human culture.

¹⁰ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, chs. 2–3; and *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), chs. 3 and 5.

What is most astounding in this context is the fact that, unlike nearly all other interpreters, Reinhold is exceptionally perceptive in organizing his discussion around the insight that the *Critique* is aimed primarily at attacking the metaphysical doctrines of *materialism* and *spiritualism*—and yet he fails to make clear the crucial metaphysical grounds and implications of Kant's attack on these specific dogmatic doctrines. Nonetheless, in devoting most of the space at the end of the *Letters* to explaining the distinctive value of the Kantian epistemological account of the self's perceptual cognitive capacities (in the course of a treatment of the issue of immortality), Reinhold does manage, despite his limited theoretical concerns, to bring out some of the Critical philosophy's special virtues.

II. THE SITUATION OF PHILOSOPHY BEFORE THE LETTERS

Three main factors—the Enlightenment, Jacobi, and Kant—determined the philosophical context facing Reinhold in the 1780s. To begin to understand the *Letters*, one needs to appreciate what Reinhold's most deeply entrenched views were before he had even heard of Kant, what the dominant philosophical dispute was at that time in Germany, and what was so remarkable about the specific strategy of resorting to Kant's first Critical writings as a response to this situation.

The first main influence on Reinhold—and the one with the longest hold on him—was the set of progressive social and political ideals that he brought along with him when fleeing to Weimar and Protestantism.¹¹ The second main influence on the *Letters* was the Pantheism Dispute, which erupted in Germany in 1785 upon the publication of F. H. Jacobi's *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Mr Moses Mendelssohn*. Jacobi insisted that Mendelssohn—and thereby in effect all traditional philosophers—had to choose between the alleged fatalistic and Spinozistic position of Lessing and the only alternative Jacobi thought was feasible, a libertarian and anti-rationalist version of Christianity.¹² The third main factor on the scene was the long shadow cast in 1781 by the first edition of Kant's massive *Critique*, a work that befuddled its first readers not only because of its unusual difficulty but also because of its many ambiguous stances. It seemed aimed, for example, at sharply criticizing, and yet also somehow defending, numerous core claims of common-sense experience, modern science, metaphysical reason, and the Christian tradition.

¹¹ On this early period, see my 'Reinhold's Challenge: Systematic Philosophy for the Public', in Martin Bondeli and Alessandro Lazzari (eds.), *Die Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds, Fichte-Studien Supplementa* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 2002), 77–103.

¹² On the role of Lessing's own work in regard to these issues, see H. B. Nisbit, 'Introduction', in *Lessing: Writings on Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Nisbit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Reinhold's *Letters* elegantly ties all these themes together by arguing that everyone else had failed to notice the obvious solution—namely, that Kant's work has to be read properly from back to front. Once this is done, it should be easy to see that Kant succeeds in his ultimate aims, which concern the philosophy of religion, and that he provides, in a remarkable feat of anticipation, an enlightened answer to the problems that had become acute after Jacobi. Even without presenting anything like a full-length review of the *Critique*, Reinhold presumed that his *Letters* could show how the 'Kantian philosophy' contains the means for meeting Germany's most crying needs—and could also satisfy his own interest in gaining recognition as the authoritative spokesman of the age.

Reinhold's optimism is rooted in the most basic philosophical features of his initial concerns. From the time of his earliest writings, the most distinctive feature of Reinhold's orientation toward the Enlightenment was his insistence on finding a way to support social reform with a philosophy that meets the double demand of being *popular* and *systematic* in the best sense.¹³ The insistence on this *double demand* is a major factor in Reinhold's interest in Kant, because he thought that the *Critique*, and the *Critique* alone, was directly oriented toward meeting this demand. Later, however, Reinhold's concern with this issue also led to a turn away from Kant, as a consequence of Reinhold's extremely ambitious presumptions about the way that this demand should be met. This point is responsible for most of the differences between the two versions of *Letters*. By 1790 Reinhold had come to believe that even the initial formulation and exposition of the Critical philosophy was inadequate. The revolutionary *Critique*, which was supposed to provide a practically sacred new foundation by itself, turned out to need to be reformulated in terms of Reinhold's own doctrine of a single basic faculty of representation (*Vorstellungsvermögen*). This doctrine is grounded in a supposedly transparent and absolutely self-determining 'principle of consciousness' (*Satz des Bewußtseins*).¹⁴ Reinhold believed this principle could be more effective in meeting the 'double demand' than Kant's own system, which now seemed neither adequately fundamental nor truly universally accessible. The suspicion was that Kant started his system at too 'high' a level, accepting as given 'knowledge', or notions such as concept, intuition, space, and time, rather than deriving them from a foundation in something absolutely elementary, such as the bare notion of mental representation.

The initial version of the *Letters*, however, still focuses on conveying the value of the endpoints of the Critical philosophy rather than on seeking an ideal foundational formulation of its starting points. This focus made sense given the role that the Pantheism Dispute played in mediating Reinhold's early interests in the

¹³ On related themes, 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).

¹⁴ Reinhold, *Versuch*, 1: 'representation is distinguished in consciousness by the subject from both subject and object, and is referred to both'.

Enlightenment and Kant. The underlying issue here concerns Jacobi's conception of the capacities of philosophy as a theoretical discipline in general. Jacobi's highly negative view of these capacities played a central role in the way that Reinhold and all his so-called Kantian successors began their thinking about the core options in modern philosophy. For Jacobi, it is not only Spinoza or Lessing but traditional theoretical philosophy in general that leads to pantheism because it can do nothing more than link contingent particulars together with one another as part of a necessarily connected all-inclusive whole. This conception leaves no room for thinking of oneself as a free and independent individual, related to other free individuals, or to a personal God who is beyond the world-whole. While Jacobi finds the most consistent version of this holistic conception in Spinozism, he realizes that there is also a Humean version of it that starts from a position that is more epistemological and subjectivist than ontological and rationalist. In this psychologistic version of traditional philosophy, one must begin simply with certain inner representations, and then, as long as one is rigorous and consistent, one cannot help but end up with what is only a totality of necessarily connected representations. On this model, not only are ultimate finite individuality and personal freedom lost; there is also no longer any external nature, any plurality of actual beings, physical or personal, that can be asserted to exist, and hence the position can be called a kind of skepticism.

Jacobi was most concerned with the practical implications of this conception of philosophy. It seemed to him that it clearly divests life of any personal meaning, any significant origin or goal, and undercuts all ordinary belief, morality, and theistic religion.¹⁵ His alternative was to propose that this whole conception is mistaken because it is fixated on *demonstration*. We should realize that we do not exist 'only to connect', in the sense of merely gathering contingent representations or natural beings together in one whole, however immense. We are also—when not misled by philosophy—open to the direct 'revelation' of intrinsically meaningful external items.¹⁶ There is an obvious consequence of these views for Jacobi's philosophy of religion. Since for him the old conception of philosophy cannot even justify ordinary claims about any other finite beings, physical or personal, it follows that we no longer need to be embarrassed by holding onto the supernatural beliefs of Christianity, for these are in no worse position than the everyday claims that traditional philosophy has put into question. In other words, either we stay with 'traditional' philosophy and a meaningless annihilation of our own selves as ultimate individuals, or we reject this 'nihilistic' position and continue to hold onto our everyday ontology and whatever moral and religious claims seem also to be 'revealed' to us. Theoretical

¹⁵ Cf. J. G. Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

¹⁶ F. H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Löwe, 1785), 31: 'in my judgment the greatest service of the scientist [philosophical writer, *Forscher*] is to unveil existence, and to reveal it [*Dasein—zu enthüllen, und zu offenbaren*].'

philosophy leads to ‘knowledge’ that is wholly unsatisfying, but that realization can remind us of the satisfying non-demonstrative beliefs that we have always had, which can help us to lead a life of belief that is also open to religious faith.

Jacobi’s agenda was a challenge to the mainstream of the German Enlightenment, which had assumed precisely that one did *not* have even to think about facing the stark choice of either an unsatisfying ‘rational’ philosophy or a literally supernatural religion. Instead, one could select one of many different, supposedly satisfying forms of rational religion, or ‘natural theology’. The differences between most eighteenth-century successors to Descartes, Leibniz, and Locke were relatively minor in this context. Enlightenment philosophers tended no longer to see any need to insist on the miraculous doctrines of Christian ‘special revelation’, but for a long time they continued to assert that rational philosophy and ‘natural teleology’ point toward at least the likelihood of a God who provides a meaningful existence and final end for human individuals. By the later eighteenth century, however, the corrosive influence of figures such as Hume and Spinoza had led a new generation of philosophers to suspect that none of the old techniques of theoretical philosophy could defend a position encouraging rational religion, let alone ‘old time’ supernaturalism.

Reinhold’s response to this situation in 1786 is to propose that Kant provides an ideal way to endorse a kind of rational religion after all—and to save genuine morality, ultimate personal individuality, and Christianity in particular. The key is to see that the discussion between Jacobi and Mendelssohn need not to be taken to reveal the limits of reason or rational religion as such. It shows only the limits of the traditional ‘dogmatic’ and theoretical metaphysics that is unfamiliar with Kant’s Critical vindication of reason and religion on a pure practical basis.

The theme of religion is connected to a very serious complication that many readers of the *Critique* chose to ignore or downplay in the 1780s—namely, that it by no means excludes transcendent metaphysics and supernatural religion in all senses. As Reinhold astutely recognized, although Kant was clearing away *theoretical arguments* for assertions about God, freedom, and immortality, he was also providing the foundation for an elaboration (see the *Critique of Practical Reason*) of the rightful claims of pure practical reason, and an extended defense of true and substantive ‘non-theoretical’ beliefs of a religious nature. For Kant, these beliefs are called ‘pure practical’ and ‘non-theoretical’ simply because the only adequate *epistemic ground* for them is a premiss set that is not entirely theoretical but includes as an essential component some strict moral considerations. It is very important, however, that the *content* of such beliefs can still express a genuine fact that can be described in non-moral terms, for example, that there exist beings with non-spatiotemporal powers, given the postulates’ conclusions affirming a personal God and immortality.

Reinhold expected his advocacy of Kant’s philosophy to have considerable popular impact, and to gain support from the relevant authorities in liberal regimes because it would provide them a convenient escape from the

threatening extremes that Jacobi had presented.¹⁷ If a rational, but non-dogmatic defense of religion is feasible, then the culture wars of *Aberglaube* and *Unglaube*—superstitious faith and crude non-belief—could be avoided. This strategy would endear Reinhold to the great majority of his readers, who were still relatively traditional. Just as importantly, it would also attract more progressive thinkers who eschewed supernatural remedies but remained very interested in finding some way to secure the secular value inherent in the notion of the highest good—namely, the thought of a realm of full human satisfaction and justice. That Kant connected this value to fairly traditional ideas of God, freedom, and immortality is not surprising, given the fact that this complex of ideas had a very well-known anticipation and democratic pedigree in the threefold creed of Rousseau's 'Savoyard Vicar'. In progressive Jena, 'results' at least somewhat like Kant's postulates thus became a common goal, even while practically everyone, including Reinhold himself soon, also thought it necessary to come up with better 'premisses' than Kant's own.¹⁸ This is true even of figures such as the young Schelling, who as a student was extremely disturbed by the attempts of theologians in Tübingen to modify, in a more conservative way than Reinhold, the general argument form of Kant's postulates for their own fundamentalist ends.¹⁹ The 'Earliest System Programme of German Idealism' (1796 or 1797) is perhaps the most famous expression of the desire of the leaders of the new generation to succeed Reinhold by accomplishing the *underlying* 'spiritual' goal of Kant's postulates in a more radical way of their own.²⁰

Even if it is understandable why Kant's general ideal of the highest good proved highly attractive at the time, it should also be clear on reflection that the philosophical energy behind these appropriations of Kant had to be grounded in something other than the practical arguments of the *Critique* itself. These arguments are woefully condensed, and they do not even seem to be good representations of Kant's best thinking at the time. They appear to insist, quite dogmatically, that we have a 'pure' moral 'need' to obtain deserved rewards for our moral striving (or at least to believe in a situation where such strivings will in general be rewarded), and yet the very 'purity' of this intention seems in tension with the admission that we have a psychological weakness requiring the thought of God,

¹⁷ See Reinhold's letter to the education minister C. G. Voigt, Nov. 1786, in *Korrespondenzausgabe der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften/Karl Leonhard Reinhold*, vol. 1, *Korrespondenz 1773–1788*, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Eberhard Heller, and Kart Hiller (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann, 1983), 145–57.

¹⁸ See Schelling's letter to Hegel, 5 Jan. 1795, which claims that Kant's philosophy has only given the 'conclusions', for which the 'premisses' are still needed, in *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981), i. 13.

¹⁹ See Schelling's letter to Hegel, 5 Jan. 1795, 'all imaginable dogmas have been stamped as postulates of pure reason', in *Briefe von und an Hegel*, i. 13.

²⁰ 'The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism', in *The Emergence of German Idealism*, ed. Michael Baur and Daniel Dahlstrom (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 309–10.

or a God-like punishing and rewarding force, to ‘spur’ us on (see A 813/B 841). No wonder that Kant had to work very hard, in his 1786 ‘Orientation’ essay, to try to distinguish his concept of a *necessary need* of pure practical reason as such from anything like the contingent sensible drives or random desires for the supernatural that he took to be the starting point for the unacceptable position of figures such as Jacobi and his ally Wizenmann.

Instead of providing expository details and *direct support* for the moral argument at the center of its own interpretation of the Critical philosophy,²¹ the *Letters* introduces three quite different ways of indirectly building a case for Kant: historical, systematic, and commonsensical. First, Reinhold repeatedly illustrates the remarkable way in which Kant senses and responds to the most basic *needs of our age*, needs that must themselves be understood in the context of the *whole history* of human culture. This point reflects Reinhold’s deep methodological conviction that philosophies and religions in general must be assessed in terms of their historical responsiveness to the needs of reason in a particular era—a theme that the German Idealists, especially Hegel, would follow up on in great detail.

Secondly, Reinhold repeatedly hints that Kant has a deep and convincing general analysis of the *subjective structure of our faculties*, and that this analysis provides the hidden ‘inner grounds’ and technical authority needed for the Critical philosophy’s ‘scientific’ standing. The *Letters* assumes that it is only with absolutely firm grounds that philosophy can provide an effective program for achieving the kind of reliable practical ‘results’ needed to complete the Enlightenment and to resolve the perplexity created by the Pantheism Dispute. It is therefore no accident that several letters are devoted to the seemingly out of place topic of philosophy of mind. They claim that Kant introduces a theory of subjectivity that not only answers the specific problem of immortality but also provides the key for resolving the whole history of the mind–body problem and the main issues of epistemology. It is also no accident that, as noted earlier in regard to the foundational notion of mental representation, Reinhold soon realized that his own approach involved ideas going beyond Kant himself. The new suspicion of a lack of depth and clarity in Kant’s own account of the mind simultaneously led Reinhold to develop a more basic ‘Elementary-Philosophy’ and gave him a way to explain the *Critique’s* inability to gain full acceptance after all, even after the extraordinary impact of the initial version of the *Letters*.²²

Both of these points connect with the third general theme that concerns Reinhold—namely, the philosophical importance of the Enlightenment notion of common sense. Explicit respect for sound common sense is central to the

²¹ For a more discussion of some positive aspects of the moral argument, see Robert M. Adams, ‘Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief’, in C. F. Delaney (ed.), *Rationality and Religious Belief* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 116–40.

²² The very same type of argument was soon used by later thinkers to claim that Reinhold’s own program did not, and could not, succeed until its theory of subjectivity was fundamentally improved.

historical characterization of our own enlightened era, and it also provides a systematic standard for adequate theories of subjectivity, which should have premisses whose elements are immediately evident. Even apart from specific issues concerning history and mind, however, common sense has a general methodological value for Reinhold as an irreplaceable touchstone for any philosophy that aims to be morally responsible and properly popular and systematic.

In sum, while the broadly metaphysical project of a defense of core Christian doctrines—God and the soul—on the basis of a foundationalist version of a ‘Kantian’ science of subjectivity dominates the relatively familiar surface of the *Letters*, the articulation of this project is determined throughout by Reinhold’s much less well-known, and highly original, appreciation of the philosophical significance of historicity and common sense. For a long time, most post-Cartesian philosophers insisted that one must emphasize either historicity, like Herder and his followers (who model philosophy on art and interpretation), or systematicity, like Leibniz and his followers (who model philosophy on logic and math)—but *not both* at once. Although Reinhold had special respect for Herder and Leibniz, the *Letters* exhibits a new and immediately influential style of writing that aims at leading modern philosophy beyond the forced choice of either relativistic historicism or systematic ahistoricity. What makes Reinhold’s approach even more remarkable is the way that it is combined with a very strong respect for common sense, a respect that can easily seem incompatible with taking very seriously either history or traditional systematic philosophy, especially after the impact of modern science. Kant was an influence here, for, as Reinhold saw, the Critical philosophy is distinctive in aiming to do justice to common sense and philosophical systematicity together—but Kant severely criticized Herder and never incorporated history into his methodology in the fundamental way that Reinhold did.²³ Ironically, it was precisely the difficulties in the reception of Kant’s own writing that forced Reinhold eventually to insist all the more on a ‘historical turn’ in philosophy, and to stress a special hermeneutical perspective that is needed in order for us properly to appropriate the deep content of our philosophical past. Reinhold’s insight was that even systematic philosophers should incorporate a narrative method in the presentation of their views. In this way they can help their readers grasp the complex ‘fate’ that innovative philosophies undergo as they struggle to be understood and survive throughout the non-transparent dialectic of history, where progress initially occurs, as Hegel was to say, ‘behind the back of consciousness’.²⁴

All this explains why the titles and contents of the individual letters are very unlike what would be expected simply from considering the *Critique’s* table of

²³ See Reinhold’s path-breaking work on the topic of the history of philosophy, ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte: Eine Akademische Vorlesung’, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. G. G. Fülleborn (Züllichau and Freistadt: Fromann, 1791), 5–35. See below, Chs. 8 and 13.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, ‘Introduction’, in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 56.

contents and the reactions of its other readers. In place of long transcendental arguments about space, time, categories, and idealism, Reinhold's readers were treated to a short but very influential account of philosophy as all at once practical, historical, and scientific.²⁵

III. THE SITUATION OF PHILOSOPHY WITHIN THE LETTERS

Reinhold's prior encounter with the Enlightenment, Jacobi, and Kant manifests itself in the *Letters* as a historically framed defense of common sense, rational Christianity, and Critical subjectivity. Reinhold's Enlightenment orientation comes out most clearly in the First and Fourth Letters, which claim that the core doctrines of both the founder of Christianity and the *Critique's* 'Gospel of pure reason' are nothing other than the most appropriate responses of reason to the deepest needs of common sense (p. 121) in light of the historical situations in which these doctrines were introduced. The Second and Third Letters contend, more specifically, that the current era desperately needs an enlightened version of Christianity that secures God's existence as a postulate of moral reason and thus avoids the extremes of Jacobi's nonrationalism and Mendelssohn's dogmatism. The postulate of a future life, a topic that Kant himself never treats at length, surprisingly determines the Fifth through Eighth Letters, the whole second half of the work. The practical goal of satisfying the 'unified interests of morality and religion' turns out to depend on letting 'Critical grounds of cognition' supplant more traditional 'metaphysical' theories of the soul. The conclusion of the *Letters* is that only a Critical account of the functional interconnection of our spontaneous and receptive powers of subjectivity can provide a basic philosophical 'science' of our faculties that delivers us from the twin evils of 'spiritualism and materialism'.²⁶

All these concerns surface explicitly in the title of the First Letter, 'The Need for a Critique of Reason', a need that is spelled out further in the 1790 title in terms of the Reinholdian phrases 'spirit of the age', 'present state of the sciences', and 'universal reformation'. The words 'need', 'critique', and 'reason' point directly to Kant's claim that the Critical demonstration of restrictions on what is

²⁵ Despite their high-flown metaphysical language, the German Idealists largely followed Reinhold's pragmatic example in their methodology, although Schelling and Hegel had a very different reaction to Jacobi. Rather than rushing away from the thought of the all-determining 'world-whole' and insisting on free individuality, like Reinhold (and then Fichte), they explored the new option of giving this whole a human face, of showing that it has an *internal teleological* form, so that something like the highest good can be achieved *necessarily within* nature by a 'cunning of a reason' that need not be regarded as 'purely' practical.

²⁶ The German term *Geist* can be translated as 'mind' or 'spirit'. The former translation generally sounds better in English, but it is anachronistic in the context of the *Letters*. 'Mind' hides the relevant close connections with religious themes and terms such as 'spiritualism'.

determinable by pure theoretical reason is the prerequisite to conceiving a possible satisfaction of practical reason's fundamental 'need' to achieve the highest good.²⁷ Although the common-sense notion of just rewards (which is central to the ideal of the highest good) is not intrinsically historical, Reinhold's claim is that, at crucial turning points in our culture, our concern with this notion needed to be vividly stimulated by the moral visions of revolutionary religious figures (Jesus and his followers) and then metaphysically secured by a philosophy that properly defines the bounds of reason. The 'spirit of the age' in Germany in 1786 is defined by confusion about these points. Hence, the 'present state' of its philosophical 'science' requires a 'universal reformation' in order to overcome a fundamental misunderstanding about reason itself that is creating despair about the possible satisfaction of humanity's most basic interests.

The First Letter introduces this problem through a summary of worries that incline Reinhold's imaginary correspondent toward pessimism about the Enlightenment in Germany. Sharply conflicting results in metaphysics, especially about the existence of God, have led to 'indifference' about reason itself, despite the danger of increasing authoritarianism in politics and non-reasonable attitudes of superstition and non-belief in religion (pp. 99–105). Reinhold's optimistic reply is that conflicting metaphysical arguments do not by themselves nullify the possibility that reason has a proper and constant concern here, one that can be satisfied once it is reoriented back toward grounds that clearly have a chance for universal acceptance (pp. 105–9). As long as there is the possibility of a 'rational metaphysics' on such grounds, there may be an escape from the stale options of traditional metaphysics, which deals dogmatically with concepts alone, and 'hyperphysics', which makes claims about supernatural powers but lacks a universal base in intuition to back its claims (pp. 110–16). These extreme options can have a crucial historical role, however, as part of a teleology of reason, wherein reason's own 'expectations' disclose the shortcomings of past metaphysical attempts in a systematic way that indirectly points to the new kind of practical metaphysics that is needed now (pp. 117–22). Not surprisingly, precisely this kind of metaphysics is found in Kant's *Critique*, which Reinhold claims, contrary to other interpretations, is neither simply negative and 'all-crushing', nor dogmatic and 'neologistic'; it has positive 'results' that can be 'simply' explained and lead to philosophical and religious peace (pp. 123–7).

The Second Letter focuses on Kant's positive 'result' concerning the existence of God. Reinhold begins by noting that a significant sign of the power of reason may be found in the 'fact' that all cultures have affirmed God's existence. The present age, nonetheless, takes a very dim view of reason because traditional demonstrations of God now appear to be very weak, and so we seem to

²⁷ The crucial consideration here, which Reinhold does not explain, is that according to Kant the exact laws of nature, which necessarily structure our experience, are still compatible with our absolute freedom and immateriality, given the metaphysical ideality of space and time.

heading toward two bleak options: 'that reason must remove faith' or 'faith must be without reason' (pp. 129–31). Here again, the *Critique* points to the saving possibility, a 'rational faith' that escapes these options and meets the 'need of the age' for a stable system, while showing not only the weaknesses of traditional theoretical arguments for a personal God but also the 'impossibility' of any disproofs (including pantheism) of such a God's existence (pp. 132–3). By establishing the limits of theoretical reason and then making use of 'practical reason', Kant's position is like faith, for it invokes a non-theoretical ground (namely, moral demands) and affirms God, and it is also like reason in general, for it appeals to considerations that are necessary, universal, non-sensory, and systematic (pp. 134–5). Moreover, his approach reveals how reason, as practical, can satisfy not only philosophical experts but also the most common person, since morality is addressed to all (normal, mature) human beings as such, and can be appreciated even by those who lack special intelligence or skills. Reason thus shows a way even to heal class divisions, since the deepest ground of the Critical philosophy lies in an awareness that everyone can have of their own rational self, which is supposedly the same as the proper ground for the proof of God and as old and as universally accessible as common sense (pp. 136–7).²⁸ Instead of elaborating on exactly how the *Critique* argues from this ground, however, Reinhold turns to Kant's 1786 'Orientation' essay. It is here that Kant directly responds to the Pantheism Dispute by indicating that his moral argument for God provides an alternative to both Jacobi's supernatural anti-rationalism and Mendelssohn's theoretical rationalism. What Reinhold adds is a typical historical claim that these erroneous extremes were also very valuable, since their development helped to disclose the limits of what philosophy can accomplish within the old dogmatic orientations. Those who say that Jacobi is like Kant are right only in that both philosophers acknowledge some limits to theoretical demonstration. Much more important is the fact that Kant still relies on reason of a universal kind (moral), whereas Jacobi insists on going beyond rationality altogether through immediate and particular claims about the supernatural.²⁹ On the whole, Kant is more like Mendelssohn, who wisely insisted on relying on rational grounds but had too much confidence in theoretical as opposed to practical reason (pp. 138–41).

The Third Letter attends to the worry, motivated no doubt by Mendelssohn's concerns, that Kant's energetic efforts at 'toppling' old proofs of God can give the impression of a basically negative program. Reinhold's reply is that the *Critique*

²⁸ The most striking passage in this regard is in the Third Letter, where Reinhold calls the moral argument for God 'as intuitive and illuminating as the self-consciousness that a human being has of its rational nature' (pp. 30–1).

²⁹ This contrast is complicated by the fact that Jacobi, like Kant, contrasted the mere rationality of the understanding with the orientation toward the 'unconditioned' that is definitive of reason. They also both affirmed the distinctive need and power of reason to assert something 'unconditioned', but Kant, unlike Jacobi, insisted that this power can be properly exercised only through the means of universal practical reason.

not only affirms God but also achieves a general positive objective in showing how reason provides a 'ground of cognition' that secures the 'necessary relation of morality to religion' (pp. 3–5). Kant unifies morality and religion 'by the head', using an argument for God from pure practical reason to save an era endangered by 'morality without religion', whereas Jesus unified morality and religion 'by the heart', using an appeal to moral feeling and images of God as a loving and universal father to save an era endangered by 'religion without morality' (pp. 6–9).³⁰ The common democratic orientation of Jesus and Kant, which promises salvation to all as 'world citizens', is contrasted with the tyranny of the intervening 'orthodox' period, which is found not only in the elitism of the Roman church but also in strands of the Reformation tradition that stress theological claims at the expense of basic moral claims, or vice versa. Reinhold proposes an analogy: Kant's 'religion of pure morality' relates to genuine Christianity as, more generally, the true theory of morality relates to proper moral practice (pp. 10–14). This practical orientation is secured by the *Critique's* proof of the restricted nature of our faculties, which (if sound) undermines the claims of those who assume we have a speculative faculty for determining—or disproving—the existence of anything beyond the sensible world, by either mere concepts or alleged revelation (pp. 15–21). Here again, Reinhold does not pause to explain Kant's main grounds for the crucial 'restriction thesis'—namely, the *Critique's* controversial arguments for transcendental idealism.³¹ Instead, he quotes a long passage from the 'Orientation' essay, which argues that our rational moral conception of God is a 'first' condition that would have to be met by any purported intuition of the divine (pp. 22–6).³² After dismissing any purely theoretical cognition of the divine, Reinhold touts the systematic advantages of the Kantian moral cognition of God. It builds on the conceptual richness of traditional metaphysical approaches while being able—unlike such metaphysics—to affirm concrete individual existence, a result that hyperphysical appeals to intuition can reach only illegitimately (pp. 27–32). The last part of the letter places the moral argument for God in the context of a three-stage universal history of religion: first there was crude historical faith, then there was a crude theology of reason, involving hyperphysical or dogmatic claims, and now, in a third era, higher

³⁰ Hegel's early work on religion employed very similar ideas. See especially his *Early Theological Writings*, ed. T. M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

³¹ These arguments depend on very specific and complex claims about how we are limited in *all our determinate theoretical* knowledge by pure forms of space and time, forms that have to be understood as merely 'transcendentally ideal' and not applying at all to 'things in themselves' beyond sensible appearances. It is no accident that later Reinhold, as well as his successors, relied on 'shorter' and supposedly better arguments for 'idealism' that bypass Kant's specific considerations about space and time. This procedure helped to create considerable confusion about the structure of the *Critique's* main arguments and the meaning of its conclusions. See above, n. 10.

³² This may sound as if it is being allowed that we might have such an intuition, but Reinhold goes on to insist our intuition is sensible and finite, so we cannot have any intuition, and hence any theoretical cognition, that could demonstrate the existence of an infinite being.

forms of faith and reason are properly combined in Kant's pure moral religion (pp. 34–9). The main point of this story goes beyond religion; it exemplifies Reinhold's more general view that philosophical advances usually incorporate both historical and systematic approaches, and that this occurs through a process of dialectical development within the whole history of culture, which culminates in reason's reconstructive narrative of its own fulfillment.

This narrative approach is made explicit in the title of Reinhold's Fourth Letter, which concerns the 'previous course' of conviction in the postulates of God and immortality. Its first pages provide some of Reinhold's clearest statements about how these two 'articles of faith' show the harmony of Kant's 'systematic philosophy of religion'³³ with both common sense and historical tradition, since Jesus also 'rested content with the deliverances of common sense' in favor of these articles (pp. 117–21). Historical development is important nonetheless because in the infancy of Christianity a 'pure' reliance on moral considerations would have 'undermined conviction'. In the pre-Kantian world, intuitions and concepts were inadequately thematized, and so sensible intuitions were at first overly emphasized by common people just as, later, bare concepts were overly emphasized by philosophers (pp. 122–30). Reinhold's account of this process introduces what is perhaps one of the earliest explicit formulations of the alienation version of the 'projection' theory of religion (p. 132).³⁴ It explains belief in miracles and incomprehensible divine powers as a hypostatization of powers desired by our own weak reason, a reason that misunderstands its own systematic capacities by picturing them in external, authoritarian terms (pp. 131–4). Building on Jacobi's analysis, Reinhold describes this development in terms of another analogy: 'Rome' (dogmatic Catholicism) completes the alienated systematic development of hyperphysical thought just as Spinoza 'completes' the alienated systematic development of theoretical metaphysics (pp. 134–7). Reinhold regards Spinoza as the best of the traditional metaphysicians because he appreciates that a theoretical assertion of the existence of a divine person would require, like all such existence claims, intuition and not mere concepts. Reinhold sums up the perplexities of modern philosophy of religion in terms of its inevitable difficulties in trying to bring together the notions of (a) a necessary being and (b) the 'non-comprehensibility' of divine existence without yet appreciating (c) the command of practical reason. The advantages of relying on practical reason are that it does not try to prove God from concepts alone—and *in this sense* it allows that God's

³³ 'Philosophy of religion' is a common term today, but it seems to have been just coming into usage in Reinhold's time.

³⁴ Cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (Königsberg, 1792), §2, a work whose strategy closely parallels Reinhold's *Letters*. Reinhold's version of the theory already anticipates the dialectical twist of German Idealism, according to which extreme alienation is a fortunate process needed for the eventual reversals that lead to a deeper rational fulfillment and recovery of oneself through another.

existence is not 'comprehensible'—and yet it alone can show that God exists and the concept of a necessary being is instantiated (pp. 138–42).³⁵

The second basic 'article of faith', immortality, dominates the rest of the text, although only in the Fifth Letter is it discussed directly in relation to Kant's moral argument. Even there, Reinhold focuses on the context and results of Kant's postulate rather than the unusually unpersuasive argument for it, which is simply that pure practical reason demands that we believe that we have the opportunity to work toward the highest good in a way that is not limited by the mere natural course of human existence.³⁶ Once again Reinhold's main aim is to show how a basic idea of the *Critique* fits all at once the fundamentally historical, common-sensical, and systematic character of reason. He stresses that, even though the idea of some kind of an afterlife naturally occurs to common sense, history reveals that the 'pure' conception of an immortal soul is a relatively late development, one that first requires considerable time for the underlying notion of a mind/body distinction to be adequately developed (pp. 167–72). The first step in the process is simply the common-sense religious interest in a good or bad fate after death as a consequence of actions in this life. Once again, the second step is a dialectical development of extreme positions: bare historical and then bare metaphysical grounds for immortality assist in raising popular interest in the issue and in the tools of mere reason, but their inadequacy leads to the formulation of the moral argument (pp. 173–8). In a final clarification, Reinhold explains that the moral argument does not appeal in an improper way to the feelings of hope and fear, since it insists that first we must please God morally, and not in any manner that involves a hypocritical enslavement to our own passions or an external authority. The key idea is not, 'be good simply because there will be a reward later' (a motive that is futile because it would destroy one's goodness from the start), but 'because, and only because, you genuinely are striving to be good, you can hope for a proper reward later' (pp. 179–84).

The Sixth Letter attacks 'metaphysical grounds of cognition' for the doctrine of immortality. Although Reinhold's own view of this doctrine is in a sense also highly metaphysical in its presuppositions and implications, the main point that he intends to make is clear enough—namely, that traditional strictly theoretical arguments for immortality are highly problematic, especially after the *Critique*. Instead of displaying the full 'inner grounds' for this Kantian position, however, Reinhold once again calls attention to the benefits of its results: sound arguments from 'metaphysical' grounds alone would supposedly hurt, rather than promote,

³⁵ Unfortunately, Reinhold expresses this point simply by concluding, 'practical reason requires them to believe what they cannot comprehend' (Fourth Letter, 139).

³⁶ See Kant, A 827/B 855–6; and *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, eds. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and cf. the review of Kant's concern with immortality throughout his career in my *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), ch. 5.

the unity of religion and morality because they would make interest in morality unnecessary (pp. 68–70). The most complicated philosophical issues arise when Reinhold tries to specify exactly what can be theoretically said about the soul nonetheless, once we get beyond all the fallacies of the old metaphysics.³⁷ He allows that there is nothing ‘wrong’ about a theoretical use of the notion of the soul *if* it is simply meant to designate appearances that are not like those of ‘outer sense’ (pp. 70–2). This may seem to be a mere phenomenological point, but Reinhold goes on to give it a very strong meaning by suggesting that the fact the mind does not appear extended to us implies that it need not be subject to the processes of corruption to which bodies are vulnerable. It is unclear whether he takes this claim as *evidence* that our mind *cannot* in any way go out of existence, or rather as merely a ‘defensive’ way of saying that we do not *have* to say it must be corruptible simply because bodies are. Unlike Kant himself, Reinhold here does not invoke the doctrine of the transcendental ideality of bodies, and this also leaves it unclear exactly why he thinks that *we* must ultimately (theoretically, and not merely qua appearance) regard ourselves as beings that are not bodies.

I have shifted here from the question of what we should say about the ‘soul’ to what we should say about the ultimate nature of the ‘self’ precisely in order to raise the issue of the difference between the two notions. Much of the strength of Kant’s own position depends on keeping this distinction in mind, and on recognizing that even if the term ‘soul’ designates only a certain kind of temporal appearance that need not, or perhaps cannot, correspond exactly to a soul-substance of this distinctive mental kind ‘in itself’ (because nothing in itself is temporal), this still does not settle the question of our own ultimate nature. There were metaphysicians at the time—Kant and Reinhold call them ‘spiritualists’—who thought that our ultimate nature would have to be something like an indestructible simple mental being, a monad that is defined as a ‘spirit’ because it has higher rational powers *and* theoretically is demonstrably invulnerable to destruction. Reinhold reminds his readers (p. 76; as usual, the reference is not filled out or explicit) of a famous passage in the *Critique* which, among other things, challenges this spiritualist view by speaking about the ‘I (or he or it), the thing that thinks = x ’ (A 346). That is, even if the self, subject, or x that we are can definitely be said to exist in some way as more than ‘mere appearance’, this is *not* to say that there is any evidence yet that it is specifically a soul-substance or spirit. Reinhold obscures this point somewhat in saying that we ‘can call’ the soul ‘spirit’, or ‘simple’ or ‘substance’ (pp. 72–4) as long as we do not claim *thereby* to be able either to determine an object of outer sense within experience or to claim immortality beyond experience. This may be true, but it is an unfortunate way of putting things because it does not state a categorical denial of spiritualism,

³⁷ This is a difficult undertaking because of the complexity of the Paralogisms section of the *Critique*, which Kant went on to revise extensively in his second edition. See the Preface to the second edition of my *Kant’s Theory of Mind*.

which is, after all, one of the two main substantive points of the Critical theory of mind. Nor are matters helped when Reinhold adds that any mere metaphysical representation of the self is 'unimportant' and that, in any case, we 'know nothing' about this self (pp. 75–80). This way of putting things is also unfortunate, because it could lead one to forget that Kant implies we *do know* (theoretically) at least the very important truth that some kind of self exists and it *cannot be known* (theoretically) as spirit—and yet it also *cannot* be spatial or material in itself. This is the second main substantive point of the Critical theory of mind, one which Reinhold also endorses—namely, that 'materialism' or 'naturalism' must also be excluded.³⁸ Once again, instead of elaborating here on this highly controversial claim and Kant's crucial underlying arguments for it concerning transcendental idealism, Reinhold concludes by reiterating the practical advantages of Kant's moral argument.

The Seventh and Eighth Letters turn to the history of the concept of a simple thinking substance, and, in particular, the ways in which the ancient schools each emphasize one of the features of mind in a one-sided manner, thereby encouraging either materialism or spiritualism. The Critical theory, in contrast, avoids the extremes of a reduction of mind to body, or of body to mind. Its balanced theory of faculties of sensibility and understanding shows how the distinctive complexity and unity of the mind can be described without the introduction of a confusing plurality of souls, as in some ancient theories. Reinhold's account influenced the Plato scholars of his time, and its general strategy clearly had an effect on similar accounts of mind by the German Idealists. For today's readers, the main challenge of this section lies in determining exactly what Reinhold is saying about the finer points of Kant's own theory of mind.

Reinhold begins with the observation that the *Critique's* aim is to get beyond traditional debates on mind/body dualism by sharply distinguishing proper affirmations about different types of representations (inner/outer), and their apparent rules, from improper metaphysical claims about differences in 'things in themselves' (pp. 142–6). Note that this is a general methodological distinction that many philosophers (e.g., Brentano) might make without appealing to any of Kant's specific arguments for transcendental idealism. Reinhold follows Kant closely, however, in stressing that traditional metaphysical concepts such as simplicity and substance are not very informative with respect to the mind, whereas it is useful to think of it in functional terms, in terms of the 'power of thinking' and the faculties of sensibility and understanding (pp. 147–54). He also follows Kant in rejecting the materialist reduction of the epistemological features of receptivity to mere actions of the body (which could never account for pure forms of intuition), and in rejecting the spiritualist elevation of the active intellect to a demonstrably independent soul (pp. 155–65). Reinhold's final remarks put to

³⁸ See Kant, A 379, A 383, B 420, and *Prolegomena* §§46, 57; and cf. my *Kant's Theory of Mind*, 36.

rest two hypothetical objections to his historical account of ancient theories: that it gives too little attention to the role of the notion of the 'world soul', and that it underplays the possibility that ancient talk about a separate soul was merely figurative (pp. 247–55; 274–8).

Reinhold's main concern is to show specific ways in which the Kantian theory systematically improves on the four main ancient schools. The Epicurean, or 'psychological', theory has a model that is too passive and cannot explain laws generated by the spontaneity of the understanding. The Stoic, or 'moral', theory has a model that is too elevated and attributes causal powers to the intellect (e.g., to generate desires) that are really due to the senses. The Aristotelian, or 'logical', theory introduces an active intellect that remains mysteriously independent of the sensible realm. The Platonic, or 'metaphysical' theory improperly claims insight into the nature of the soul in itself (pp. 256–66). More generally, these theories make inner sense too much like understanding, as if mere passive awareness, even of one's self, could guarantee knowledge; or, they make outer sense too much unlike understanding, as if perception is merely a physical process and not already informed by the intellect.

It is right here, almost hidden away in the *Letters'* historical remarks, that one can find Reinhold's most perceptive theoretical observations on the Critical philosophy. Reinhold's final argument here nicely anticipates aspects of Kant's famous second edition Refutation of Idealism (B 274–9). Reinhold criticizes Greek philosophers who were hesitant to give the body an absolutely essential role in our epistemic processes because they assumed that our immortality could be secured only if it is attached to a soul that is always purely rational. They feared that any epistemological dependence on outer sense could make us metaphysically dependent on the physical domain. Kant's great breakthrough here is to work out a theory of knowledge that allows outer sense a central epistemic role without falling back into a naive 'myth of the given'. It thus does justice to what is best in materialism's motives, while also not identifying epistemic issues with the metaphysical issue of an existence possibly independent of bodies—and hence it can do justice to what is best in spiritualism's motives as well (pp. 267–73). Here again, Reinhold seems almost clairvoyant, since Kant did not explain this line of argument very clearly prior to the 1787 edition of the *Critique*. On this issue, whatever the other limitations of the *Letters*, Reinhold may have contributed not only to the promotion of Kant's popular reputation but also to the clarification of one of the most significant systematic advances within the Critical philosophy itself.

8

Reinhold on Systematicity, Popularity, and the Historical Turn

In other contexts. I have argued that Reinhold's unique insistence on closely combining the features of systematicity and popularity makes his philosophy especially important for anyone trying to understand and evaluate the major metaphilosophical options that have dominated modernity in the wake of Kant's Critical work.¹ On this occasion, I will be extending my argument by pointing out how these features are related to the pivotal role that Reinhold plays in the development of philosophy's specific relation to itself as an historical phenomenon, and I will go so far as to propose that he is the best candidate for the honor of being regarded as the prime inaugurator, or at least the major catalyst, of the momentous 'historical turn' that western philosophy has taken in the last two centuries. My observations on his metaphilosophical position on this crucial point will take a circular path through three main steps. First, I will provide some introductory terminological clarifications to indicate what I mean here by the general question of the relation of philosophy to history. Secondly, I will review the overall context of Reinhold's work on this topic in the pivotal Jena years of transition from Kant to German Idealism proper. In a third and final section, I will discuss more closely a few specific Reinhold texts, with an eye to drawing conclusions about how their virtues and limitations might help us to understand our own relation to the phenomenon of a 'historical turn'.

I. ON PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY

Put most simply, the 'general question' I have in mind is: When, how, and why did philosophy become fundamentally historical in its approach? This question has an obvious and perhaps strange-sounding presumption, namely that in fact philosophy has become 'fundamentally historical'—a presumption that itself implies a prior controversial claim, namely, that there was some earlier time in which philosophy was not 'fundamentally historical'. Stated so boldly, these

¹ See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 'Introduction', and ch. 2.

presumptions can be easily challenged, and in fact I will not be concerned with trying to defend them in a universal form. Instead, I will be concentrating on a more limited claim and will be using the term ‘philosophy’ largely as a shorthand for a particular European tradition that I assume is easily identifiable—even if it is hard to define and need not be taken to be co-extensive with everything that might understandably be called philosophy. In other words, I concede that, for most Anglophone analytic philosophers, philosophy ‘proper’ is still supposed to be something quite distinct from the history of philosophy.² Moreover, it can be granted that, even in earlier periods, the term ‘philosophy’—at least in English, and in the context of phrases such as ‘natural philosophy’—has meant something like the study of physics, or natural phenomena, in a way that can have very little to do with history at all, let alone the history of philosophy in particular. Nonetheless, there remains, in contrast to all this, a mainline historical and continental tendency that I believe has been dominant since precisely Reinhold’s Jena period, and that consists in thinking of philosophy as primarily a ‘conversation’, to use the remarkable and ever more influential phrase that Hölderlin bequeathed to Heidegger, Gadamer, and Rorty (‘Since we are a conversation. . .’ (*‘Seitdem wir ein Gespräch sind. . .’*)).

On this view, philosophy in its core is not a mere problem-solving enterprise or an impersonal strictly scientific discipline. It is rather an ongoing tradition-centered and highly personal activity, one in which the stress is not so much on offering straightforward answers to ‘eternal questions’ as on finding a new kind of voice, raising radically new questions, and putting the writings of one’s predecessors into a hitherto unsuspected light. In an analogous sense, one might say, for example, that Lacan and Foucault and Jung were all ‘conversing’ with Freud, and not simply refuting or improving upon him in the way that a twentieth-century physicist might correct the claims of nineteenth-century physics. Similarly, one might say that Beckett was conversing with Joyce, and Joyce with Dante and Homer, and that truly understanding the later writers requires some appreciation of ways in which they incorporated ‘strong’ readings of their main predecessors.³

These are familiar ideas, but note that, for all that has been said so far, the ‘conversational’ or dialogical, psychological, and social dimensions of writing have not yet been characterized in a way that shows a fundamental historicity must be involved.⁴ To say that a work arises in a context and must be understood essentially in relation to its conversational predecessors, and in relation to

² For arguments that even analytic philosophy should be and is becoming more historical, see above, Ch. 1.

³ This idea has been emphasized by Harold Bloom and utilized by Richard Rorty. See especially Rorty, ‘Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism’, in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 139–59.

⁴ The phenomenon of a turn to history in contemporary analytic philosophy is explored in Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Of the positions discussed there, my own view is closest to Alasdair MacIntyre’s insofar as he emphasizes very deep differences between philosophical traditions as well as the need

the fact that it itself will be a predecessor of later works that will approach it in a similar way, is still not quite to say that history in any special sense need be involved. When people write to and talk with one another in a complicated interrelated way over an extended period, this in fact involves what are obviously different points in time, but, unless more is said, there may be nothing fundamentally historical going on, for the conversation might be just as well conceived, or reimagined, as occurring almost all at once in one large room. In other words, as I understand it, a 'fundamental' historical dimension in a conversation requires more than simply the fact that there is a plurality of intersecting approaches extended over time. It requires, at the least, a sense that there exist deep distinctions between very different eras, and that, even though these eras are not totally cut off from one another, they connect with one another in an essentially diachronic way that involves particular restrictive kinds of order and gaps in influence (hence, Hölderlin's key term, 'Since' (*Seitdem*)). On this understanding, 'history' requires a unique kind of segmentation and distance, and, although the differences in its eras might in some ways be analogous to distinctions between cultures spread out geographically or socially, they also have to be related in special ways that cannot be assumed to be understandable simply in terms of such distinctions. Germany (or even Rome), for example, is in this sense not something simply to the north and west of 'Greece', and its culture is not something that simply includes ideas that Greece was familiar with plus an extra set of ideas of its own. The crucial thing is that, in its core, Germany has an understanding of itself as not only other than but also as later than and dependent on Greece, and as faced, in an essentially asymmetric way, with inescapable historical decisions concerning, for example, what it alone can choose to incorporate, what it suspects that it can never recover, and what it does not even want to try to preserve from the earlier culture.

All these points about historicity concern culture and conversation in a general sense, but to apply them specifically to philosophy it must be added, at the least, that the historicity of a philosophical conversation needs to be tied to diversity of not just any sort but one that involves basic conceptual orientations. I add the term 'basic' here because I will be understanding philosophy as always involving some consideration of distinctive a priori components, and hence I am going to be focusing on a paradigmatic form of 'fundamentally historical' philosophy that remains philosophy in a fairly 'hard' sense, and that does not deconstruct itself into a form of relativistic historicism.⁵ Philosophy in this sense, in contrast to culture in general, can be said to involve a self-understanding of

and possibility of finding rational ways to mediate these differences. See especially his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

⁵ This approach is common to the age. See, for example, an early discussion by Schelling concerning the possibility of a 'philosophy of history' that argues against it on the ground that philosophical knowledge is a priori and historical knowledge is not. See the subsection 'Ist eine

its enterprise as conceptual and basic in a way that involves being 'pure' as well, and thus, like genuine science, as aimed at transcending time and all specific culture in some manner, despite the central fact of its own peculiar historicity. This means that I am precisely not advocating a form of philosophy as historical conversation that assumes we can only understand earlier eras as 'different' and cannot evaluate them as worse or better than us, or even as right or wrong simpliciter. In other words, I will be working with the hypothesis that we do understand a distinction between the ways in which Lacan might be influenced by Freud, or Joyce by Dante, and the ways that a twentieth-century genuinely philosophical theory might be influenced, positively or negatively, by a nineteenth-century or medieval predecessor (e.g. Heidegger by Brentano or Thomas). In the cases that are not clearly philosophical, we can say the later writer used earlier material to do many new and unanticipated things that need not be understood as meant to invalidate what the earlier writer was attempting. In the philosophical cases, however, a large part of the work implicit even in writing that contains very few explicit historical references can turn out to be best understood as intended precisely as a 'destruction' or 'overcoming' of the main conceptual claims of earlier philosophic eras.⁶

In this way, even a historically oriented philosophy can be understood as an enterprise 'just like science but different'. It is like science in that it also aims at a progressive revelation of basic truth, and not merely at 'letting a thousand flowers bloom', however they want, or however it is that the longer lasting ones 'win' by mere natural conversational dominance, or by simply changing the subject. Thus, like science, philosophy inevitably aims at some refutation of the claims of earlier eras. At the same time, it can be unlike normal science in holding that its own progress essentially requires something like a personal encounter with historical conceptual formations, and even a partial dependence on them in a way that it need not imagine ever being able totally to escape.

II. THE CONTEXT OF REINHOLD'S HISTORICAL WORK

So much for an introductory clarification of the terms 'fundamental', 'historical', and 'philosophical' in the general question I posed at the beginning. The remainder of this question had to do with the 'when, how, and why' of the historical turn in philosophy. If one is at all willing to grant that there is such a

Philosophie der Geschichte möglich?', in 'Allgemeine Übersicht der neuesten philosophischen Literatur', *Philosophisches Journal*, 8 (1797–8), repr. in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart/Augsburg, 1856), i. i. 465–73.

⁶ A related possibility is that a historically oriented philosophy can aim at defending rather than overturning an earlier philosophy, but this project becomes most interesting when it also involves overcoming intervening philosophical positions that have blocked appreciation of the earlier tradition.

turn, it may be tempting to place it somewhere before or after Reinhold's time. But my hypothesis is that Reinhold stands at precisely the main turning point here, so my main question will be: If that is when the turn takes place, why and how does it occur in Reinhold's work and its immediate aftermath? Before trying to answer that question, however, it may help to disclose my reasons for not preferring earlier answers to the 'when' question.

Consider the alternative view that the historical turn occurred before Reinhold. Given the overtly anti-historical direction and enormous influence of Descartes's work (whatever indirect historical influences he may have remained subject to himself, and despite the impressive historical considerations of figures such as Leibniz and Gassendi⁷), it would be very hard to argue for such a turn taking hold prior to at least the early eighteenth century. For a long time this century, understood basically as the movement of the Enlightenment, was thought of as an era that was fundamentally anti-historical in its philosophical orientation, as a mere casting-off, as with Descartes, of earlier influences. More recently, this interpretation has lost its dominance, and it has become more and more obvious that the Enlightenment is not the one-sided, pure, and rational movement that its later opponents presumed.⁸ Not only was there much work in the early and middle part of the century that was oriented heavily toward history (e.g., Gibbon, Vico, Winckelmann, Heyne, and Voltaire), but even major systematic philosophers such as Hume gave the historical dimension of human culture extensive and direct attention. Nonetheless, it cannot be concluded that these figures were responsible for a global appreciation of fundamental historicity. Either the radical elements of their work were not taken up immediately by others (e.g., Vico), or the historical form of their discussions turned out to be the expression of an underlying ultimately non-historical conception of human nature and philosophical method (e.g., Hume).

In contrast, in other strands of the eighteenth century (all too crudely designated by the term 'anti-enlightenment'), and in particular in the works of Lessing, Hamann, Herder, and others in the (later) mid-eighteenth-century German world, it can be argued that there arose a new orientation in philosophic writing that was all at once genuinely historical, well developed, and influential. This movement, however, precisely by being so radically opposed to the main-line academic tradition in philosophy, still cannot be said to have taken on a leading position in its own time (even though its historicist ideas did become dominant in the era of Dilthey, Nietzsche, and after), and thus to have initiated a truly overarching 'historical turn' within philosophy itself. Kant's harsh treatment of his own former student, Herder, is a clear sign of historicism's maverick

⁷ See Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁸ An influential early expression of this 'new' reading of the Enlightenment can be found in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969).

position during the remarkably short but crucial period of the clear dominance of Kant's own philosophy.⁹ (This was, incidentally, a period that lasted barely past the 1780s; the *Critique* began the decade, but by its end Reinhold's own *Elementarphilosophie* had achieved vanguard status, and soon Fichte's call for an idealism that would leave the dead 'letter' of the *Critique* behind had become triumphant.) Of course, it might be argued—as Foucault suggested in his treatment of the essay 'What is Enlightenment?'¹⁰—that Kant himself brings about the historical turn, for he is manifestly concerned with drawing attention to the special axis point within history that is occupied by his whole era, as 'the age of critique'¹¹—and with stressing the defining role that philosophy (and especially his own work) plays in relation to the character of the era. It also cannot be denied that in numerous significant essays Kant developed a complex historical account of human social evolution that was crucial to his moral, political, religious, and anthropological theory,¹² and that he even began and ended the *Critique* with observations directly concerning its place in philosophical history.¹³ Nonetheless, it surely would take a very extensive revisionist argument to dislodge the common and proper thought that Kant is a fundamentally nonhistorical thinker, an anti-Herder, who sees himself as developing a final system that will put metaphysics once and for all on a fully scientific path that will require no fundamental corrections or continuing historical investigations (it is revealing that Kant did not want even his own 'pre-Critical' works remembered).

Similar reasoning can make it look as if Reinhold would be the least promising Idealist to study as the initiator of 'the historical turn', for he seems even more taken by the ideal of a final system than was Kant himself. The whole idea of the Elementary-Philosophy and the project of a philosophy resting on a single transparent 'Grundsatz' would seem to presume that philosophy can and should seek a ground with an ever accessible certainty that would make all historical considerations irrelevant and distracting. And, as I myself have argued elsewhere, a very natural way to approach Reinhold's major early Jena works is precisely as attempts to simplify the Critical philosophy so that it could all the more quickly achieve the necessary, final, and non-historical form that Kant's own work aimed at but appeared to miss simply because of incidental complications in its mode of exposition.

⁹ See the discussion of Kant and Herder in John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Michael N. Forster, 'Introduction', in *Johann Gottfried von Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii–xli.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

¹¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface, A xi.

¹² See Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chs. 6–9. Cf. Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Pauline Kleingeld, *Fortschritt und Vernunft: Zur Geschichtsphilosophie Kants* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995).

¹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A ix–xi, and A 852/B 880–A 856/B 894.

The crucial technique that Reinhold employed in order to attempt to reach his ends was to build a philosophy that could simultaneously claim full popularity as well as systematicity. He sought a foundation that is *allgemeingeltend*, and not simply *allgemeingültig*—that is, one that is so immediately clear that it can be said to be already generally acknowledged, and not warranted simply by esoteric conclusions that can be seen only once the whole system is developed.¹⁴ In following this technique, Reinhold might be characterized as moving, as Hartmut Kuhlmann has recently argued, to try to extend the most basic structure of Kant's practical philosophy, the doctrine of the 'Faktum der Vernunft', to philosophy in general.¹⁵ If systematic moral philosophy can be understood as the exposition of the implications of a basic 'popular' position (see the title of the first section of Kant's *Groundwork (Grundlegung)*)—the claim of a unique categorical imperative, something that supposedly is already clearly present in the mind of every rational agent—then perhaps systematic philosophy in general can be presented as the mere exposition of the single fundamental proposition of a rational subject as such—that is, the *Satz des Bewußtseins*.

All this adds up to an obvious problem for my initial proposal: given the Elementary-Philosophy's seemingly very non-historical program, as well as Reinhold's general Leibnizian and Enlightenment rationalist background, how can 'the historical turn' be connected with Reinhold, of all writers? The answer lies in recognizing that most of Reinhold's extensive writing was in fact devoted not to developing a pure system but rather to facing up explicitly to explaining widespread problems in the reception of the supposedly undeniable Critical philosophy, problems that forced him time and again to explain that philosophy not in relation to an alleged transparent and eternal foundation but instead primarily in the context of specific historical problems that generated its need and delayed its success. Here it is very important to remember that the occasion for Reinhold's career- and epoch-making work, his *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie (Letters on the Kantian Philosophy)* (1786–7), was nothing other than the incomprehension that greeted Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Everyone at first had a sense that the *Critique* was a very important book, but even the greatest geniuses of the age admitted that they could not follow it, or could not accept it where they could follow it. The enormous popularity ('popularity' in the double sense of a wide readership and a lowering of the level of argument) of the *Briefe*

¹⁴ See Hartmut Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus. Ein kritischer Versuch* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzlar, 1993), 46, citing Reinhold, *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen: Erster Band, das Fundament der Elementarphilosophie betreffend* (Jena: Mauke, 1790), i. 150: 'Ich nenne ihn [den Grundsatz] . . . nicht bloss allgemeingültig, das heisst einen solchen, der von jedem, der ihn versteht, als wahr befunden wird, sondern allgemeingeltend, das heisst einen solchen, der von jedermann verstanden wird.' This theme is emphasized in my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, and my paper for the first Reinhold Kongress, 'Reinhold's Challenge: Systematic Philosophy for the Public', in Martin Bondeli and Alessandro Lazzari (eds.), *Die Philosophie Karl Leonhard Reinholds* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2003), 77–103.

¹⁵ Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus*, 50.

provided a deep but very temporary sense of relief for this problem. Soon thereafter, Reinhold himself felt obliged to present the Critical philosophy again in an even clearer form expressed by a new system of his own; in other words, we have here the beginning of the process—repeated frequently in the course of the works of German Idealism and its many indirect successors in the following decades and centuries—of an unceasing series of revisions aimed at making a supposedly transparent new and popular philosophy understandable at all to a half-fascinated, half-confounded public.

It is revealing that the Preface to Reinhold's first system (*Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (*Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation*) (1789)) was entitled 'Über die bisherigen Schicksale der Kantischen Philosophie' ('On the Prior Fate of the Kantian Philosophy')—in other words, its explicit starting point was still the problem of the very mixed reception of supposedly the most enlightened philosophy of the age, the philosophy that should have been capable of setting everyone easily onto the path of pure and never-to-be reversed reason. It is also revealing that one of Reinhold's next works was entitled 'Fragmente über das bisher allgemein verkannte [!] Vorstellungs-Vermögen' ('Fragments on the Previously Universally Misunderstood Faculty of Representation') (1789)—in other words, he recognized that his own new Elementary-Philosophy was immediately suffering the same unpopular fate as the illustrious predecessor it was meant to rescue.¹⁶ A remarkable number of Reinhold's astonishingly many works in these years had similar explicitly historical titles: 'Über den Geist unsres Zeitalters in Teutschland' ('On the Spirit of our Age in Germany') (1790; reprinted in part as the First Letter of the book edition of the *Briefe*, v. 1), 'Grundlinien zur Geschichte der Idee eines Geistes' ('Outlines concerning the History of the idea Spirit') (1790 = Tenth Letter, the first book edition of the *Briefe*, v. 1), *Beiträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen* ('Contributions to the Correction of Previous Misunderstandings of Philosophers') (vol. i, 1790), 'Systematische Darstellung aller bisher möglichen Systeme der Metaphysik' ('Systematic Presentation of all Heretofore Possible Systems of Metaphysics') (1794), and *Beiträge zur leichteren Übersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie bey dem Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts* ('Contributions to a more Convenient Survey of the State of Philosophy at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century') (vol. i, 1801).

Three other publications are especially clear in their historical orientation. The second volume of the *Briefe* (1792) consists in large part of pairs of essays, the first of which treats the widespread disagreement on a specific problem dealt with by pre-Critical approaches ('Concerning Previous Discord'), while the second treats

¹⁶ See the extremely helpful reference work by Alexander von Schönborn, *Karl Leonhard Reinhold: Eine annotierte Bibliographie* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991).

an allegedly definitive answer to this problem given by the Critical approach ('Concerning Future Accord'). Another essay along this line (and one the very occasion of which provides evidence for the phenomenon of what I have called 'the historical turn') is Reinhold's contribution to 'What Real Progress has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff' (1796; Kant and Maimon also drafted essays on this topic; Reinhold's was co-published with the essays of Schwab and Abicht). But perhaps most important of all is an essay that appears to be the first in the mainline Idealist tradition to deal directly with the issue of the history of philosophy as such: 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie' ('On the Concept of the History of Philosophy') (1791).¹⁷

I will be giving details of this essay special attention for obvious reasons, but first it should be reiterated that its explicitly historical and metaphilosophical title must be understood not as an exception but rather as just another sign of Reinhold's general overriding concern with historical issues, a concern that goes back to the very beginning of his career.¹⁸ In his pre-Jena period, his many incidental Enlightenment-oriented essays sharply juxtaposed advanced and outdated social institutions; his constant theme was the changes that the new era would bring with it and the confusing mix of recalcitrant old views that would have to be sorted out.¹⁹ The divisiveness of the era's traditions, which he experienced vividly in his own life as a former priest fleeing from Catholic Vienna to Protestant Jena (via Leipzig and Weimar), was clearly his main concern when he came to read Kant. At the forefront of his mind was not the pure topic of representation as such, with which he has been unfairly identified in textbooks ever since, but rather the 'needs' of the age in which he lived, the deep historical intellectual divisions that he felt within it, and the promise of a salvation from discord through Critical idealism; hence the title of the very first of his *Briefe*: 'Bedürfnis einer Kritik der Vernunft' ('on the Need for a Critique of Reason') (1786, first published, like many of his essays, in *Der neue Teutsche Merkur*). As he explained in a letter to Voigt, the aim of the *Briefe* was 'to make vivid the most striking results of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and to exhibit these results in connection with external grounds taken from the current state of philosophy and the most pressing scholarly and moral needs of our age—and not from incidental matters or Kant's works . . . to make [them] more appealing in style and

¹⁷ Reinhold, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte: Eine Akademische Vorlesung', in (ed.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. G. G. Fülleborn, 5–35; repr. in (and cited here from) Reinhold, *Auswahl vermischter Schriften*, i (Jena: Maukes 1796), 207–45. For this reference and many other stimulating points I am indebted to Robert Piercey, 'Truth in History: The Crisis in Continental Philosophy of the History of Philosophy', dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2001.

¹⁸ Thus Karl Rosenkranz remarked of Reinhold: 'Da er nun von jeher historisch zur Philosophie gekommen war . . . ' (*Geschichte der Kant'schen Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1840; repr. Berlin, 1987), 333).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Reinhold, 'Thoughts on Enlightenment' (1784), trans. Kevin Geiman, in *What is Enlightenment?*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 65–77.

language for beginning thinkers.²⁰ Similarly, when Reinhold presented his own Elementary-Philosophy, he defended it immediately with an essay entitled ‘Über das Bedürfnis, die Möglichkeit, und die Eigenschaften eines allgemeingeltenden ersten Grundsatzes der Philosophie’ (‘On the Need [NB], the Possibility, and the Characteristics of a Universally Accepted First Principle of Philosophy’) (*Beiträge zur Berichtigung* (1790), ch. ii). It is clear that he took his unique mix of popular and systematic philosophy to be the essential cure for the central problems of his era, indeed of human history as such: ‘I believe the one thing necessary for philosophy is a universally accepted principle . . . and the need for this has never been so great as now . . . when a principled way of thinking has more than ever attained a decisive influence on the weal and woe of humanity.’²¹

Given all this evidence, it turns out to be appropriate to understand Reinhold’s project as rooted, after all, most basically in a constant and explicit attempt to confront the chaotic character of philosophy as a historical enterprise. Reinhold’s distinctive repeated tracts on the mixed ‘fate’ of philosophy reflect very naturally the fact of his unusual sensitivity to the breadth and variety of philosophical traditions, his burning desire to present Kant’s philosophy precisely as a definitive answer to this historical diversity, and then his disconcerting experience of repeatedly finding the effect of Kant’s and his own supposedly self-evident philosophy undermined by the same disagreement of interpretations that afflicted previous philosophy. All this might be considered an incidental development in the career of a second-level philosopher—were it not for the fact that we now have clear evidence that the style and focus of Reinhold’s innovative historical approach to philosophy had an immediate impact on his extraordinarily influential successors, and that, despite many limitations and misunderstandings, it shaped a widespread appreciation of a new and fundamental interconnection of philosophy and history.

Since the very close (and dependent) relation of Fichte to Reinhold is relatively well known,²² in this context it may be most useful to emphasize that Reinhold’s specifically historical considerations were extremely relevant to the most important early works of Schelling and Hegel as well. Hartmut Kuhlmann has reminded us that one of Schelling’s very first essays (‘specima

²⁰ Karl Leonhard Reinhold. *Korrespondenzausgabe der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften/Karl Leonhard Reinhold*, Vol. i. *Korrespondenz 1773–1788*, ed. Reinhold Lauth, Ebeshard Heller, and Kurt Hiller (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann, 1983), cited in Horst Schröpfer, ‘Karl Leonhard Reinhold—sein Wirken für das allgemeine Verständnis der “Hauptresultate” und der “Organisation des Kantischen Systems”’, in Norbert Hinske, Erhard Lange, and Horst Schröpfer (eds.), *Der Frühkantianismus an der Universität Jena von 1785–1800 und seine Vorgeschichte* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 104.

²¹ Reinhold, i. 91, cited in Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus*, 44.

²² See my ‘Kant, Fichte, and Short Arguments to Idealism’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 72 (1990), 63–85; also in *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 3. For more on Fichte’s background and his sensitivity to his historical situation, see Anthony J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

1', now lost, from his schooldays in Tübingen) was directly on Reinhold: 'Über die Möglichkeit einer Philosophie ohne Beinamen, nebst einiger Bemerkungen über die Reinholdschen Elementarphilosophie' (1792) ('On the Possibility of a Philosophy without Surname, with some Remarks on the Reinholdian Elementary-Philosophy').²³ It seems clear that in the *Stift* Schelling knew directly of treatments of Reinhold's project by Abel and Flatt, and that the Elementary-Philosophy was in the center of the most advanced philosophical discussions in Tübingen.²⁴ It is no wonder then that Schelling's extensive 1797/8 essay 'Allgemeine Übersicht der neuesten philosophischen Literatur' can be taken as a variation, directed against the whole Reinhold Kantian school, of Reinhold's own genre. (This essay is an extremely important and all too neglected work, for it gives Schelling's immediate assessment of the whole era and prefigures his own best-known system. It appeared in eight issues of the *Philosophisches Journal* and was later modified and renamed 'Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre'.²⁵) Its message is that the disputes among Kant's immediate followers reveal not a new Critical harmony but rather a deep discord and an out-of-date metaphysical view that has to be transcended by a new speculative idealism, a genuine historical philosophy of 'spirit'.²⁶ This philosophy no longer claims to present itself in a self-evident 'popular' foundation but rather systematically incorporates the diversity of historical viewpoints in a detailed and dynamic fashion. This work already contains the germs of the key idea (also intimated by Fichte) of a progressive series of 'epochs of the history of self-consciousness' that appears in Schelling's major work, *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800, Part Three), and then, more famously and in an even more historical form, in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. What is crucial here is that not only is philosophical history, or the general development of human knowledge, for the first time integrated into the very center of the dominant philosophy of an age, but it is also the case that the dialectical interaction between this philosophy and its immediate predecessors has become an essential part of

²³ Kuhlmann, *Schellings früher Idealismus*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 57.

²⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols. ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1856), I. i. 345–473. See Kuhlmann's analysis, *Schellings früher Idealismus*, 189–279, and his reference, 212–13, to the notion of a 'pragmatische Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes', in Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in J. G. Fichte: *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans L. Gliwitsky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962–), I. ii. 365, and Maimon, in 'Über die Progressen der Philosophie' (1792), in *Salomon Maimons Streifereien in Gebiete der Philosophie* (Berlin, 1793), 1–58, and 'Pragmatische Geschichte des Begriffs von Philosophie, und Beurtheilung der neuern Methode zu philosophiren', *Philosophisches Journal*, 6 (1797), 150–81. See also Rolf-Peter Horstmann, 'The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling' in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132–4.

²⁶ Kuhlmann notes Schelling's innovative use of this term here (*Schellings früher Idealismus*, 189), although the term may already have been used in a somewhat similar sense in Reinhold, 'Über den Geist unsres Zeitalters in Deutschland', *Der neue Teutsche Merkur*, 1 (1790), 225–55.

the systematic exposition of philosophy itself. Whereas before it might have been an open question, for example, as to how much Kant actually read of his main predecessors (Berkeley, Leibniz, Hume; in general it is notable that, with the exception of a few occasions, Kant rarely commented directly on philosophers of his own era), such a question has now become unthinkable; a central feature of philosophical writing has become the imperative of directly responding to, incorporating, and transcending the claims of one's immediate predecessors (while also situating them in relation to their predecessors).

All these developments become even more evident in Hegel's *Differenzschrift* (1801), an essay that marks his official Jena debut, prefigures all his later work, and picks up directly on the historical theme of the 'Bedürfnis' for philosophy (its first two subsections are entitled, 'Geschichtliche Ansicht philosophischer Systeme' ('Historical View of Philosophical Systems') and 'Bedürfnis der Philosophie' ('The Need of Philosophy')). This essay is best known as Hegel's *Auseinandersetzung* with Fichte and Schelling, his way of giving notice that they—and Kant as well—are but essentially one-sided steps on the way to the true philosophy, Hegel's own implicit grand synthesis, which will go beyond both Fichte and Schelling. The immediate occasion for the essay, however, and the explicit focus of its first and last pages, is none other than the view of the history of philosophy offered in Reinhold's *Beyträge zur leichtern Uebersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie bey dem Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts* (vol. i, 1801). The themes of this essay provide a convenient starting point for reconsidering the effect of Reinhold's work and its role, in little more than a decade, in making history the central topic of the new age of philosophy.

III. REINHOLD'S HISTORICAL TURN

The main issue here has little to do with the specific charges that Hegel makes about various ways in which Reinhold supposedly misunderstood Fichte and Schelling, and even Kant and himself. The first key point is simply that, from the very beginning, Hegel makes clear that it is precisely Reinhold's apparent confusion ('Verwirrung') about the philosophical state of the era that is the main occasion for the *Differenzschrift* itself (Preface, first paragraph). In Hegel's colorful language, the 'external occasion' for his work is the 'need of the time and . . . a bit of flotsam in time's stream, namely Reinhold's *Contributions*'.²⁷ More specifically—just as Reinhold had regarded Kant, and then his own work as misunderstood by the very age that it was bringing to clear expression—Hegel

²⁷ Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen systems der Philosophie in Beziehung auf Reinhold's Beyträge zur leichteren Übersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie zu Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 1stes Heft* (Jena: Seidler, 1801; repr. Hamburg: Meiner, 1962), 5; *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1977), 77–195, at 82.

begins with the assumption that Fichte's work had come both to define the epoch and to have undergone a misunderstanding indicative of not only an immaturity in the epoch but also a systematic one-sidedness in its version of idealism, a problem requiring immediate repair. The *Differenzschrift*, of course, has a repair ready to offer: the new 'speculative' idealism of an 'absolute' that combines under itself both the 'subjective subject-object' of Fichte's system of reflexion and the 'objective subject-object' of Schelling's just developed philosophy of nature.²⁸ Hegel contrasts his own systematic approach with that of a mere 'historical view' on prior philosophies, which reduces each of them to a 'dead opinion' and treats them 'merely as different modes [of doing philosophy] and purely idiosyncratic views'.²⁹ He makes it very clear that the prime object of his mocking discussion is Reinhold's view that '[the goal is] to penetrate more profoundly than ever into the spirit of philosophy, and to develop the idiosyncratic views of one's predecessors . . . further. Only if this sort of information concerning previous attempts to solve the problem of philosophy were available can the attempt succeed.'³⁰

The appeal of Hegel's objections to Reinhold here rests largely on two points that are obviously significant but that are also such that it seems inconceivable Reinhold did not actually appreciate them. On the one hand, Hegel characterizes Reinhold's approach as trivializing earlier philosophical efforts, as working from 'an elevation so pure and so sickening' that earlier systems appear as nothing more than 'preparatory exercises or mental confusions'.³¹ On the other hand, Hegel presumes that Reinhold remains so caught in his own 'peculiarity' of historical minutiae and preparatory studies ('in the founding and grounding concern'³²) that he is blind to the eternal truths of reason that philosophy can disclose: 'otherwise it [the history of philosophy] will not give us the history of the one eternal Reason, presenting itself in infinitely many forms; instead it will give us nothing but a tale of accidental vicissitudes of the human spirit and senseless opinions.'³³

It is easy enough to respond directly to these severe objections. All of Reinhold's work—and especially, as we will see, his essay on the history of

²⁸ *Difference*, 82. ²⁹ *Ibid.* 85, 86, 88.

³⁰ Reinhold, *Beiträge*, 5–6, cited by Hegel at *Difference*, 86. Cf. *ibid.* 87: 'The preceding philosophical systems would at all times be nothing but practice studies for the big brains.' A further assault on Reinhold is developed in a harsher tone in a separate section at the end of the essay 'On Reinhold's View and Philosophy', 94–113. There is some warrant for Hegel's remarks in the fact that Reinhold makes some mocking remarks himself about speculative idealism, saying that Fichte and Schelling may each be conflating the pure I with their own 'peculiar' I, but this is not a typical tone in Reinhold, and in any case he is on to a real problem in asking about the idealists' warrant for their claim to having a 'transcendental intuition'

³¹ *Difference*, 88. ³² *Ibid.* 88; cf. *ibid.* 182, 192.

³³ *Ibid.* 114. See the typical Hegelian comment of H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts (Jena 1801–6)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 52: 'Faced with Reinhold's conception of the history of philosophy as a series of uniquely personal attempts to interpret life in the world, Hegel comments acidly . . .'

philosophy—is oriented toward the idea of a ‘philosophy without a surname’ (*ohne Beinamen* recall the title of Schelling’s *Stift* essay on Reinhold)—that is, a philosophy that escapes the limitations of particular schools and eras and speaks the truths of reason itself. Hence, the last thing Reinhold would be interested in is a study of the history of philosophy that would leave us with an exhibition case of mere curiosities. All of his studies are well-organized (indeed all too well-organized to seem completely fair to the complexity of the facts) reconstructions of historical options in terms of the basic logical possibilities that they exemplify (for example, materialism/spiritualism: dogmatism/skepticism); they present nothing like a list of mere accidental occurrences. Although, like any critic, Reinhold may occasionally chide others for their peculiarities, in general he clearly neither wants to disparage his predecessors (or the general importance of the past) as simply irrational in the way that Hegel intimates, nor does he himself lose sight of the nature of philosophy as a home of systematic, eternal reason.

Not only do Hegel’s objections fail to match Reinhold’s own position; it can be argued that Hegel’s own procedure exhibits the same line of thinking that is present in the very passage he cites from Reinhold. For, it is not only in the late Hegel, but already in the *Differenzschrift* itself, that one can see a realization of Reinhold’s thought, noted above that ‘to penetrate more profoundly than ever . . . and to develop the idiosyncratic views of one’s predecessors further’. What else, after all, is the procedure of the *Differenzschrift*, if not precisely Hegel’s working-through a study of the limitations of his predecessor’s systems in order to display what he takes to be the supposedly correct and urgently needed philosophy of his own time? Ironically, the general idea of Reinhold’s historical turn could have no more obvious advocate than his fierce younger critic, for on every page the very form of Hegel’s criticism displays an indebtedness to Reinhold’s call to history and the actual practice of developing a system through a detailed conversation with one’s predecessors.

Of course, there remain some differences as well. Although by 1801 neither Hegel nor Schelling³⁴ had worked out his own full philosophy of history or history of philosophy, by this time it was already quite clear that these post-Reinholdian thinkers were committed to a new and much more radical conception of the immanence of reason in history—and thus of the essential historical character of the appreciation of reason itself. Believing that Fichte (in Reinhold’s aftermath) had properly left the ‘letter’ of Kant’s system behind in order to free its ‘genuine’ idealistic ‘spirit’ (‘Preface’, second paragraph), they had moved on to insist that it was not the actual but the ideal form of their predecessor’s work that mattered, the way in which it illustrated one limited

³⁴ On Schelling, see two helpful essays by Wilhelm G. Jacobs, ‘Anhaltspunkte zur Vorgeschichte von Schellings Philosophie’, and ‘Geschichte als Prozess der Vernunft’, in Hans Michael Baumgartner (ed.), *Schelling* (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1975), 27–37, 39–44.

position in the predetermined dialectical story of the stages necessary for the development of self-consciousness and spirit. However much they may have disagreed with one another on, or changed their own minds about, the details of this story, the crucial fact is that they always insisted on an even tighter net of interconnections, both within history and between history and system, than Reinhold had envisaged.

In this context, before moving on to issues of evaluation, it may be useful first to step back and distinguish four general possibilities, arranged under the broad headings of extreme and moderate options.

A. Two extreme options.

1. *Historicism*: history is a mere sequence of philosophical positions, with no more tendency toward convergence and lasting truth than one can find in art.
 2. *Speculative idealism*: history is a tightly connected dialectical progression, with a necessity and completeness in principle that we can comprehend.
- B. Two options of moderate modernism: neither historicism nor speculative idealism is warranted; there is a definite direction of progress in philosophy, and a slow but steady movement toward an appreciation of more and more fundamental truths. This position can be split into two forms:
3. *The Reinholdian position*: enlightened philosophy requires an *Auseinandersetzung* with one's major historical predecessors and their contemporary interpreters, but this can be done in a relatively easy manner, with an exhaustive and convincing treatment of the main options within our grasp.
 4. *The contemporary non-radical post-positivist position*: given the problems with the other options, it seems pointless to turn away from historical considerations concerning both new and still unresolved philosophical problems, and it is most reasonable to expect that striking progress on these problems in this way is not going to be wholly futile (as on 1), or no longer needed (as on 2), or easy (as on 3).

Given these options, one can reconstruct Hegel's bitter critique of Reinhold, his implication that Reinhold had no historical sense at all, as motivated from the position of someone who thinks (in line with option 2) that he has the basis of a full historical and rational system already in hand, and who therefore presumes that anyone who approaches history with less than this is reverting to little more than a chaotic vision of the relation of philosophy and history (tantamount to option 1). Such a criticism clearly presumes an extreme speculative position that is much more extravagant than what most contemporary philosophers would be comfortable with asserting. But most of them could agree with the common, covered-over ground between Reinhold and Hegel, the ground that involves holding onto a historical turn without presuming that this must

lead to historicist relativism. Hence, the relevant question remaining for us is simple: given the obvious difficulties of the extreme approaches, how should one choose between Reinhold's relatively moderate option, and the even more moderate position popular in our own time? Before facing that question, however, it may help to reconsider some general problems in the very notion of the historical turn.

Despite the many obvious catalysts for it—the influence of Herder, Lessing, etc.—the fateful turn to history in the Jena period can still seem rather mysterious. After all, if one is fundamentally a rationalist, of either a speculative or a Reinholdian sort, it can appear that special attention to history is unneeded precisely because one is so confident that a persuasive rational system can be quickly set up. A basically non-historical philosophical orientation would seem quite consistent with the conjunction of this confidence and even the self-recognition of the Jena thinkers that they were living in a time of decisive historical revolution. In the late eighteenth century, enlightened writers could not help but believe that the scientific, political, and industrial revolutions of the era had brought about fundamental, irreversible, and ultimately rational changes, changes that human beings had not only gone through but had themselves constructed and now could appreciate in their general significance. This was truly an 'epochal' event, but also (especially after the first impact of Kant's work) one compatible with still believing that philosophy could experience a revolution of its own that would be like what was happening in physics and politics—that is, one that would involve basically turning away from the past rather than essentially incorporating it into one's system. Furthermore, we know that this view was not an absolute impossibility, for it is just the option that positivism and its allies would eventually explore, with considerable influence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Given the great interest and respect for science and rationality that the Jena philosophers also shared, why then did they not take a non-historical route? A familiar Nietzschean answer is that, despite their enlightened orientation, they remained shackled by their background in traditional institutions such as the Tübingen *Stift*. But this suspicion is hardly persuasive, since it is well known that groups of theologians (for example, the Neologians) much more conservative than the Jena philosophers were still capable of setting up a rationalist position that had little to do with history as such. Hegel himself would probably offer a very different kind of answer—namely, that the working-out of reason through a correction of the one-sided positions of 'Reflexion' such as the philosophies of Fichte and Kant is part of the necessary cunning of reason itself. Because the absolute is 'subject as well as substance', our coming to know it adequately cannot be simply a matter of resuscitating, in an anonymous way, the timeless framework of perennial philosophical issues (as set up, for example,

in manuals of ancient, medieval, or Cartesian or Spinozist metaphysics); rather, we have to confront the latest historical systems of our own time, and incorporate what is valid in them in a way that locates both them and us in relation to the whole narrative of the necessary development of subject and spirit. This is an understandable position for one standing right in Hegel's shoes, but it is hardly an adequate answer to our question; few contemporary philosophers would accept Hegel's elaborate system, and in any case it seems evident from work in the 1790s prior to Hegel—notably the writings of Reinhold—that there had already taken place (for reasons that therefore must have been independent of Hegel's own peculiar grounds) a turn to regarding history and philosophy as an essentially systematic conversation. So again, we need to ask: why this turn right then?

A natural place to begin to look for an answer is to consider the very nature of philosophy—and this is exactly Reinhold's opening move in his key essay 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie'. Before we review his procedure, however, it should be understood from the very beginning that it faces an extremely difficult problem. If the need for historical considerations is part of the very nature of philosophy itself, then it would seem that it should be a need felt whenever philosophy gets developed—and this simply does not seem true. It is true that when Aristotle, or the medieval thinkers, or even Descartes, are first laying out their basic metaphysical positions, some review of the prior options is a part of the discussion. The fundamental historicity of the earlier options, however, is not clearly thematized. The earlier positions, if they are presented in good faith at all, seem only incidentally historical; readers are being asked to try wholly to abstract from their historical situation, and to find a position of their own, without any eye toward being part of a future that will maintain a deep sense of historical differences as such.

Reinhold's essay itself comes remarkably close to exhibiting this limited pattern. He begins with a typical observation about the wide range of disagreement that characterizes the history of philosophy, noting that a survey of compendia reveals that philosophers themselves are by no means in agreement even on the definition of philosophy.³⁵ Like Hegel, he is disturbed by other writers whose interests are too narrow and thus do not offer an appropriate general definition. Platner, for example, is criticized for saying philosophy has to do with 'highest concepts' and 'basic principles' while not explaining what the basic principles of reason are.³⁶ Similarly, Feder is faulted for saying philosophy concerns 'the most important truths' while not explaining how these are related to reason, and not allowing that there can more to philosophy than what is 'most' important.³⁷ The 'Leibniz–Wolffian' school is said to characterize philosophy in terms

³⁵ Reinhold, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 208.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 209–10.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 211–12.

of the principle of sufficient reason—and then to fail to explain how philosophy differs from other sciences, such as history, which also use this principle.³⁸ Reinhold notes basic difficulties even with the work he relies on for his own lectures, J. Gurlitt's *Abriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Müller, 1786), since Gurlitt, like Cicero, offers a much too general definition of philosophy as the account of 'human and divine things'—something that is obviously the topic of other disciplines as well.³⁹

At this point Reinhold moves on to his own proposal, which begins with a sharp distinction between ordinary history and philosophy: the former asserts relations of things on the basis of experience, whereas the latter relies rather on reason.⁴⁰ More specifically, he insists that philosophy offers not just any kind of rational account but one that (a) intentionally aims at satisfying the search for truth for its own sake, (b) focuses on necessary relations, and (c) relies on the 'pure nature of the human mind'—namely, the all-encompassing 'Vorstellungsvermögen' (faculty of representation).⁴¹

An advantage Reinhold claims for his general definition of philosophy is that it allows us to understand how the specific branches are to be understood, since logic, metaphysics (and its subsections), physics, and morals can each be defined in terms of the specific necessities that they treat.⁴² It is also on the basis of his understanding of philosophy in general that Reinhold offers his specific definition of genuine history of philosophy; it is the study of the 'changes in' and 'striving after' a science of necessities in the sense just explained.⁴³ So defined, the discipline can be contrasted with other efforts with which it has all too long been conflated: 'the history of the human spirit', 'the history of the sciences in general', 'the history of particular philosophical sciences', and the 'history of the life and opinions of philosophers'.⁴⁴

With all these clear and relevant distinctions alone, Reinhold shows himself to be nothing like the non-philosophical bumbler that Hegel excoriates. All the same, one can wonder if Reinhold has a grasp of the most fundamental problems here; for example, exactly how do philosophy and the history of philosophy undergo 'changes', if they are not just like the mere changes from ignorance to permanent truth found in other sciences? Reinhold is quite clear that explanations of changes in philosophical opinions due to mere historical or psychological causes, interesting as they may be, belong to the history of humanity as such, not to philosophy proper.⁴⁵ He is also clear in insisting that philosophy and its history are not to be equated simply with metaphysics, even though this discipline has now supposedly

³⁸ Reinhold, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 212–13.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 213–14. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 218.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 218, 219, 221. To illustrate the crucial second point, Reinhold makes the familiar Kantian claim that perception alone gives us not a necessary relation but a mere sequence of events, e.g., of seen stones. He does not, however, make clear whether philosophy's role is simply to argue for a general principle that is needed or whether it provides insight into particular necessities.

⁴² *Ibid.* 223.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 226.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 227.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 229.

been brought to a form that allows not only 'all past but also all future metaphysics to take on the dignity of a science'.⁴⁶ In addition to noting that metaphysics is just one of several philosophical sciences, Reinhold appears to have a special interest in distancing himself from the Baumgartian tradition, which gives primacy to the study of the 'first grounds of human knowledge', but without a proper grounding in something like Reinhold's own 'Elementarwissenschaft' (science of elements)—that is, the theory of the 'Vorstellungsvermögen'.⁴⁷

Sound though they may be, Reinhold's distinctions by themselves hardly fill out a positive characterization of the historical dimension of philosophy. Only a few brief remarks near the end of the essay hint at a fuller story. Reinhold notes that a genuine history of philosophy is not merely 'literature' about philosophy's past; it knows how to focus on 'main' works that are truly 'epochal'.⁴⁸ He also points out that most so-called histories of philosophy offer not this kind of history itself but 'mere materials' for it.⁴⁹ Here he explicitly denounces any notion of reducing the history of philosophy to a story of incidental 'opinions'⁵⁰ and thus he already takes on the position that Hegel was later unfairly to claim as his own—in contrast to Reinhold's! The fact is, already in 1796, in the best-known Jena journal, Reinhold was making clear that the proper historian must seek the specifically 'rational meaning' in past philosophies, with an eye above all to its relation to the necessary truths of philosophy in general.⁵¹ All this is to be done in the service of a 'philosophy without a surname',⁵² one that rests not on accidental observations but on an appreciation of the 'Laws of the Original Organization of the Human Spirit'.⁵³ Looking to the future, Reinhold adds that, if one has not in this way developed an account of the mind 'so broad . . . that it will be elevated above all factions' one will not appear as a genuine philosopher.⁵⁴ Hence, he boldly claims that for the history of philosophy the relation of his science of the 'Vorstellungsvermögen' to the study of the incidentals of history parallels the relation of the mind to the body.⁵⁵

This line of argument makes it relatively easy to choose between options 3 and 4 listed earlier. Reinhold's confident dependence on what turned out to be a quickly overturned theory of the mind is by itself sufficient reason for preferring a more moderate perspective on the history of philosophy than his own, one that is not committed to such a restrictive system, even if it is not one as

⁴⁶ Ibid. 232.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 233.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 236.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 236.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 238.

⁵¹ Ibid. 240.

⁵² Ibid. 241.

⁵³ Ibid. 242. Jacobs's essay gives an excellent account of how Schelling's history of self-consciousness builds along these lines on the 'transition to reason' that is central to Reinhold's theory of the *Vorstellungsvermögen* ('Geschichte als Prozess der Vernunft', 41–3). Jacobs also properly links this program to the enlightenment: 'In this way reason was understood as making an unconditional demand; the organization of the human species that corresponded to this demand counted as the absolute goal of history. Because the commands of reason were absolute, this goal could not be evaded. The Archimedean point had been found for philosophy' (p. 41; my translation).

⁵⁴ *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 243.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 244.

elaborate as Hegel's. This is not a very troubling result, but for my own general thesis a serious problem may appear to arise here from the fact that Reinhold's essay can give itself the appearance of mechanically applying a pure ahistorical framework to a set of positions that might be best understood wholly apart from history. Reinhold's conclusion is more complicated than this, however, for he says philosophy's history needs to be divided in certain 'main epochs of change',⁵⁶ and that philosophical reason as such first appears only 'in the heart of civil society'⁵⁷—the crucial stage in the modern transition from a state of nature to a rational enlightened society. Unfortunately, he does not explain here precisely why an epochal division of history is needed, and why general social arrangements of a certain kind are a necessary condition for the fulfillment of philosophy. But this is probably too much to expect from an essay that is meant simply to outline, as it does very effectively, some of the most basic preconditions for properly understanding the concept of a history of philosophy at all. The programmatic nature of the essay, despite its own epochal status as a first attempt at self-definition by the first era of serious history of philosophy, can give the false impression that it was produced by an entirely typical eighteenth-century rationalist. Fortunately, the list of writings reviewed earlier prove that Reinhold's historical considerations went far beyond this one basic essay. His very extensive and pattern-setting practice as a commentator on the immediate past of philosophy is what best reveals the full depth of his commitment to a historical approach. The 'Begriff' essay is an important, consistent moment in Reinhold's historical turn, but it does not yet answer the last component of our original question—why the turn to history then?

To address this question, I will conclude with a very brief sketch of my own general hypothesis—that the Jena turn might be best regarded as in fact the effect of a strange combination of incidental events, a kind of almost spontaneous combustion, but one that can nonetheless have an enduring meaning. Even if confusions and misunderstandings and accidents were essential to its happening, once the historical issue was raised the way it was at that central place and time in a systematic fashion, it simply proved to be something that philosophy (aside from its positivist interludes) was not able to get away from—then, and in any future that we can envisage, and despite all the skepticism one might have about the alleged necessities in the idealists' specific claims.

The main 'accident' I have in mind is the complex interconnection of the projects of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte. Kant presented a philosophy that at first seemed revolutionary and basic in a way parallel to clear revolutionary developments in other fields. Simultaneously, Enlightenment writers such as Reinhold felt a pressing need to hasten what they took to be the evident need for a quick completion of the Enlightenment by appealing to a basic philosophy whose

⁵⁶ *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 244.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 245.

combined popular and systematic form could bring about complete (spatial and temporal) social and cultural reform.⁵⁸ Reinhold's considerable literary abilities undeniably played a key role in bringing some reforms to come about more quickly in Germany. For a while he was able to convince a large body of at least the educated public that Enlightenment philosophy, in the form of Kant's system, was already established in a thoroughly respectable and scientific form and could be easily applied to resolve the remaining problems of theory and society. A crucial twist in events came when, in the 1790s, Kant's work, Reinhold's own new work, and Fichte's new equally epoch-determining work each managed to dominate the attention of the age but then immediately succumbed to objections that seemed much easier to appreciate than the systems themselves. At this point, one could take the growing jumble of interrelated systems to indicate a hopeless mix of stray minds (and thus to license dismissing 'scientific' philosophy altogether, or moving to something like positivism)—or one could bravely continue Reinhold's practice and repeated arguments to the effect that the latest philosophies have something of unimpeachable value in them, and we cannot do better than to try explicitly to sort them out in the context of their general historical background. The prerequisite of this project was a philosophical language—that of Kant and the first idealists—that was modern and rational enough in its orientation to seem readily comprehensible in principle and highly appealing in its ultimate goal, but that in detail was so complex and suggestive, and at points near incomprehensible, that no reconstruction or revision could truly appear to have yet properly sorted out the attractions of the system. This whole project might well have fallen to the wayside had it not been that such truly remarkable writers as Schelling and Hegel (and the whole generation of Hölderlin and Novalis and the Schlegels) managed right then to offer a 'sorting-out' of the entire range of immediately prior philosophies and their historical precedents in a way that has in fact proven to be unforgettable. Even if core parts of their systematic philosophy remain as unconvincing as Reinhold's simplest principles, their way of continuing the conversation between Kant, post-Kantians, and earlier eras was accompanied by a fundamentally historical orientation with no end of insightful formulations, so that all later continental thought—and now large sections of Anglophone writing as well—remains largely a sequence of imitative footnotes to their efforts.

⁵⁸ The main idea of this approach is very evident in the 'Vorbericht' given by Friedrich Niethammer to the first issue of his extremely influential *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten* (1795): 'One expects from philosophy that it provide the final purpose of all knowledge and action, a definite and unchanging direction toward a goal . . . In order to fulfill this purpose, philosophy obviously must above all be a science' (p. v). For a vivid recent expression of this enlightenment view, shorn of any pretenses about 'science', see Allen W. Wood, 'Philosophy: Enlightenment Apology, Enlightenment Critique', in C. P. Ragland and Sarah Heidt (eds.), *What is Philosophy?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 96–120.

Like many remarkable cultural achievements, there may have been no immediate necessity in this development, and yet something of irreversible philosophical significance—as far as we can see—can have been accomplished. In this process, I believe Reinhold is the one who first set the (well-prepared) match on fire; whatever his faults, he enlightened us all by helping to create a popular and unquenchable need (*Bedürfnis*) for doing systematic philosophy historically.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I would like to acknowledge a special indebtedness in this project to Paul Franks, Theodore Ziolkowski, Gary Gutting, Fred Rush, Vittorio Hösle, Theodore Ziolkowski, Mathias Thierbach, and the organizers of the Second Reinhold Congress.

PART III
HEGEL AND AFTER

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9

Hegel's Aesthetics: New Perspectives on its Response to Kant and Romanticism

The quarrel between Hegel and Jena Romanticism—the Schlegel brothers and Novalis—over the relative significance between the Artist and the Philosopher is difficult to take seriously at the end of a century of philosophy which has mainly consisted in endeavoring to find out what philosophy is . . .

(Arthur Danto)

I.

1.1. Above all else, Hegel can be said to be the master of context, the philosopher who insisted that properly understanding anything involves putting it in its full context, reconstructing its development and its relation to all that is around it. From the beginning of his career, Hegel did not hesitate to put into its place the work of his fellow philosophers; his analysis, critique, and supersession of them occurred all at once, and culminated when he located them within his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the final system of his *Encyclopedia*. Long after Hegel's own era, and even after the sharp decline in the appeal of his specific system and of ambitious systematic philosophy in general, a looser form of Hegel's contextual approach remains very popular, and with good reason. Without giving in entirely to this approach, it is hard to resist the temptation to turn the tables on Hegel himself a bit. Hence, in casting a philosophical glance at the specific phenomenon of Hegel's own aesthetics, in an attempt to begin to evaluate just a few of its most distinctive characteristics (in Part II), I will proceed by first offering a sketch of how I believe his philosophy as a whole should be situated in the context of its own age and the development of German philosophy in general (in Part I).

Of course, my own interpretive perspective has its own context, external and internal. The external context is furnished by two other accounts providing slants on Hegel's aesthetics, slants that I believe are very understandable but in the end inadequate. The first of these slants is given by what I will call the 'standard account', which buys into most of Hegel's own characterization of his aesthetics (like his philosophy in general) as largely a welcome 'objective' corrective

to the supposedly 'subjective' approach of Kant and the allegedly even more radically 'subjectivistic' and arbitrary approach of the German Romantics. The second slant is to be found in Jean-Marie Schaeffer's book *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*.¹ Schaeffer accepts much of the standard account, but he goes on to argue in an original way that the main aesthetic tradition of Germany—after Kant, from the early Romantics to Hegel and others until Heidegger—shares a large set of influential and highly questionable 'speculative' presumptions, and that the sharing of this speculative approach is far more significant—and unfortunate—than whatever incidental differences can be found between various figures within this tradition.

My unease with these two slants on Hegel's aesthetics is tied to more general considerations that come from the 'internal' context of my own earlier work on the interpretation of Kant and the development of post-Kantian German philosophy. In a series of recent studies, I have focused on the general structure of Kant's philosophy and its reception by the Romantics, as well as by Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel.² On my reading, the main point of Kant's own philosophy (including his aesthetics), as well as that of many ideas found in some significant but previously neglected writings by Early Romantic and 'genuinely' Kantian and 'commonsensical' philosophers in Jena, is actually not subjectivist at all in the sense in which Hegel and those who come after him commonly assume.³ What happened, I believe, is that Hegel and many other readers in his time and after were led—that is to say, misled—by absolutist presumptions of their own to conflate Kant's genuinely Critical system with the new version of the so-called Critical philosophy that was set out by Reinhold and Fichte. This version rapidly eclipsed Kant's own works and overtook him in popularity, and then, despite his own strong protestations, it seriously distorted—and has continued to distort—our understanding of what it is to present a modern philosophical system. The danger of this distortion was anticipated by a few of the Early Romantics and their philosophical friends in Jena—but only for a very short time and in a way that has come to light only recently. An additional complexity in these developments is the fact that, although Hegel presents himself as an aesthetic 'objectivist', in contrast to Kant and the Romantics, it can be argued that it was really Kant and his true followers who held to a fundamentally objectivist position, whereas it was the post-Kantians who were largely responsible for developments and

¹ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*, with a Foreword by Arthur Danto (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), originally published as *L'Art de l'âge moderne: L'Esthétique et la philosophie de l'art du XVIIIe siècle à nous jours l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

² See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³ Here I am heavily indebted to recent German research, especially by Ernst Behler, Dieter Henrich, and Manfred Frank. See below, nn. 6, 9, 12, and 20.

reactions that led to an upsurge of subjectivism in philosophy in general and aesthetics in particular.

For my kind of unusual and reversed view of the relation of Kant to Hegel, the interpretation offered by Jean-Marie Schaeffer presents an especially interesting challenge. On Schaeffer's account, the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism turns out to appear to be relatively insignificant. His main claim is that all major German aesthetic theories are dominated by an unfortunate 'speculative' presumption that philosophy can and must give a unified a priori determination of what is significant about art, of how art is primarily a phenomenon of 'ontological' significance, a manifestation, in one way or another, of Being above all else. Schaeffer's interpretation is very impressive in its details, but I will be arguing that it is possible to meet it half-way. That is, one can begin by agreeing with many of Schaeffer's particular observations reminding us of how German philosophy tends to have a much too unified and idealistically 'reductive' approach to art. One can go on, however, to argue that there are still differences between various German theories that are quite significant and have deeper roots than he notes. Insofar as Schaeffer falls into following the standard account's presumption that the Kantian and Romantic traditions are distinguished by an impoverished sense of objectivity, he is vulnerable to missing the ways in which these traditions can, after all, be understood as anticipating at least some of the significant 'non-speculative' features of art in the modern age. Moreover, only when the achievement of Kant and his genuine Romantic successors is put into a proper objective perspective, does it become possible to give a fair evaluation of the starting point of Hegel's aesthetics, and of the ambitious way that he tries to locate himself in the tradition of German aesthetics as the philosophical heir of Schiller and Goethe's alternative to the alleged failings of Kant and Romanticism.

1.2. Schaeffer's treatment of German philosophy, and especially of the Romantics, reflects an intense curiosity and unease shared by other influential contemporary commentators. According to Schaeffer, 'the romantic revolution was fundamentally *conservative* because it consisted in essence of an attempt to reverse the movement of the Enlightenment toward a secularization of philosophical and cultural thought'.⁴ Despite recent challenges, this interpretation remains prevalent in the Anglophone world. Isaiah Berlin was perhaps its best-known commentator on the German tradition, and his posthumously published lectures, *The Roots of Romanticism*,⁵ give an especially vivid expression of the common notion that Romanticism and its heirs are dominated by a sense of discontent with the Enlightenment. Berlin suggests

⁴ Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 9.

⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

that this discontent was given its most vivid expression in strands of German Romanticism that encouraged pantheism, emotionalism, and a nearly nihilistic kind of irony. Intrigued by these strands, but ultimately repulsed by them, Berlin and other interpreters like him have reinforced the standard account and stressed a primarily negative dialectical relation between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. I am suspicious of this line of interpretation, but I can agree with Berlin that Romanticism definitely needs to be understood in terms of its relation to the Enlightenment—and so it is essential to consider how this relation might be understood in a much more positive way than he suggests. Such a relation emerges fairly naturally if one recalls that in Germany the prime mediator between these two movements is none other than Kant, the Enlightenment's major spokesman for Critical reason.

I have mentioned the themes of 'Enlightenment' and 'discontent' and have given prominence to 'Kant' and 'German Romanticism'. On the standard account, the first way of lining up all these four notions would be to suppose that Kant should be read as a prime defender of the Enlightenment, and the German Romantics should be read as playing primarily the role of discontents. First instincts here happen to be half-right; Kant certainly does represent, on the whole, the best of the Enlightenment in Germany; but German Romanticism cannot be flatly opposed to Kant or to the Enlightenment. The recent work of German scholars, supplemented by that of a new generation of American philosophers,⁶ has taught us that matters are much more complicated and interesting than this. A complication that they have *not* stressed as much as I would like to is that there is a way of reading genuine Kantianism, not only as the Enlightenment movement *par excellence*, but also as a force that maintained itself, in a much underappreciated way, *inside* an important wing within the very movement—Romanticism—that has often been thought to be basically opposed to Kant. Making this case will require introducing, in very brief outline form, some distinctions that are often overlooked concerning three large groups among Kant's early successors: Idealists, Early Romantics, and Late Romantics.

1.3. According to the popular view found in the standard account, the post-Kantian period is to be defined in terms of the classical triumvirate, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. For my immediate purposes, these grand figures—and most of their contemporaries—can all be treated together under the rubric of one phenomenon called 'German Idealism'. It is important to realize, however, that—contrary to what one would expect on the standard account alone—this movement actually begins with, and in almost all of its most fundamental characteristics is determined by, the work of a much less well-known figure, namely Karl Reinhold, the philosopher who was by far the most influential contemporaneous interpreter of Kant's *Critiques*, as well as the immediate

⁶ See, e.g., recent work by Frederick Beiser, James Schmidt, Charles Larmore, and Fred Rush.

predecessor in Jena of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Indeed, it was the enormous popularity of Reinhold, his presence as lecturer and author, that made it possible for Jena to exist as the philosophical hotbed that it became virtually overnight in the 1780s. Those who know Reinhold usually think of him as a positive bridge between Kant and the other later figures, but it can be argued that the main effect of his work was to set philosophy backward and to help cover over what are some very significant differences between Kant and the post-Kantians.⁷ Although Kant himself was certainly a German, and in his own way a kind of idealist, the fundamentals of his Critical philosophy are so much opposed to those of all his major 'successors', from Reinhold on, that it is simpler—and not uncommon in Germany itself now—not to label Kant himself a 'German Idealist' at all. This is because Kant's Critical philosophy is primarily a form of critical rationality of a mainstream Enlightenment and non-absolutist kind, containing a noticeable dose of Prussian systematicity to be sure, but in a form that is *relatively modest* in its most basic philosophical components.⁸ It is not an all-inclusive monistic system that aims to present an objective and apodictic deduction of all domains of thought and being. As opposed to this 'modest' approach, German Idealism from Reinhold to Hegel can be understood as a truly 'speculative' endeavor, a radically ambitious and often strongly foundationalist enterprise. It insists on presenting a fully complete and certain system through a way of doing philosophy that aims to *replace* not only traditional authority but also commonsense suppositions about where philosophy can start and what it can and must accomplish.

It is important to know from the start that the contrast drawn here does *not* have much at all to do with modern English presumptions surrounding the term 'idealism'; indeed, it goes in a direction that is quite contrary to these presumptions.⁹ The fact is that all these German figures had not the slightest thought of denying, even in a Berkeleyan way, the reality of the 'public' world. They were (in their 'classical' period) very much concerned with affirming this world and the fact that there is only this world, a natural world through and through, a world of matter, not of spirits or of dualism. Their self-ascribed term 'idealism' designates not what *we* would call skepticism or anti-realism but rather their radically optimistic, rationalist, and objective view about the *shape* of this world and our capacity to *know* it. Their most basic belief is that we can tell with certainty that there is an extraordinarily fulfilling and accessible—and in that sense 'ideal'—underlying pattern to the way that all nature, culture, and history have developed. Most

⁷ See *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 2.

⁸ See *ibid.*, ch. 1. I go on to explain that Hegel himself is not a foundationalist in any ordinary understanding of the term, and yet his system has several important structural parallels with earlier idealist systems that were foundationalist, and especially with their view of the highly privileged role of philosophy itself.

⁹ See my 'Introduction' to *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* and the works cited below in n. 12.

audaciously, they believe that this pattern can be not only *discovered* by philosophers but also expounded by them in a new manner that ultimately rests on nothing more complex than the mere idea of self-consciousness—and so it can be *demonstrated* in a way that should convince even the hardened skeptic. Moreover, for the German Idealists the disclosure of the rational ‘ideal’ shape of natural reality is not a mere possibility for philosophers now; it is something that is taken to be incumbent on them to achieve in their central role as part of a world-historical mission. The Idealists’ many treatises on the ‘vocation of the scholar’ and the ‘need for philosophy’ are meant literally to ground the ‘vocation of humanity’, for they take their philosophical knowledge to be something that *has to be* brought to the public, as the necessary stimulus, protector, and completion of the Enlightenment itself. If all this sounds abstract and far-fetched, simply imagine the unwavering conviction of a modern scientific zealot who thinks of the world as having arrived at its basic destiny by the eighteenth century, so that essentially all that remains is to root out irrationality and superstitious otherworldliness by means of proper (‘natural’) scientific education. This attitude, so familiar in the ‘religion of natural science’ that came to dominate the ‘liberated’ world west of the Rhine, is, I submit, structurally isomorphic to German Idealism, with the difference that the Germans thought that the crucial motor for our time was no longer *natural* science as such—which they very much respected but did not regard as most fundamental—but rather ‘*philosophical* science’—in other words, Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie*, or Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, or Schelling’s *Identitätssystem*, or Hegel’s *Wissenschaft der Logik*.

In many of its goals, this Idealistic movement can certainly *seem* very much in tune with the objectives of Kant and the Enlightenment on the whole. But the Idealists were extremely ambitious in their method, and it is their ambitious method that makes them distinctive and gives their work a content and effect that brings them far away from their roots. This point can be clarified by comparing them with the Romantics, and by contrasting the Early and Late forms of the German Romantic movement.

Until fairly recently, it was not uncommon (in English) to speak of German Romanticism as if it were a single movement, and to characterize it chiefly in terms of the character of its end point, the notoriously reactionary themes of writers who especially irritated Hegel, such as Görres, von Savigny, and the later Friedrich Schlegel. Conservative Catholicism, racially rooted patriotism, otherworldly mysticism—the very opposite of Enlightenment movements—dominate here. The term ‘Romanticism’ has, unfortunately, often been pre-empted for this ideology, and in this use it has also been tied to trends in painting, poetry, and music that often emerged only well after the turn of the century.¹⁰ All this I propose to separate off under the

¹⁰ See, e.g., Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

heading of 'Late Romanticism' and to distinguish sharply from the *immediate* late-eighteenth-century reaction that is my main concern here—namely, the 'Early Romantic' movement that centered in Jena in the 1790s around Novalis, the Schlegels, Niethammer, Schleiermacher, and some lesser-known but highly significant Kantians. Although Early Romanticism is, in fact, a relatively modest and objective movement similar to Kant's Critical philosophy, the general reputation of Romanticism continues to be dominated by the Late Romantic image of irrational arbitrary doctrines, pursued simply for the sake of restoring old authorities or flouting one's individual peculiarities. This popular image has many of its roots in Hegel's indictment of Romanticism in his Berlin lectures on Aesthetics, where he treated it under the heading of a negative form of irony and used it as a foil to set off his own supposedly more rational and objective approach to art, value, and reality. This is why, rather than approaching Hegel directly on his own terms, it has been important from the first to recall the context of his work and to consider the possibility that he may have been inaccurate and unfair in his general and highly influential portrait of his predecessors—and thus also in the claims that he made for the distinctive value of his own contribution.

1.4. The main theses of my general interpretation of the era can now be summarized in the following terms:

(1) *Kant and the Enlightenment* together represent a unified front for the universal *primacy of critical reason*, against dogmatic authority in religion, state, or school.

(2) *Kant's philosophy itself* goes a step further than the popular Enlightenment by providing a *systematic but 'modest' philosophical* framework that reveals how all the basic interests of reason express a set of underlying categories, inescapable for spatiotemporal rational agents as such. Its 'modesty' consists in *accepting* the core claims of both 'common sense'—which includes the basic validity of our sensory, moral, religious, and aesthetic experience—and modern science largely on their own terms; its systematicity consists in proposing a well-organized rational core of common concepts for these at first sight very conflicting sets of claims.

(3) The *German Idealists* then literally absolutize the notion of a systematic framework by presenting a thoroughly *optimistic rationalistic monism*. The 'absoluteness' of their systems is expressed in an insistence that even the most basic claims of common sense and natural science cannot be taken as given but have to be understood as *derivable* from pure philosophical insights; a consequence of this position, in its pure Hegelian form, is the relative devaluing of aesthetic and traditional religious experience in contrast to the transparent and all-inclusive rational achievement of modern philosophical thought.

(4) *German Romanticism in general* can then be seen as a revolt *against* claims of *universal rational systematization*. But the revolt can take two forms.

(4a) By *Late Romanticism* I mean that strand of the movement that is directed against rational systematizing as such, and that flees into the *cherishing of the irrational* for its own sake, or—just as dangerously—for the sake of something that it regards as so much higher than reason alone that reason itself becomes the major enemy. In church, state, and school (including natural science, historical science, and philosophy) the spirit of pure philosophical reasoning is to be resisted, and authority, tradition, passion, and ‘organic’ expression are to take the place of critical reflection. (Most expressions of this movement came literally later and involved a new generation, but it is also true that Friedrich Schlegel is a representative of both ‘early’ and ‘late’ Romanticism, and sometimes the distinction does not have a clean temporal form in his work, but is, appropriately enough, more like a recurrent schizophrenia. Jacobi, Lavater, and others also express the main ideas of this movement years ahead of its peak, whereas much of Tieck’s work comes later but often manifests the spirit of the earlier generation.)

(4b) *Early Romanticism* is the most complex movement, including something of all the above, and so it is best characterized last. It shares with all Romanticism a *distrust of systematicity*. But it is also *enchanted by systematicity* (scientific and philosophical), and in its most perceptive form it learns from Kant’s Critical work the possibility of using reason in such a way as to bring out the limits of reason itself. Through this procedure, it sees the best chance for ‘completing’—that is to say, keeping ever active—the project of the *Enlightenment* in thought and in actuality. The tempting superficial architectonic of Kant’s system, presented in Prussian prose, gave rise to the hubris of reason and its extreme reaction: the war of the absolute Idealist systems that would present a ‘complete’ system and go beyond Kant’s self-imposed limits, and the literally reactionary Late Romantic writings that called for going beyond philosophy altogether. Early Romanticism is distinctive, within Romanticism, in that it maintains a deep respect for reason, and for empirical science, liberty, and critique in general. But it remains Romantic in method by turning Kant’s heavy prose into ‘philosophical poetry’. Having had the advantage of glimpsing at first hand in Jena the rationalist excesses that Kant’s systematicity could inspire in his Idealist ‘successors’ (especially Reinhold and Fichte), the Early Romantics launched a *twofold program* to save the Enlightenment from the zealots whose excessive enthusiasm for reason, they realized, could only threaten to bring about (as it eventually did) disdain for reason as such.

The best-known side of the ‘twofold program’ of Early Romanticism is the one in which the *poetic* voice is given the main emphasis in the duet of philosophy and poetry. Through literary vehicles such as stories, fragments, aphorisms, and poems, writers such as Novalis and the early Friedrich Schlegel aimed to infect the general public with a sensible delight in reason and a simultaneous pleasure in a shocking sense of the limits of reason. The novelty of their methods here was the source of their popularity and also of their own undoing. Extravagance, irony,

mockery of pure reason, could become so alluring that it was no wonder that the extremes of Late Romanticism, and irrationality for its own sake, arose, especially in the aftermath of the political disappointments of the era. To this extent, it can be agreed that Hegel was correct in warning about Romanticism.

The other side of Early Romanticism, the side that most needs emphasis now, concerns the core *philosophical* pronouncements of the Jena philosopher-poets. This aspect is represented in the content of elegant sayings such as Schlegel's oft-cited remark, 'It is equally fatal intellectually to have a system and to have none. One must decide to combine both.'¹¹ The view can also be found in writings from members of the 'Herbert circle', a group of young radicals who had come to Jena *before* Fichte's arrival to learn all about the Kantian philosophy. They wrote reviews and articles for an important journal that Niethammer started with the express aim of defending the perspective of common sense. Niethammer and the others saw that from the very beginning Reinhold and Fichte were going in a very different direction from Kant. They were espousing a strong foundationalist program for philosophy that would supposedly bring skepticism to rest forever and rebuild thought and the world on a totally rational basis. In his lead article, Niethammer argued that such an ambitious philosophical agenda leads to irresolvable dilemmas (for example, is the demand for a foundation itself founded?), and that philosophy ought rather to start from a more modest common-sense basis—that is, the given nature of objective experience, sensory and moral. Johann Benjamin Erhard, the most gifted member of the Herbert circle, took the step of explicitly connecting this perspective with Kant's work and of arguing that, precisely by aiming only to analyze what is within experience, Kant had already presented a method that escapes the extremes of irrationalism and rationalist foundationalism.¹² In other words, Erhard could use a standard philosophy journal format to make Schlegel's point that we should neither 'have a system' nor 'have none'. To be memorable and provocative, Schlegel added, 'we must have both'—which is, of course, literal nonsense, but is *intended* that way: it is supposed to make us think on our own about what is needed. The idea it is pointing to is not that one can literally have a system *and no* system. Rather, what one can do, and what the Early Romantics were doing and advocating, is to have

¹¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum*, fragment #53 (my translation). A translation of selections from this and other Early Romantic works can be found in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, ed. Kathleen Wheeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. Jay Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹² See the discussions of Erhard in Marcelo Stamm, 'Prinzipium und System: Rezeptionsmodelle der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes 1794', *Fichte-Studien*, 9 (1995), 215–40; and Manfred Frank, 'Philosophical Foundations of Early Romanticism', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject*, (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 65–85, and 'Unendliche Annäherung': *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

a modest respect for rationality and system, as exemplified in non-foundational system of a Kantian variety that accepts various ‘givens’ from common sense and modern science; and then one can combine this with a sharp rejection of the Idealist notion of a ‘complete’ system.

The most remarkable expression for this attitude comes from a recently discovered letter that Franz von Herbert wrote to Niethammer on 6 May 1794, immediately after hearing, in Zurich, Fichte’s preview of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and then somehow foreseeing the Idealistic flood that would threaten true Kantianism and Enlightenment in Jena. Herbert declared himself ‘the irreconcilable enemy of all so-called first principles in philosophy’—that is, all Idealist foundational programs. He went on to stress that Kant himself based his philosophy not on pure reason alone but on common-sense judgments, and he ended by bidding Niethammer to devote his special talent to giving philosophy a clear exposition and to remaining ‘a simple teacher and reader of the *Critique of Pure Reason*’.¹³

This is good advice still, but there is a complex postscript to it. While Reinhold and Fichte, and their followers, flourished, Herbert disappeared into obscurity until his correspondence was found recently in the police files of the Austrian Empire, which had been monitoring his group because of their suspicious political sympathies. Niethammer, on the other hand, changed his outlook many times over as he advanced in a distinguished bureaucratic career.¹⁴ He went on to help his old friend from Tübingen, Hegel, by making possible Hegel’s immediate post-Jena career and the writing of the *Logic*. Thus Early Romanticism was eclipsed by the Idealist movement that culminated in Hegel’s system.

II.

2.1. So much for preliminary remarks and general observations on the era. Having indicated that Romanticism may have something to teach us about Hegel, it is time to look more closely at how Hegel himself approached Romanticism. Hegel presents his own conception of his place in aesthetics in terms of a ‘historical deduction of the true idea of art’ in modern philosophy, a highly succinct account (only about a dozen pages) of aesthetics from Kant to Schlegel that devotes almost half of its space to an extremely harsh treatment of the idea of romantic irony. As can be expected, Hegel’s account falls into three parts: first a brief critical review of the four moments of Kant’s analysis of the judgment of taste; then a middle section praising immediate corrections of Kant in the period of Winckelmann, Schiller, Goethe, and Schelling; and, finally, a third section

¹³ Cited in *Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer: Korrespondenz mit dem Herbert und Erhard-Kreis*, ed. Wilhelm Baum (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 1995), 76–7.

¹⁴ Niethammer’s significance is documented in Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

on romantic irony that focuses heavily on Friedrich Schlegel but also touches on Fichte, Solger, and Tieck.

It is a remarkable but neglected fact that one can easily imagine a slightly different three-part chapter here that would have passed over Romanticism altogether. In such a version, Hegel could have kept his first section intact, with its conclusion that Kant's aesthetics is fundamentally one-sided in being 'subjective' and in leaving a threefold and alienating split of 'necessity and freedom, particularity and universality, sense and reason'.¹⁵ Then the next section could have focused on the initial corrective of this one-sidedness by Schiller, Goethe, and Winckelmann, who all treated art in a way that avoids the threefold split that supposedly invalidates Kant's approach.¹⁶ Third, Hegel *could* have ended on a positive note by devoting a separate and final section that would give Schelling credit for making the general and explicitly philosophical claim that art functions as an 'absolute' manifestation of reconciled spirit,¹⁷ and that would simply add that Schelling made one crucial mistake. Schelling was correct in giving art an absolute and reconciliatory status, but he was wrong (from Hegel's perspective) in ever suggesting that this was tantamount to some kind of priority over or equality with philosophy. Hegel could have spelled out his view that Schelling failed to see that speculative reason must be the highest of spirit's manifestations, and that the distinctive sensuous nature of art dooms it to a secondary role, indeed a self-canceling role, once it understands, as it must in the modern age, that its 'truth' lies in an inwardness of mind to which it can never do full justice, and which philosophy alone can properly express.

It might be thought that it was merely for incidental historical or personal reasons that Hegel did *not* write this simpler kind of chapter. Since the work of Schlegel and Tieck and others had already become such an influential cultural phenomenon, it might simply have not seemed feasible at the time to ignore Romanticism. Moreover, it is clear that Hegel had a deep personal dislike for Schlegel and what he took to be the destructive tendencies of the whole Romantic crowd, and he might have felt an irrepressible need to warn against them. Nonetheless, Hegel often claims that Schlegel is not a genuine philosophical mind at all, and so it still can be argued that, in this crucial philosophical chapter, Schlegel and his friends could have been just as easily passed over altogether, like many other confused artists who stir up a historical fuss. Since this did *not* happen, it is reasonable to hold on to the suspicion that there are deep systematic reasons for Hegel's having given so much space to an attack on Romanticism.

It is not so hard to see what these systematic reasons might be, even if Hegel himself did not lay them out in a fully transparent order. Hegel's discussion begins with the point that Kant deserves credit for laying the foundation of

¹⁵ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, sect. lxxxii, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood (London: Penguin, 1993). Section numbers are cited as added by Inwood.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, sect. lxxxiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, sect. lxxxv.

modern aesthetics by introducing the thought that self-consciousness ‘finds and knows itself as infinite’.¹⁸ Hegel’s basic claim is that the notion of infinity is truly crucial but that Kant himself misunderstands it and does not develop an adequate positive notion. From a systematic perspective, there are two ways to go on from this misunderstanding, two directions that can be presented as preparing the road for the final, reconciliatory Hegelian position.

First, one can counteract the Kantian stress on a merely ‘formal’ and distant infinite by developing aesthetic works and ideas that illustrate beauty in the form of material, finite, and non-alienated achievements: hence the significance of Winckelmann, Schiller, and Goethe, who each in his own way shows concretely how freedom and necessity, particularity and universality, sense and reason can be harmonized. However, these finite instances of reconciliation do not themselves explore and make explicit the full depths of the infinite aspect of spirit. It is at this point that the second systematic alternative to Kant needs to be introduced—namely, Fichte’s notion that the self is infinite, and that this infinity manifests itself at first in the extreme form of a completely abstract relation to itself, an ‘I’ that posits and finds itself simply as an ‘I’, in contrast to and ‘above’ all else that it may eventually find.¹⁹ It is this aspect of Fichte’s philosophy that Hegel eventually emphasizes in his discussion of Schlegel and irony. Unfortunately, though, in this famous discussion Hegel conflates Fichte and Schlegel in a way that we now know is highly misleading; several recent studies have shown in detail that Schlegel, Novalis, and the other Early Romantics were interested in distinguishing themselves from Fichte, rather than in simply building on his perspective.²⁰ These complications, however, do not affect the fact that, for Hegel’s purposes, the basic Fichtean conception of the ‘infinite I’ is an inescapable component of all aspects of the dialectic, and so it is understandable that Hegel would want to try to work it into his aesthetics somewhere. Theoretical and practical philosophy are each supposed to begin with an appreciation of the pure and bare identity of the I with itself;²¹ the distinctive Hegelian claim is then that the very barrenness of this identity is what leads to a demand that it be filled with a proper content, a sensory, ethical, historical, and rational content that is not simply ‘striven’ for, as in Kant’s postulates and Fichte’s philosophy, but that is actually and completely attained (for example, abstractly in Hegel’s philosophical system, and concretely in the totality of the modern rational state as the culmination of history).

In the aesthetic domain this attainment involves the concrete phenomena that Schiller, Goethe, and Winckelmann are said to remind us of, but all this now also needs to be interpreted from a purely philosophical perspective, one that

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, sect. lxxvii.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, sect. lxxxvii.

²⁰ See Ernst Behler, ‘Hegel und Friedrich Schlegel’, in *Studien zur Romantik und zur idealistischer Philosophie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), 9–45; Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*; and Judith Norman, ‘Squaring the Romantic Circle: Hegel’s Critique of Schlegel’s Theory of Art’, in William Maker (ed.), *Hegel and Aesthetics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 131–44.

²¹ See the beginning of the section on ‘Self-Consciousness’ in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

builds on both Fichte and Schelling and regards concrete aesthetic phenomena not merely as magnificent particular, sensory, and 'necessary' examples of beauty, but also as paradigmatic exemplifications of the infinite: their aesthetic value can be comprehended in terms of their place in the universal, rational, and free nature and development of spirit as a whole. From this perspective, anyone who seems to dote—as Hegel believes the Romantics did—merely on the mind's reflexivity as such, for—example, on its capacity for irony as a technique for maintaining distance from entrapment in the finite, can be faulted for not appreciating the need for the mind not to get lost in a merely formal or future 'infinite'. In this way, the Hegelian appreciation of art can be understood as aiming, above all, at a synthesis of Weimar classicism and Jena Romanticism, at balancing the stress that Weimar put on the finite and Jena on the infinite. (And so it can appear to be largely an accident of particular personalities that Hegel speaks so sympathetically of the one-sidedness of the Weimar crowd and so disparagingly of the one-sidedness of the Jena crowd.) Hence Hegel is right to begin by summarizing his position as one that aims to recognize 'artistic beauty as one of the means which resolve and reduce to unity the . . . contradiction between abstract self-concentrated mind and actual nature'.²²

So much for *reconstructing* what I think would be the most *consistent* brief version of Hegel's theory of the role of art in the modern age. The next step is to begin to *evaluate* this philosophy, to consider how fair and promising its fundamental claims are. There is no better place to begin than with the unusual Hegelian notion of the 'infinite'. Hegel has some right to claim that a version of this notion already plays a central and mysterious role in Kant's system wherever Kant speaks of the infinite as the 'unconditioned'. The first *Critique* claims that this infinite cannot be known theoretically, while the second *Critique* claims that it can and should be affirmed morally, and then the third *Critique* adds that aesthetic experience gives us a 'symbol', but only a symbol, of this moral infinite, and more broadly, a concrete 'clue' to the general way in which the fundamental shape of reality that is presumed on moral grounds has a relation to the sensory form of reality that is perceived concretely in ordinary theoretical (that is, not explicitly moral) contexts. Hegel constructs his own system as precisely a denial in general of Kant's restrictions on our access to the infinite. Hegel insists that we do have theoretical and not merely moral means for affirming the 'unconditioned',²³ and he stresses that Kant has a one-sided and unnatural way of understanding even the kind of moral affirmation of the infinite that is allowed by the Critical philosophy.

These general claims about our access to the infinite explain why, from the beginning of the Aesthetics lectures, Hegel impugns Kant's view as being 'merely

²² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, sect. lxxvi.

²³ See my critique of these arguments, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, ch. 6.

subjective' and mired in mere 'postulates'.²⁴ In part, these charges are no doubt meant to call to mind Hegel's old points about the theoretical limitations of Kant's transcendental idealism, and the peculiarities of Kant's moral arguments, which stress that we can only strive for a postulated highest good, and cannot claim that it is present in our finite, necessary, and sensory being. However, there are also new and more specific points behind Hegel's charge here that Kant's aesthetics allows only a 'subjective' approach to the infinite. This charge is expressed initially in terms of a complaint that, for Kant, aesthetic purposive unity is required 'only from the point of view of the reflection which subjectively judges . . . and aesthetic judgment is related to the subject or person and feeling of pleasure'.²⁵ Here Hegel is obviously contrasting the restrained Kantian position with his own view that without qualification we do know (that is, judge objectively and constitutively, and not merely reflectively and regulatively) purposive unity, both immediately and upon philosophical reflection, in common *aesthetic* experience—just as in the domains of theory and practice in general. To know that there are such purposive unities, and that these unities are embedded in an encompassing purposive whole (that is, the 'Absolute', which is simply Hegel's name for reality as a thoroughly rationally structured totality) just is to know the infinite, and to know it in a full and not merely formal way (as the true 'infinite', which for Hegel stands for what is 'fully-reflexive' or self-accountable, and not simply something very large or beyond number).

2.2. There is a significant contrast here between Kant and Hegel, but in the way that it is drawn so far it still depends all too much on some very general and debatable systematic presumptions. I take it that it would be obviously unfortunate for a Hegelian in our *own* time if the only way that the charge of being too 'subjective' could be made against Kant's aesthetic theory would be if the status of our judgment of taste on that theory had to be measured against the standard of genuine knowledge of the Hegelian Absolute. If being 'merely subjective' means nothing other than not going so far as to insist that one knows that Absolute as such, then surely most contemporary philosophers would be willing to allow themselves to be called subjectivists, and the charge would lose significance. However, it must be admitted that the complaint of subjectivism is commonly raised against Kant's aesthetics on other bases, and most of the more specific objections that Hegel has in mind in his *Aesthetics* can be reformulated in terms of these common bases and in ways that do not depend entirely on his own most extravagant speculative commitments.

The main worries that Hegel and many contemporary interpreters share about Kant's aesthetics have an understandable basis in some very unfortunate complications of Kantian terminology. The three most common worries concern the apparently (a) 'non-objective', (b) 'non-conceptual', and (c) 'merely sensory'

²⁴ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, sect. lxxvii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, sect. lxxvii.

(that is, not fully rational) components of Kant's analysis of the judgment of taste. On the first point, legions of interpreters have followed in Schiller's footsteps and worried about Kant's statements that beauty is not an 'objective' property. I have argued at length elsewhere that this whole debate may rest on a misunderstanding,²⁶ for, even though Kant often does use the term 'subjective' for aesthetic qualities, in fact his theory can be understood as rejecting only some fairly specific and highly questionable objective theories of his time—for example, ones that locate beauty in a determinable rational 'perfection' of things all by themselves, or in something that can be determined fully a priori, or from categories alone, or as 'transcendentally real'. There is nothing in the *logic* of Kant's basic arguments that goes against attributing beauty to sensible objects as such—at least in terms of how *we* now would ordinarily understand such an attribution. Moreover, it can be argued that Kant's position rests essentially on the belief that there are independent and causally effective features of objects that give rise to our judgments of beauty, since it is crucial for him that aesthetic judgments are *perceptual* and so are a sign of something that is out in the world and independent of our own productions and fantasies. Thus Kant need not, after all, be maligned (or praised) as a 'non-objectivist'.

I have also argued that similar misunderstandings infect criticisms and appropriations of Kant that suppose that he means to divorce aesthetic judgment entirely from concepts.²⁷ Precisely because of the concrete *sensory* and objective nature of beauty, Kant does stress that genuine aesthetic judgments cannot be reached by concepts *alone* and are not originally a matter of mere inference or conscious reflection. All this is still consistent with believing that our judgmental—and hence our conceptual—capacities still play an ineliminable role in aesthetic experience. This is not to say that Kant's theory involves concepts in the full Hegelian sense of self-determining 'Notions', but it does mean that there is no ground to the suggestion that 'particular and universal', as we ordinarily understand these terms, are deeply split in Kantian taste. On the contrary, Kant stresses both that judgments of taste must focus initially on concrete individual objects, and that these objects must be understood as having the universal feature of being aesthetically commendable. Similarly, Kant would not think that he needs to be corrected by a reminder from Schiller or Goethe that in taste there is a special unity of 'sense and reason', and of 'necessity and freedom'. Kant stresses that in taste a beautiful

²⁶ See my 'New Views on Kant's Judgment of Taste' in Herman Parret (ed.), *Kants Ästhetik/Kant's Aesthetics/L'Esthétique de Kant*, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 431–47; and cf. Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 59–63. Kant's focus on beauty in nature rather than in art also indicates his special emphasis on objectivity as such, in contrast to Hegel.

²⁷ See my 'Taste, Conceptuality, and Objectivity', in François Duchesneau, Guy LaFrance, and Claude Piché (eds.), *Kant Actuel* (Montreal and Paris: Bellarmin/Vrin, 2000), 141–6; and cf. Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 48, 61–3. Where Schaeffer argues that Kant 'should' acknowledge a role for conceptuality in taste, I argue that he actually does, once all his terminological twists are understood in our own terms. The distinction between fully 'determinate' and 'indeterminate' concepts is crucial here, and, as Schaeffer notes (p. 50), it is also used by Schlegel.

object must come to us through sense at the same time that it is judged by reason (in a broad sense)—and also that it has a value that is taken to be ‘necessary’ for all other humans even though the judgment itself remains ‘free’ from determination by mere sensory, logical, perfectionist, moral, or theological grounds. None of this means that a particular aesthetic judgment can *demonstrate* that there is a perfect unity of the highest forms of freedom and rationality—for example, a thoroughgoing purposive harmony of nature as a whole, or an absolutely free self-causing subjectivity—but it should be remembered that it is also true that this is not something that can be demonstrated on Hegel’s system, or any other philosophy either.

2.3. Does all this mean that, if Hegel had only read Kant more sympathetically, he could have granted that all the good features that he found in Schiller, Goethe, and Winckelmann were compatible with the argumentative core of Kantian aesthetics, and so the movement to the second stage in modern aesthetics could have been merely a matter of providing some vivid examples and not of introducing new philosophical content? In fact, there remains a fundamental distinction here between Kant and Hegel, one that involves a significant issue of methodology. As I noted earlier, what Kant believes is that all ambitious rationalist systems—and hence, if he had only known it, Hegel’s system as well—have fundamental limitations; and so, in place of any absolute rationalist system, philosophy in general should work from common givens—the common givens of scientific, moral, and aesthetic experience. In Kant’s Critical system, no philosophical system is truly absolute and fully self-accountable, no matter how much the value of autonomy, in very specific but delimited meanings, may be stressed within the subfields of philosophy and in philosophy’s own general and transcendental account of itself. This means that the ‘scientific’ status of philosophy itself is ambiguous. Morality, with its non-deducible ‘fact of reason’; religion, with its never fulfillable goals of perfection; aesthetics, with its never fully anticipatable feature of direct satisfaction; and natural science as a concrete totality, with its ever-expanding and never-finished systematic reorganizations—all these domains are dealt with philosophically by Kant under the heading of merely regulative judgment because he believes that they are consistent and unavoidable parts of our rational picture of the world, but cannot literally be logically deduced or reduced to one another or to some absolute theoretical basis. There is a ‘not yet’ that remains in all these endeavors, and in any philosophical account of them, and that is a realistic reminder that we are not the master but rather the subject of nature, and that we always remain, at least in part, dependent upon a ground beyond anything that speculative thought can demonstrate.

Hegel took this to be an alienating result, and hence he would condemn as ‘subjective’ any aesthetics that shares this ‘incomplete’ Kantian perspective. On this point, however, and contrary to what Hegel suggests, the early Romantics—Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and their philosophical friends—are

distinguished precisely by agreeing with Kant's 'realistic' modesty. They were not radical subjectivists or Fichteans demanding that philosophy demonstrate the mind's absolute domination of nature. Instead, they directly criticized this demand and understood romantic art, and irony in particular, as valuable precisely because it points us beyond the powers of mere subjectivity. Their 'universal poetry' is characterized as an infinite, unending task, a poetry of poetry, with a reflexivity that reveals itself to be not a complete, self-contained, infinite speculative circle, but rather an eccentric and never fully balanced oscillation between the concrete finite being it knows directly in its own self and the infinite reality that it can approach only by approximation.²⁸

Matters are complicated here historically by the fact that Schlegel gave credit to Fichte for being more explicitly metaphilosophical than Kant, and this helped to generate the impression that Romanticism was closer to Fichte than Kant. But in other places Schlegel and Novalis expressed their fundamental rejection of (what they took to be) Fichte's notion of an all-encompassing I, and, as was noted earlier, there is evidence that other Jena philosophers at this time explicitly noted that this kind of rejection went along best with a return to Kant's own more modest position. Although they did not expressly connect this modesty with the specific character of Kant's aesthetics, and its emphasis on a nature that is not entirely under the control of spirit, there is no reason why they could not have done so. To believe that our reason is not omnipotent is not to collapse into 'sickly yearning' (Hegel's charge against Novalis)²⁹ but is simply to have a genuinely realistic, human sense of our limited place in reality at large.

The Kantian–Romantic position involves a 'modest' understanding not only of art and our general position in reality but also of the capacities of philosophy; that is, an acknowledgment of the limits of speculation. Hence it can be argued that the anxious metaphilosophical reflections that have occupied twentieth-century philosophy were already anticipated in the Jena Romantic circle and its appreciation of the complex interrelation of philosophy and art (or, as they would say, 'poetry', a general term—*Dichtung*—that in German signifies all kinds of imaginative construction and is not limited to the non-prose genres of writing that are signified by the term in English). It is no accident that it was hard for readers of the Romantic fragments to understand whether these writings were meant as theory or as poetry; and it is no accident that in our time we now look back to this late-eighteenth-century period as a time when Literature in a grand sense was born, and creative writing was invested with an aura that previously had attached to theology, science—and foundational philosophy.³⁰ The perceptive

²⁸ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Lyceum*, fragments ## 108, 42, in *Theory and Practice* and cf. Behler, 'Hegel und Friedrich Schlegel', 20. Similar points are a main theme of Novalis's so-called 'Fichte Studies', which are at points very critical of Fichte. See below, nn. 34 and 38.

²⁹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, sect. xc.

³⁰ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988); similar

Early Romantic comprehension of the limitations of the ambitious philosophical systems of their time prefigured the eventual widespread disenchantment—in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and after—with grand systematic philosophy altogether. What is most fascinating about this perception, however, is the fact that, contrary to Hegel's suggestion, in Early Romanticism it was not tantamount to a nihilistic dismissal of philosophy or rationality in favor of a wholly arbitrary and undisciplined aesthetic lifestyle. Instead, the perception came hand in hand with an ineliminable respect for the special reflective activity of philosophy and the thought that the general methodology of great philosophy is not all that different from art. The Romantics boldly anticipated our contemporary thought that philosophy is not a matter of sheer deduction, analytic or dialectical, but rather involves, above all, a knack for building fruitful interpretive overviews and critical reflections, and hence a form of writing that ultimately is to be evaluated by objective criteria of a broadly aesthetic kind. The fact that the later career of many of the Romantic writers involved a turn toward reactionary religious or political doctrines in no way undercuts the philosophical validity of this aspect of their early writings. The limitations of philosophy that they appreciated can obviously lead—as interpreters such as Schaeffer have stressed—to a desperate search for 'compensation' in other ways, but such a development is not logically dictated by their philosophy as such, and the later reactionary remarks of some of the Romantics should not be used in an *ad hominem* manner today to tarnish the whole movement.³¹

2.4. This approach contrasts with Schaeffer's challenging interpretation, for he discusses the Romantics in detail, and rather than electing, as I have, to distinguish them from the speculative and Hegelian tradition, he has insisted that, for all their ingenuity, they were primarily the originators of the main errors of that tradition. Schaeffer's general approach is hardly new. What is significant is the wealth of detail with which he documents his sacralization thesis that modern aesthetics has been dominated by a 'sacralization' of art³² and has treated it as an activity with 'ontological' significance—that is, as providing an escape from the alienation found in other 'lower' modes of life. Schaeffer combines this general thesis with the charge that German aesthetics makes a foundationalist claim in alleging that art has an 'essence' that makes it 'simultaneously the fundamental knowledge and the knowledge of foundations'.³³ In reply, I will stress that the 'sacralization thesis' and the foundationalist claim are two very different

points have been expressed by Nicholas Boyle, 'Art, Literature and Theology: Learning from Germany', in Robert E. Sullivan (ed.), *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 87–111.

³¹ See, e.g., the essays by Dieter Sturma, Charles Larmore, and Andrew Bowie in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*.

³² Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 6.

³³ *Ibid.* 6.

assertions, and it is not clear that Schaeffer does justice to the depth of their difference and the true significance of their relation to Romanticism.

Schaeffer does not seem to appreciate that the first idea, the sacralization thesis, can take either a modest or an extravagant form. The modest form involves holding simply that art, like many other activities, can have *some* higher 'salvific' role (and needs to be studied with a view to that function) *without* in addition going so far as to contend, in an extravagant way, that art is the *only* activity with such significance, or even that its significance here is clearly privileged. Given this distinction, even an ambitious speculative philosopher such as Hegel can be said to hold only a modest and not an extravagant form of the sacralization claim—which is not to deny that the way that he holds the 'modest' version of the thesis has some peculiar and objectionable aspects, given his insistence that art's value must always be seen in relation to the Absolute.

It is clear, however, that with many *other* German figures, such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and aesthetic forms of neo-Marxism (Adorno, Sartre), one can in fact find—as Schaeffer demonstrates—many controversial expressions of the extravagant version of the sacralization thesis. It is also not far-fetched to argue that, even if Kant himself was not committed to such a thesis, the fact that he attended to aesthetics so much at the very end of his system and gave it a special new role, combined with the fact that many later thinkers had an especially hard time accepting Kant's own very strong claims about other activities, such as religion, ethics, and science, all surely had something to do with generating in others a deep interest in extravagant versions of the sacralization thesis. Nonetheless, all this still does not mean that art must play a 'foundational' role. The foundational claim is—to an extent that Schaeffer does not make clear—quite distinct from the sacralization thesis, and, although these two claims might happen to be found together in some systems, they need not be combined. There is quite a difference between saying that something is our *highest* goal, or special end, and saying that it is the *precondition* for our getting to any knowledge or ends at all. Moreover, even if one does speak of art as some kind of ground or 'foundation', one need not understand this in foundationalist terms.³⁴ For some writers, the notion of art as a 'ground' that uncovers 'will' or 'being', for example, might be indistinguishable from the notion that it is an abyss (*Abgrund*) that reveals itself not as any kind of firm basis, but simply as a mode of calling into question other types of activities. In this way reflection on grounds can play a harmless role within what Schlegel called

³⁴ This point seems missed in the discussion of Hegel and Heidegger in Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 7. Hölderlin's position also deserves more discussion here. See Charles Larmore, 'Hölderlin and Novalis', in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 141–60; Karsten Harries, 'The Epochal Threshold and the Classical Ideal: Hölderlin contra Hegel', in Michael Baur and Daniel Dahlstrom (eds.), *The Emergence of German Idealism* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 144–75; and Violetta L. Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte 1794–1800* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

‘transcendental poesy’, or poetry of poetry—which is quite unlike any kind of uncritical and transcendent foundation laying.

The main issue in the end is whether Schaeffer is correct in assimilating all of German Romanticism to the speculative tradition by claiming that it aims to use art to ‘replace’ philosophical discourse. That is, does it really aim to endow ‘the arts with a compensatory function’ by holding to the extravagant and exclusivist claim that ‘fundamental reality is accessible *solely* through poetic ecstasy that escapes rational discursivity?’³⁵ Here it is important to get clear about the kind of ‘compensation’ that is being alleged. There is, after all, a harmless way to understand the common and Romantic belief (stressed especially by Schleiermacher) that there are *many* activities that can be said to give us ‘fundamental reality’ in a way that ‘escapes’ discursivity in some sense. To appreciate this, one simply needs to have a bad headache, or be directly struck by a vivid color. (‘Wow’ does not say it all, especially since these are very different kinds of experience.) If ordinary life can give us this much ‘surplus meaning’, there is no reason why art must do less. But to allow this much is not to say that art has an exclusive role to play, and so it is very unfortunate that Schaeffer tends to identify the Romantics with the claim that art is ‘the *only* possible presentation of ontology, of speculative metaphysics’ (emphasis in original).³⁶ Note that we might easily believe, as the Romantics did, that art, or special forms of experience somewhat like it, such as religion, can present us with a certain kind of ‘fundamental reality’ *without* believing that they provide our sole access to anything of ‘ontological’ significance. Schaeffer grants that even Schelling and Hegel distanced themselves expressly from such exclusivist claims in their mature work, and so it turns out that evidence of a questionable ‘compensatory view’ is to be found mainly in the tradition deriving from Schopenhauer, a tradition that is quite distinct from the Early Romantics.

Schaeffer also understandably ties the idea of art as compensatory to ‘a polemical view of common reality’, a view that certainly can be found throughout nineteenth-century aesthetics and after (arising at about the same time as the phenomenon of ‘bohemianism’). But here Schaeffer goes astray, I believe, when he suggests, like Hegel, that this strictly polemical attitude is similar to Novalis’s desire to ‘romanticize’ life.³⁷ Here again there seems to be an old-fashioned and ungrounded caricature of Romanticism. Novalis’s whole point in romanticizing ‘common life’ was that it was ‘low’ but not necessarily ‘alienated’ and to be looked down upon—and that, even in its lowliest forms, it already contains elements of

³⁵ Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 10.

³⁶ Ibid. At 79–81, Schaeffer seems to conflate Schelling with Novalis, and to confuse the fact that for Novalis poetry has special privileges (e.g., it can create the ‘loftiest’ sympathy) with the claim (which I believe Novalis is not committed to in his major writings) that philosophy has no such privileges. The dispute here is like claiming that only intuitions or only concepts can reach reality; it takes lots of evidence to show that a reasonable scientist such as Novalis would deny the sensible position that they can each reach reality in their own distinctive way.

³⁷ Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, 11.

deep significance, aesthetic and scientific insights that simply need a moment of inspired observation.³⁸ Novalis loved ordinary life and nature, and even his peculiar fascination with death can be understood, not as a desire to escape existence as such, but rather as a positive (albeit peculiar) interest founded on a then not uncommon belief that existence is so extensive that it can go beyond all ordinary 'daylight' consciousness.

In sum, although I would agree that Schaeffer is right to note many particular errors in post-Romantic aesthetics, and to fault the general speculative orientation of German aesthetics from its origin to its current forms,³⁹ it is nonetheless unfortunate that often in his portrayal of Romanticism Schaeffer himself, like his arch-enemy Hegel, remains all too much in the grip of the standard account and an overly negative relation to the context of earlier thought.

2.5. Similar remarks may apply to the perspective that Arthur Danto appears to adopt in the intriguing remark that I began with from his Foreword to Schaeffer's book: 'The quarrel between Hegel and Jena Romanticism—the Schlegel brothers and Novalis—over the relative significance between the Artist and the Philosopher is difficult to take seriously at the end of a century of philosophy which has mainly consisted in endeavoring to find out what philosophy is . . .'.⁴⁰

I suspect Danto expresses himself the way he does because he thinks that it seems naive for us now to think of measuring art from the perspective of philosophy, since the status of philosophy has itself become a major question. Contemporary philosophy tends to appear, in its method, increasingly more like art than 'normal science',⁴¹ at the same time that art, in its most recent and bewildering conceptual forms, appears to be in large part composed of reflexive philosophical elements that ignore, rather than assume, any overarching speculative notion of 'being'. *If* one presumes, as Schaeffer suggests, that the Romantics were

³⁸ See Jane E. Kneller, 'Romantic Conceptions of the Self in Hölderlin and Novalis', in David Klemm and Guenter Zoeller (eds.), *Figuring the Self* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), and, more recently, her *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), and her 'Introduction', in *Novalis: Fichte Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Schaeffer argues (*Art of the Modern Age*, 13) that this position leads Hegel to distort, exclude, or marginalize several important kinds of art such as instrumental music, landscape architecture, and the novel. But see Jere Surber, 'Art as a Mode of Thought: Hegel's Aesthetics and the Origins of Modernism', in William Maker (ed.), *Hegel and Aesthetics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) 45–60; and Mark Roche, *Tragedy and Comedy: A Systematic Study and a Critique of Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ A. Danto, 'Foreword', in Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, xv–xvi. Note that this 'quarrel' also resembles the distinction noted earlier that Hegel wanted to draw between himself and Schelling. From Hegel's perspective it is one thing to say that art is philosophically important, and shares some content with philosophy; it is something else to suggest that they are on the same level.

⁴¹ Consider current ethics—do the most interesting thinkers today (e.g., B. Williams, T. Nagel, C. Taylor, C. Larmore) line up neatly in traditional pseudo-scientific schools, such as utilitarianism or consequentialism, or do they not rather share a kind of objective pluralism, and sympathy with Nietzsche rather than with, say, a schoolbook Bentham?

thoroughly infected by the 'speculative' tradition, then it is easy for someone like Danto to assume that they had a too simple and exalted picture of art and philosophy as fixed traditional enterprises, and that their talk about the 'Artist and the Philosopher' was only so much out-of-date speculation, like quaint eighteenth-century disputes about whether men are sublime and women beautiful, or vice versa. But in the end it is Danto—and Schaeffer and others—rather than the Romantics, who can be said to be caught in out-of-date presuppositions, for now we know that the Jena Romantics were already making the point for which Danto is congratulating the twentieth century. That is, they were already drawing attention to the self-defeating limitations of foundationalist and absolutist philosophical claims, and to the fruitful interrelation of modern art and philosophy when both are conceived more modestly, as fundamentally critical, limited, and always unfinished enterprises.⁴²

⁴² On this point and many others I am very indebted to audiences at meetings in Dublin, Durham (NH), Cornell, Colorado State, and Oxford.

The Legacy of Idealism in the Philosophy of Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard

The leading figures of the generation that came to philosophical maturity in the 1840s¹ stressed, from the start, their sharp disagreements with the systematic idealism of their predecessors. As Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes de Silentio makes clear in *Fear and Trembling*, the one thing that he is *not* writing is 'the System'²—that is, any version of Hegelian idealism. Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx could have said the same. Their followers, to this day, understandably emphasize those aspects of their heroes' work that take them so far away from German Idealism that they can appear to be an attempt to 'leave philosophy'³ altogether and to replace it with radical critique, revolutionary activism, and rigorous empirical science. In addition, all three thinkers agree on the charge that most of German Idealism, like much of modern philosophy in general, can be dismissed as little more than an alienating effort to carry out theology by other means. Their agreement on this point is all the more remarkable since it arose despite obvious and deep disagreements: Feuerbach and Marx came to bury all religion, whereas Kierkegaard aimed to rejuvenate it by calling for a return to Christian orthodoxy.

¹ After Hegel died in 1831, important post-Hegelian works appeared as early as the 1830s, notably David Friedrich Strauss, *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), trans. George Eliot (London: Sonnenschein, 1906); and Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Towards a Critique of Hegelian Philosophy' (1839), in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 95–128. But the main works of the period, and my main focus, are: Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986); Karl Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"' (1843), in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. and ed. Tom Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 195–219, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (1844), in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 61–194, 'Theses on Feuerbach' (1845), in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Tom Bottomore (London: C. A. Watts & Co., 1956), 67–9, and *The German Ideology* (1846), ed. Roy Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1947); Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (1843), trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 8.

³ See Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

This standard self-portrait of the wholesale rejection of German Idealism by its immediate successors stands in need of correction now that we know much more about the genesis of these philosophies than was common knowledge earlier. Hegel's work in particular has come to be understood as a much more liberating influence than his immediate detractors would have us believe.⁴ Similarly, Marx's earliest 'philosophical and economic manuscripts', which became available only in the 1930s, reveal that even the most 'realistic' of thinkers was very concerned with the abstract details of the idealist tradition.⁵ Even if the main immediate effect of the philosophies of the 1840s was to reinforce the decline of idealism in general, one of the most remarkable strengths of German Idealism lies in the fact that so many of its ideas remain incorporated in the work of even its most vocal opponents.

I. FEUERBACH

Within the camp of Hegel's immediate successors, it was Feuerbach who developed the most influential philosophical reaction to idealism. The mainstream of German Idealism had long encouraged a dismantling of the orthodox attachment to a traditional and literal reading of Christian claims. In the vacuum created by Hegel's death this dismantling took on a feverish pace and involved the utilization of three major strategies. One strategy emphasized focusing critically on the *historical* details of religious statements and pointing out significant contradictions between the narratives provided in the Gospels. Another method (introduced by David Friedrich Strauss) involved denying the primary significance of overt literal claims in biblical accounts while suggesting that its narratives could be understood as representing a *covert* and more important 'mythic' truth, a truth reflecting the collective aspirations of the early Christian communities. One could appreciate the kerygmatic value of a group committed to a life focused on 'salvation stories' even if those stories might not correspond to any natural or supernatural facts.

The third and most radical approach was Feuerbach's. He argued directly that *even in its covert meaning* Christianity is a bundle of contradictions, and the logical conclusion of its unraveling is an exaltation of humanity. This process does not 'save' religious consciousness as such but reveals it as ripe for replacement by anthropology and a 'philosophy of the future' that inverts rather than appropriates theological doctrines. For a while, all radical thinkers in Germany became Feuerbachians and took his work to signify a dethroning of Hegelianism.⁶

⁴ On Hegel's early manuscripts and concrete political interests, see Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), chs. 3–5; and Georg Lukacs, *The Young Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).

⁵ See Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"'.

⁶ See Robert Nola, 'The Young Hegelians, Feuerbach and Marx', in Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.), *The Age of German Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 305.

Ironically, however, it is precisely on the issue of religion that Feuerbach's philosophical doctrines remain most deeply influenced by Hegel. They can be understood as little more than a filling-out of the details of Hegel's scathing account of orthodox Christianity as a form of 'unhappy consciousness' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁷

The enormous dependence of Feuerbach on Hegel was masked for a number of reasons. Hegel was directly familiar with the Atheism Controversy that occurred in Jena when Fichte lost his academic post in Jena in 1799 after brazenly presenting a version of 'moral religion' that, unlike Kant's, savaged (as 'contradictory') rather than salvaged the postulation of a supernatural personal God and an immortal human soul. What upset the German authorities (Goethe was Fichte's superior) was not the content of Fichte's view but the straightforwardness of his presentation of it. This scandal taught later idealists the importance of cloaking their radical humanistic doctrines in an esoteric form. Hegel's chapter on 'unhappy consciousness' is a classic of this genre. In nearly impenetrable passages about the inner conflict of an 'unalterable' and a 'particular' consciousness, 'self-divided' and 'gazing' into itself, Hegel pictured orthodox Christianity, especially in its medieval form, as the deepest alienation, as an internalizing of the master–slave relation within one's mind and throughout one's religious activity. In such religion, the individual imagines a perfect 'unalterable' mind that reigns over humans in a *transcendent, contingent, and asymmetric* way. The underlying point of Hegel's dialectic is that the frustration at the heart of such religious experience, the humiliation of the self as it acknowledges its inferiority in the depths of its feeling, work, and thought (through the ideals of the vows of chastity, poverty, and total obedience), is grounded in a valid implicit thirst for individual satisfaction (reward in heaven). This pent-up demand eventually forces the reversal that occurs with the Reformation and brings about the acknowledgment of the sanctity of secular life. By turning the medieval world on its head and introducing new ideals of fulfillment in marriage, business, and the construction of a free state, heaven is brought down to earth 'in the spiritual daylight of the present'.⁸ The church is demoted from its position as an absolute authority to a merely heuristic role as a factory of dialectical symbols for the appreciation of the world's thoroughgoing rational unity. The 'unalterable' and previously hypostatized Divine Spirit becomes the self-realization of the human spirit in the *immanent* sphere of modern social institutions—institutions that provide (and are understood as providing) structures that are in a *necessary* and *symmetric* relation to the satisfaction of finite individuals. The old image of the gracious lowering of

⁷ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), sect. 207–16; and cf. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sect. 177.

God the Father to an Incarnation in individual flesh becomes speculatively reinterpreted as an inverted anticipation of the modern liberation of individual human consciousness as such from its own alienating projections.

The general notion of self-alienation, and of the overcoming of alienation, is at the heart of the whole idealist story of the satisfaction of self-consciousness; its account of religion is merely the most notorious chapter in this story. For the idealists, the self's satisfaction is always a matter of achieving 'unity in difference' in the form of a 'freedom' that comes from 'being at home' with oneself through an other, from experiencing the relation to the other as a way of finding and fulfilling rather than losing oneself. 'Alienation' occurs when one still does not recognize that 'the other' that is essential to oneself is also dependent on oneself; one treats that which is in part dependent on oneself as if it were independent. In this way people make a fetish of religious, economic, and political institutions, imagining that their structures have an independent authority—until they eventually realize that whatever authority these 'universals' have is given to them by the basic needs of real individuals.

All these points are reiterated and their detailed implications made plain in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. After having shown, in earlier work, the same recklessness as Fichte by openly declaring the falsity of a fundamental postulate of the old faith—human immortality—Feuerbach also suffered the same fate.⁹ He lost his chance for an academic position, and, sensing that there was no more to lose, he chose to write down as directly as he could all the radical ideas he had absorbed from Hegel.

This is not to say that Feuerbach's critique of religion depends entirely on Hegel. Feuerbach's philosophy employs three general and quite distinct epistemological strategies, and only the first overlaps with Hegel's own perspective. Feuerbach's first and best-known strategy is a psychological theory of 'projection' that is developed along very simplified Hegelian lines and is offered as a causal account of the *origin* of religious belief. Feuerbach's second strategy involves the radical empiricist (and non-Hegelian) doctrine that the *justification* of statements in general has to derive from sensation. His third strategy involves the even more radical doctrine that the mere *meaning* of any statement transcending human experience has to be totally empty. The second and third doctrines might be intended as attempts to make up for the obvious philosophical insufficiency of the first doctrine. Although the 'projection' theory continues to have considerable popular influence (for example, in contemporary Freudian dismissals of religion), by itself it is little more than a crude version of the 'genetic fallacy', a version that does not even bother to offer a genetic story with genuinely scientific credentials. Even if it were true (or it could somehow be shown to be at least likely) that projections like those alleged to occur on Feuerbach's psychological theory have been the causes of all our *actual* attachments to religious belief,

⁹ See Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), xviii.

it still would not follow that the statements expressed in such beliefs could have absolutely no truth or possible justification.

Feuerbach's radical empiricist doctrines of justification and meaning would 'clinch the case' against religion, but they can be of philosophical use here only if they can be given a non-question-begging justification. It is unclear, however, whether doctrines making such strong claims as Feuerbach's can ever be established, and the strategy of relying on them suffers from the oddity of tying oneself down to enormously controversial general philosophical theses in order to challenge a few specific and rather extravagant claims. Hegel himself disparaged this overly ambitious kind of empiricism,¹⁰ as did Marx, and so on this point Feuerbach was left with the company of crude positivists rather than dialecticians. In the end, Feuerbach is probably read most charitably on this issue if he is taken to be offering not a *philosophical refutation* of traditional religious belief but only a *popular diagnosis* of it for those who have already lost conviction. He appears to be presuming that most of his readers are already pre-theoretically inclined to be so suspicious in practice about taking religion literally that *they* are not looking for much more than some kind of natural psychological hypothesis about how the remarkable phenomenon of religious orthodoxy could ever have arisen.

Feuerbach realized that 'fall-back' positions are possible for defenders of religious claims. Right after using the projection theory to dismiss orthodox religion, Feuerbach discusses what he calls a 'milder way', a strategy that retreats to a quasi-Kantian defense of religion. The 'milder' or 'transcendental' philosopher is described as holding on to a distinction between God 'in himself' and 'for us'. Unlike negative theology, this position is not satisfied with allowing a simple absolute being that is a subject without positive properties. It concedes to common belief the idea that God should be thought of in terms of some predicates, but it also concedes to epistemological developments in modern philosophy that there are deep difficulties in warranting specific predications about God. Thus, it reserves divine properties for an unknowable characterization of God 'in himself' as opposed to what he is 'for us'. At this point Feuerbach introduces his central notion of our 'species being': 'if my conception is determined by the constitution of my species, the distinction between what an object is in itself, and what it is for me, ceases; for this conception is an absolute one.'¹¹

Feuerbach appears to be presuming that, if the 'transcendentalist' tries to use the notion of an 'in itself' to leave room for statements about God to have predicates that signify anything beyond the ideal properties of humanity as a species, such as perfect human love, power, intelligence, etc., then he must be dismissed

¹⁰ See Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology*, 3rd edn. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 72–80.

¹¹ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 16; cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sect. 85.

for speaking nonsense.¹² There supposedly is not and cannot be anything beyond the ‘absolute’ standard of the natural phenomenon of the human species, and all distinctions between what is ‘for us’ and ‘in itself’ must be understood as mere relative distinctions between how things actually appear to a particular individual and how they could be sensibly manifested to humanity in general. On this view, traditional religious language does not have to be totally discarded, but its talk about divine love and similar properties must be understood as an unhappy hypostatization of what are genuine predicates of humanity’s capacities as a species. A proper understanding of our ‘species being’ is thus the solution to unhappy consciousness. The notion of the human species itself is Feuerbach’s epistemological, ontological, and ethical *substitute* for the absolute role that was previously played by the notion of God as traditionally understood.

Because Feuerbach realized that his analysis might be taken to be no more than a version of Hegel’s own view expressed in clearer terms, he added a critique directed against Hegel, a critique alleging a ‘contradiction in the speculative [i.e. Hegelian] doctrine of God’. Before criticizing Hegel, however, Feuerbach noted that the ‘speculative doctrine of God’ should be understood as more than simply a clumsy modern replacement for Christianity. It can be regarded as the culmination of a long-standing mystical strand within Christianity itself, a strand that treats creation as an act needed for God’s own sake. According to this view, ‘Only in the positing of what is other than himself, of the world, does God posit himself as God. Is God almighty without Creation? No! Omnipotence first realizes, proves itself in creation.’¹³ In this way some pre-modern Christians can be understood as having already applied to God the general idealist notion that the satisfaction of self-consciousness requires a recognition of one’s self by another self. But, on Feuerbach’s analysis, the ‘speculative’ version of this notion ends in ‘contradiction’: ‘God has his consciousness in man, and man has his being in God? Man’s knowledge of God is *God’s* knowledge of himself? What a divorcing and a contradiction! The true statement is this: man’s knowledge of “God” is *man’s* knowledge of himself, of his own nature.’¹⁴

It is easy enough to see what Feuerbach takes to be absurd here. He imagines Hegel to be postulating that ‘speculative religion’ culminates in a pairing of divine consciousness and human consciousness: as human selves become aware of the world’s perfection, God’s self realizes itself precisely through this last perfection, the perfection in human consciousness. Just as lord and bondsman could overcome alienation through a genuinely equal mutual recognition, so religion

¹² This objection denies Kant’s own attempt to provide general meanings for possible predications about God on the basis of a theory of pure categories supplemented by a form of justification that relies on pure moral considerations.

¹³ Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 227.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 230. I have added the single quotes and emphasis. ‘Speculation’ is a term Hegel used to describe his own philosophy in a positive way.

might seem to require the overcoming of unhappy consciousness by God and humanity achieving a situation of mutual recognition. Feuerbach totally rejects such an idea, however, not merely because it must remain asymmetric in many ways, but more fundamentally because he takes anything posited beyond the human species to be meaningless. Hence there simply is no real 'divine consciousness' that can recognize or be recognized.

There is a flaw in Feuerbach's interpretation. Although there is a symbolic sense in which Hegel believed that 'God' is fulfilled through human consciousness, this is not to ascribe literal *consciousness* to God or to assume he is a separate being, let alone to say that humans have their fulfillment in their relation to such a consciousness. Consciousness (in the relevant higher 'self-conscious' sense) is a term that Hegel, like other idealists from Fichte on, reserved for human beings.¹⁵ It is obvious from his criticism of unhappy consciousness that Hegel would be the last to posit God as a separate transcendent individual. For the prudential reasons discussed earlier, as well as because of an allegiance to the 'mystic' strand found within Christianity itself that Feuerbach notes, it is not surprising that Hegel speaks of 'God' and of 'God's self-realization' in the course of the development of humanity. Hegel can, and does, say similar things about nations and their 'spirit' being realized in the course of the development of individual human beings and their institutions. Nonetheless, just as it is absurd to ascribe to Hegel for this reason a belief that there is an individual such as Germany that is itself literally in a *state* of self-consciousness, so too it is absurd to ascribe to him a belief in a literal, psychological 'self-consciousness' of a separate divine being.

Although it is important to realize that for Hegel there is not actually a divine 'consciousness' that determines human life, it turns out that Feuerbach is still correct in sensing a basic contrast between his own position and Hegel's. The key difference is simply that for Hegel, unlike Feuerbach, the 'species being' of humanity, as a mere part of nature, is not itself an absolute ground, an ultimate term; like anything in nature, it must be determined in its essence by the 'activity' of the 'Notion itself'. This claim goes far beyond what Feuerbach would allow, but by itself it is not a 'contradictory' or alienating view; it is just another variant of the traditional rationalist view that there is a philosophical and not merely natural necessity that ultimately underlies the pattern of human life. It is also a view that will turn out to have great relevance for the evaluation of Marx as an alternative to Hegel.

¹⁵ See Fichte, 'On the Foundation of our Belief in a Divine Government of the Universe', in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: Free Press, 1969), 26: 'The concept of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory.' Trans. Paul Edwards, from *Philosophisches Journal*, 8 (1798), ed. Friedrich Niethammer. See above, my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17 n. 10.

II. MARX

Marx's immediate reaction to idealism is tied up entirely in his appropriation and radicalization of Feuerbach's approach. His early philosophical development can be divided into three phases: (1) early manuscripts that criticize Hegel and capitalism by extending to the economic sphere Feuerbach's use of Hegel's notion of alienation (1843–4); (2) a transitional phase of manifestoes that emphasize differences with Feuerbach (1845–6); and (3) a final phase summed up in his famous 'Preface' outlining the doctrine of historical materialism (1859).

Marx's initial and most direct attacks on idealism occur in his 'Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"'. This critique is structured by a description of Hegel's philosophy as a form of 'mystifying criticism'.¹⁶ The term 'mystifying' is of course meant negatively, but in using the term 'criticism' here Marx means to *praise* Hegel. Marx at first describes his own position as a critical form of 'naturalism', rather than either 'idealism' (orthodox Hegelianism) or 'materialism',¹⁷ precisely because he wants to emphasize critical elements in Hegel that he believes Feuerbach neglected. 'Materialism' at this point is Marx's term not for an ontological position but for what he takes to be Feuerbach's inadequately critical version of *epistemology*. This epistemology places too much emphasis on our passive sensibility (our mere response to the impact of matter) rather than on the three active features of human knowing that Hegel had stressed: (1) a fundamental dependence on stages of sociohistorical development; (2) a need to be developed through actual labor rather than mere thought; and (3) a dialectical pattern of progress that requires conflict and reversal (for example, in the master–slave relation and what Hegel in general called 'determinate negation').¹⁸

Marx's critique of Hegel as 'mystifying' begins with the charge of what he calls the 'double error' of idealism, but ultimately he presses three main objections to Hegel's system. One objection says that Hegel's idealism holds that all 'is' thought; a second objection upbraids Hegel for holding that all 'ends' in thought; and a third and most basic objection contends that Hegel's idealism is committed to the thesis that all 'rests' in thought—that is, that forms of consciousness are generally causes of forms of life rather than vice versa.¹⁹ Each of these charges has some source in Hegel's writing, but most of them can be rebutted by a moderately charitable reading of Hegel's intentions. In the end, however, there remains an important and valid point that Marx brings against Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*—although even this point can be argued to rest largely on a difference in praxis. It depends on how some principles should be concretely applied in view of one's interpretation of complex historical facts, rather than on a philosophical

¹⁶ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 202. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction.

¹⁷ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 206.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 202–3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 200.

difference in ultimate principles concerning a genuine disagreement on 'idealism' as such.

Here is one way that Marx expresses the charge that for Hegel all *is* thought: 'The whole of the *Encyclopedia* is nothing but the extended being of the philosophical mind, its self-objectification . . . In the *Phenomenology* . . . when Hegel conceives wealth, the power of the state, etc. as entities alienated from the human being, he conceives them only in their thought form.'²⁰ The source of Marx's irritation is understandable. In his *Encyclopedia*, the summation of his philosophy of logic, nature, and spirit, Hegel's idealistic system does place everything, even the phenomena of nature, into relation with 'philosophical mind'; it never means to discuss nature entirely 'on its own'. Similarly, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (or 'mind', *Geist*) discusses phenomena such as the state in terms of how they figure in various attitudes of consciousness rather than, for example, as 'concrete' historical, political, and military entities. But such an approach is hardly surprising in a book that has 'spirit' in its title (and was also originally called 'the experience of consciousness'), or in a system that places the structure of nature between abstract concepts and concrete features of mind (that is, distinctively human activity) in order to map the interrelations of these three domains. Hegel's focus would be absurd *if* he actually thought that any of these phenomena could be discussed *only* in terms of consciousness, as if one could not do 'real' history, economics, physics, etc.—but this is surely not his own view at all. (Marx suffered from the disadvantage of not having seen some of Hegel's most concrete works on these subjects, early essays that were not generally available in the 1840s.) Although Hegel calls himself an idealist, this fact—just like Marx's early rejection of what he calls 'materialism'—should not be taken as an endorsement of the view that matter does not exist at all or that it cannot ever be studied on its own.²¹ The genuine issue between Marx's and Hegel's real view has to do not with a dispute about whether material nature exists but rather with the question of *how* philosophy should approach nature, an issue that leads into Marx's two other objections—the charges that in Hegel's system all 'ends in' and 'rests on' thought.

Like Marx's first objection, the charge that Hegel ends with thought has an understandable source in a fairly innocent feature of the structure of Hegel's work. Since Hegel takes human thought to be the most complicated development in nature, it is no surprise that his *Encyclopedia* comes to it only after discussing the pre-human sphere. It is also true that Hegel ends his discussion of 'spirit' as such not with 'objective' spirit—the relatively concrete domain of

²⁰ Ibid. 200.

²¹ This issue has been complicated by old English translations of Hegel that ascribe to him statements such as 'the being which the world has is only semblance, not real being', when what Hegel really says is 'the world does indeed have being, but only the being of appearance', i.e. appearances are grounded and not themselves self-caused. Original translation from Hegel's 'Lesser Logic', *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), sect. 50.

social and economic interactions—but rather with thought in the relatively abstract sense of ‘absolute spirit’—that is, the domains of art, religion, and (at the very end) philosophy. But here again the genuine issue between Marx and Hegel depends entirely on *how* this turn to thought is understood. In one sense Marx also holds that thought, especially philosophical thought, comes at the end, since it is an activity of what he calls (see below) the ‘superstructure’. It arises, if it arises at all, when the ‘basis’ allows for it, and the menial labor of the ‘day’ is done. In his famous remark that ‘the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk’, Hegel reveals a deep agreement with not only this general idea found in Marx’s view about the temporal relation of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, but also with the much stronger and even more Marxian idea that the very *content* of philosophy is ‘one’s age gathered in thought’—that is, a reflection of life’s more concrete institutions.²² Thus, Hegel often stresses that the kind of alienated thought that comes at the end of a culture’s ‘golden age’ reflects the specific forms of real alienation within that culture. The problems of the Greek institution of slavery, for example, are reflected in Aristotle’s philosophical treatment of inequality and in the contours of the doomed ‘absolute spirit’ of the ancient world in general.

Marx goes on to specify his objection to Hegel’s system for ending in thought by claiming that Hegel’s philosophy ‘ends’ as a ‘confirmation of illusory being’,²³ and therefore it is itself no more than another reflection in alienated thought of the real alienation of society. This point is significant, but it cannot serve as an objection to Hegel’s *general descriptive* thesis that culture ‘ends’ in thought. That thesis by itself does not always imply an unfortunate evaluative claim. Clearly, *if* a culture is *not* alienated, then, given the descriptive thesis, it would also end in thought, and in that case its non-alienated thought would be something to be praised—for both Hegel and Marx. In so far as Marx can have a relevant *objection* to Hegel here, it must have to do with the more specific question of whether our pre-socialist society is so fundamentally alienated that even its most advanced structures (and hence their reflection in thought) *must* be mere ‘illusory being’—that is, a frustration of the true needs of humanity.

Marx discusses these structures in terms of Hegel’s list of categories of ‘objective spirit’, or practical life, in the *Philosophy of Right*: private right, morality, the family, civil society, the state.²⁴ It is hard not to be sympathetic to Marx’s critique when one recalls that Hegel defends the modern instantiation of these categories in the form of institutions such as primogeniture, capital punishment, endless warfare, monarchy, and a class-based economic and political structure that on Hegel’s own account entails contradictory phenomena such as impoverishing overproduction, a humiliating and ineffective dole system, and a relentlessly

²² *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 13.

²³ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 211.

²⁴ *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, sects. 243–8.

exploitative drive to imperialism.²⁵ No wonder Marx complains, 'In Hegel, therefore, the negation of the negation is not the confirmation of true being by the negation of illusory being. It is the confirmation of illusory being.'²⁶ That is, modern civil society, which negates the immediacy of nature while codifying itself in alienating institutions, is not itself 'negated', or transcended, in a practical rather than merely speculative way, but is simply reflected and reinforced by the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel is to be condemned for not working for the destruction of these questionable institutions and for being content with 'reconciling' people in the absolute spirit of the age that accompanies them. This complaint has its justification, but it should not be taken to show that Hegel would ever want any objective structure to be 'confirmed' in absolute spirit, rather than concretely 'negated', if he saw that the structure of objective spirit really is thoroughly 'illusory' and alienating.

Marx's understandable complaint turns into a misunderstanding insofar as he fails to appreciate this last point and goes on to suggest that all Hegel is *interested* in are satisfactions of mere thought rather than 'true' forms of objective being: 'the supercession [*Aufhebung*] of objectivity in the form of alienation . . . signifies for Hegel also, or primarily, the supercession of *objectivity*, since it is not the determinate character of the object but its *objective* character which is the scandal of alienation for self-consciousness.'²⁷ The mistake here is to suggest that Hegel wants to do away with objectivity altogether, rather than simply to overcome bad forms of objectivity. Aside from strictly polemical intentions, the only source for this influential but implausible reading by Marx must be Hegel's overly colorful way of speaking about *how* his system ends in thought. Hegel does speak about how, in the culmination of absolute spirit—which is the philosophy of his own system—an 'end' is reached in which nature's objectivity 'as such' is 'canceled', and the concept 'returns' to itself.²⁸ But the 'canceling' that Hegel has in mind here is nothing more than the formal 'negation' that is involved in placing objective structures into explicit and maximally clear thought forms; it has nothing to do with literally destroying objectivity or nature, or pretending that we could ever do without objectivity *altogether*. Presumably, Marx's own ideal society would 'end' similarly with some economic–philosophic attempt at a comprehension of its situation, and this would also 'transcend' mere objectivity—that is, it would accomplish a stage of reflection that brings us beyond our unreflective practices.

Marx's third objection to Hegel's idealism is similar to Feuerbach's charge of a 'contradiction' in the 'speculative doctrine of God'. Whereas Feuerbach attacks the mere thought of an existent divine consciousness, Marx stresses the problem of what he takes to be its alleged role as an efficient and final cause: 'this

²⁵ See Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁶ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 211.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 209.

²⁸ See, e.g., *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), §381: 'Rather it is nature which is posited by mind.'

movement [the dialectic of human life] . . . is regarded as a *divine process* . . . This process must have a bearer, a subject; but the subject first emerges as a result. This result, the subject knowing itself as absolute self-consciousness, is *therefore God, absolute spirit, the self-knowing and self-manifesting Idea*.²⁹ It might seem that this objection, like Feuerbach's, is entirely inappropriate because, as was noted above, Hegel's 'owl' represents the view that philosophic thought has its 'base' precisely in society, rather than vice versa. In other words, Hegel need not be taken to mean that, even in the higher achievements of spirit, 'consciousness determines life', rather than the other way, let alone that the whole process is directed by God as an actual self-consciousness.³⁰ Nonetheless, there remains a deep disagreement here between Marx and Hegel.

The difference lies in the fact that, even though Hegel does stress many ways in which 'life determines consciousness', he also believes (as was noted above in the contrast with Feuerbach's notion of species being) that 'life' is not an ultimate term, that there is something that determines it in turn. In Hegel's three-part system, there is an ultimate source for *both* life (nature) and consciousness (spirit)—namely, the domain of Notions (treated in the *Logic*), which fulfills itself as what Hegel calls the 'Idea'. This is not a mental entity, but rather the rational realization of the Notion in *actuality* (for Hegel, basic Notions are essentially self-actualizing, very much like the concept of God in traditional ontological arguments). Unfortunately, the term 'Idea' often has a psychological connotation in modern thought, and hence Marx understandably, but improperly, presumes that it implies Hegel is taking it to be *literally* a property of God in the traditional sense as a 'subject' and 'self-conscious' being. Clearly, *if* Marx's objection to Hegel rests simply on this unnecessary presumption, then it can be judged to remain unfair and inadequate.³¹ In fact, however, even if this mistaken interpretive presumption is entirely dismissed, there remains, as with Feuerbach, a different and more fundamental objection to Hegel. This objection consists simply in pointing out that 'life' may not need anything more ultimate than itself—not even a 'Notion'. That is, even if Hegel's 'Idea' should not be assumed to involve a commitment to a personal God, it does *seem* to signify something quite extraordinary, something that is not mere nature, and something that Hegel's naturalist successors would understandably reject.

Matters are not so simple, however, because Marx is not just any kind of naturalist. It was noted above that Marx accepts and emphasizes Hegel's 'critical' perspective. This point can be expanded by showing in some detail (see below) that Marx allows that Hegel's 'dialectic'—the intricate pattern of philosophical forms underlying both the *Logic* and *Phenomenology*—is not merely a helpful fiction

²⁹ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 214. Cf. at n. 14 above.

³⁰ Cf. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 15: 'life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.'

³¹ See, e.g., the discussion of Spinoza in *The Logic of Hegel*, sect. 50, where Hegel carefully distances himself from a personalist conception of God.

but is an essential key to uncovering necessities more basic than any structures that can be found by mere empiricism. In this way it turns out that Marx himself, like Hegel, is committed to something that is much more than 'mere nature'. As with Hegel, this something is not a ghostly guiding 'consciousness'—and yet its effects are exactly *as if* there is such a guide. Insofar as Marx can be read as accepting this much, it becomes difficult to distinguish his most basic philosophical perspective from Hegel's idealism after all. We have just examined Marx's objections to the view that everything supposedly 'is', or 'ends', or 'rests' in what is only 'thought', and this examination has not revealed any *philosophical* points that apply clearly against *Hegel's idealism* as such. If this idealism is not a straw man position, and not the opposite of all realism or materialism, but rather the notion that there are deeply necessary, rational, and (ultimately) extremely progressive ('ideal') structures governing human life and society³²—then idealism turns out to have a very tenacious legacy. Philosophically speaking, it may be best understood as not the opposite of left-wing Hegelianism but rather its underlying and moving 'spirit'.

Three brief and central texts illustrate this point. The first two are from Marx's transitional period, his remarks against 'ideology in general and German ideology in particular', and his 'Theses on Feuerbach', and the third is from his mature period, the famous 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

In the *German Ideology* Marx moves beyond an appropriation of Feuerbach to a critique of Feuerbach's own critical approach as one 'that has never quitted the realm of philosophy'.³³ This is a striking claim because Marx's own earlier work, even his notes on alienated labor, were themselves still an instance of Feuerbachian philosophy. It is true that he begins 'from a *contemporary* economic fact. The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces.'³⁴ Marx does not stay at the economic level, however, but moves from this fact to explain how it displays the structure of human alienation as such. Just as Feuerbach made Hegel's notion of alienation more concrete by adding details to the *Phenomenology's* critique of orthodox religion, Marx makes the phenomenon of contemporary alienation more concrete by adding philosophical points about the alienation of modern economic life. Feuerbach's key term, 'species being', turns out to be central to Marx's analysis, but it is now defined, in more activist terms, as our distinctive capacity for producing 'free from physical need'.³⁵ As German Idealism had already stressed, alienation is fundamentally a matter of our treating as independent something that is of our own making. Marx appropriates this point by turning to economics in a Feuerbachian way: in losing control over the

³² For a general discussion of 'idealism', see my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', 7–10.

³³ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 4.

³⁴ *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, 122: 'It is just the same as in religion. The more of himself that man attributes to God, the less he has left in himself.'

³⁵ *Ibid.* 128.

concrete *products* of our labor, as well as over the very *activity* and value of our own work and thus, simultaneously, over our relation to *other persons* (class colleagues and class enemies) as well as *ourselves*, we are above all alienated in our species being. We have turned the ‘freedom’ of our own non-necessitated activity into something taken to be necessary.

In his ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ Marx makes his most famous announcement: ‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point is to change it’ (final Thesis, XI; cf. Theses II, IV, VIII). Obviously, however, some people have ‘only changed the world in different ways’ as well, so the point now must be to change it in a *correct* way. Hence it is fortunate that Marx did some philosophy on his own before he criticized Feuerbach. Marx can not only charge Feuerbach (and, later, ‘ideology in general’) with not being genuinely active at all; he can also (with the benefit of appreciating Hegel’s more critical philosophy) criticize him for not having the right perspective for moving into correct action. Feuerbach’s philosophy suffers in general from having a much too passive (‘old materialist’) epistemology (Theses I and V); hence it carries out its critical reflection (the exposure of religion as alienation) in a much too abstract, non-historical manner (Theses VI and VII); and so, when it moves on even to think about becoming activist, it forgets ‘that the educator must himself be educated’ (Thesis III), and its plans for change remain infected by its armchair, individualist orientation (Theses IX and X). Feuerbach forgets the thoroughly social nature of our ‘species being’ and the fact that it is more than just a manifestation of something we have distinctively in common as a species. Our ‘free production’ is also a function that concerns the species as such, for the concrete capacities of the species as a society are its source and end.

The ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ raises a general issue that Marx confronts most directly in the *German Ideology*. The issue concerns the question of how any philosophical position can be critiqued once philosophy is regarded—as Marx explicitly regards it—as ‘mere criticism’ and ‘ideology’—that is, as a mere reflection of more basic forces.³⁶ Once this position is taken seriously, it would seem that whatever Marx, or anyone else, might have to *say* against a particular view would itself also be subject to the suspicion of being mere ideology. The ‘educator himself must be educated’—but who, especially in the current alienated world, can point the way to a non-question-begging education? Marx offers an answer: ‘The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises.’³⁷ The Archimedian point here is alleged to be ‘hard’ science—the ‘real’ truths of economic analysis as opposed to philosophical speculation. Or so it may seem. Just as Marx is not just any kind of naturalist, he is also not a sheer positivist. He is not naive enough to assume that the ‘facts’ that reveal the basic structures of concrete alienation, let alone the clues to overcoming it, can be

³⁶ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 5–6.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 6.

found by just any glance at history: 'This method is not devoid of premises . . . On the contrary, our difficulties only begin when we set about the observation and the arrangement—the real depiction of our historical material.'³⁸

This concession leads to a further problem: where does Marx get his crucial structural clues for properly 'arranging' historical material? On this question there is no better guide than his own summary in his 'Preface' of 1859:

The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, continued to serve as the guiding thread of my studies, may be formulated briefly as follows: In the social production which men carry out they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to definite stages of their material powers of production. [1] The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production determines the [2a] general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. [3] At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. [2b] In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophical—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. [4] Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. [5] No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. Therefore, mankind always sets for itself only such problems as it can solve; since, on closer examination, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. [6] In broad outline we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois modes of production as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society: [7] The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production; not in the sense of individual antagonisms, but of conflict arising from conditions surrounding the life of individuals in society. At the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions

³⁸ Ibid. 15.

for the solution of that antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society has come to an end.³⁹

There are at least seven fundamental philosophical points in this passage that can be understood as a direct ‘economic’ application of Hegel’s account of the ‘pathway of consciousness’. Although the enormous practical significance of Marx’s revolutionary emphasis on specific economic factors cannot be denied, the structural features of Marx’s ‘historical materialism’ clearly reflect Hegel’s ‘idealistic’ system in its central doctrine that history has (1) basic levels, (2) limits, (3) dialectical structure, (4) opacity, (5) fullness of development, (6) stages, and (7) finality.

- (1) Like Hegel, Marx regards higher conscious achievements, the ‘superstructure’ of art, religion, and philosophy, as based in more concrete social institutions. Unlike Hegel, he is primarily interested in tracing the level of ‘objective spirit’ itself (which is the immediate basis for absolute spirit) to an underlying basis not only in ‘relations of production’ but also in more fundamental ‘powers of production’.⁴⁰
- (2) Like Hegel, Marx emphasizes that it is only ‘the general character’ of mental life that can be explained and, in some very rough way, predicted. Details at the level of ‘material transformation’ cannot be mechanically projected on to details at the level of ‘ideological forms’.
- (3) Like Hegel, Marx stresses that fundamental transformations involve the dialectic of ‘determinate negation’. Economic developments mirror the ‘unhappy’ pattern of the projection of an infinite God, reigning over all, which involves ‘forms of development’ that ‘turn into their fetters’. Oppressed people lift themselves internally by exalting something external at the cost of themselves, and then they develop under this alienation to a point at which they reverse it externally, having nothing to lose but their own ‘fetters’. What is negated, however, is not the entire content of one’s earlier projects but only its alienating form.
- (4) Like Hegel (and Kant), Marx stresses that these transformations happen ‘behind the back of consciousness’,⁴¹ through a cunning of nature and reason. We ‘cannot judge’ an age by its ‘own consciousness’—that is, by the participants who are going through the ‘contradictions’ whose resolution they have yet to appreciate. There is, nonetheless, a necessary external explanation of these contradictions, one that Marx finds in economic relations, while Hegel is concerned with tracing them to even deeper conceptual relations.

³⁹ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1904), 11–12.

⁴⁰ This point is stressed in G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁴¹ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sect. 87, on the idea that the dialectic is ‘not known to the consciousness we are observing’.

- (5) Like Hegel, Marx insists that there are no shortcuts in dialectical development; no older order ‘ever disappears’ until all the developments and contradictions of the previous order have been worked through.⁴² It is no accident that the *Phenomenology* and world history are both long stories.
- (6) Like Hegel, Marx distinguishes four basic periods of history: ‘Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern’. These are the very periods that Hegel distinguished in terms of their attitudes to freedom;⁴³ Marx stresses in more detail how their attitudes are rooted in specific economic structures concerning the possibility of ‘free production’.
- (7) Like Hegel, Marx thinks that in his own time we see human development coming to ‘an end’—that is, approaching a culmination that represents a first stage of genuinely rational organization. Of course, unlike Hegel, Marx identifies this stage with the future socialist reorganization of advanced European societies, rather than with the high point of the bourgeois state in the nineteenth century.

In sum, there is no mystery about where Marx looked to find his orientation in ‘arranging’ the facts of history so that he could dissolve ‘ideology’ from a standpoint with ‘real premisses’. Even though he hardly justified the (just noted) seven basic features of history by arguments of the kind found in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and *Logic*, the remarkable overlap of his conclusions with Hegel’s must be much more than a coincidence. Whether or not Marx himself would be open in principle to an orthodox Hegelian derivation of these features, he and many of his followers certainly seemed to regard them not as mere hypotheses but as an ultimate and unrevisable ground, an expression of necessities that any future science and society would have to accommodate. To this extent, his philosophy can be read as taking over the most fundamental philosophical project of German Idealism: the glorification of human history as having a thoroughly dialectical shape in its development as the complete and immanent fulfillment of self-consciousness.

III. KIERKEGAARD

The standard way of approaching Hegel’s legacy is to make a sharp distinction between the left (‘old’) Hegelian and right (‘young’) Hegelian schools that emerged soon after his death.⁴⁴ The position represented by Kierkegaard requires that a further distinction be made. By arguing that the ‘essence’ of religion is the development of ‘human morality’, and that this eventually leaves modern

⁴² See *ibid.* sect. 89, on the need to go through ‘nothing less than the entire system’.

⁴³ See the phases distinguished in Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (New York: Wiley, 1956).

⁴⁴ See John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

institutions free from any literal commitment to the supernatural ontological claims of traditional Christianity,⁴⁵ Hegel forced a choice between a number of quite different options. Right Hegelians tended to combine relatively conservative social inclinations with a theoretical background in the speculative liberal traditions of enlightened Protestant theology (somewhat like their contemporaneous 'Transcendentalist' cousins in early liberated circles in New England).⁴⁶ They were eager to protect the status quo by embracing a reading of Christianity that freed it entirely from the threats of modern historical and scientific research. The 'conflict between science and theology',⁴⁷ which many intellectuals liked to think was the great crisis of the century, was no problem at all for these Hegelians. If the Christian story is simply a symbol of, and a historical catalyst for, the appreciation of what are essentially speculative and moral doctrines rather than factual claims, then the latest findings of physics, geology, biology, psychology, etc., need not be the slightest embarrassment to Christianity. At the same time, however, left Hegelians, such as Feuerbach, argued that precisely because religion could now be understood (by the most advanced philosophy of the time) as nothing more than a vehicle for human liberation, there was no longer a need for institutions designated specifically as religious. On their reading of the facts, the moral education that traditional religion might at one time have encouraged could now be replaced by explicitly secular organizations.

Kierkegaard presents a third option that goes beyond both these left- and right-wing Hegelian responses. He agrees with the right wing in praising Christianity, but, more fundamentally, he agrees with the left wing that, *if* Christianity plays a merely authoritarian or dispensable educational role, then, as institutional 'Christendom', it should be rejected.⁴⁸ His most fundamental point, however, is a vigorous denial of the general Hegelian reduction of Christianity to little more than an instrument of rationalistic morality, and in this way he undercuts the basic supposition common to the right- and the left-wing schools.

Kierkegaard's relation to idealism is not the confrontation of one 'system' with another, or the attempted substitution for philosophy of an anthropological science or a program for necessary social liberation. Nonetheless, he borrows more from German Idealism than his relentless campaign against Hegel would lead one to expect. This background is indicated in the title of one of his major works, *Stages on Life's Way*, as well as in the subtitle he chose for his classic *Fear*

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 68: 'The aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is human morality.'

⁴⁶ I am indebted to a vivid account of these parallels developed in a paper by Nicholas Boyle, '“Art”, Literature, and Theology: Learning from Germany', in Robert E. Sullivan (ed.), *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 87–111.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978).

⁴⁸ *Kierkegaard's Attack upon 'Christendom'*, 1854–1855, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).

and *Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric*.⁴⁹ At the center of Kierkegaard's thought is a project that parallels the plot of Hegel's *Phenomenology*—namely, a philosophical outline of the ideal 'pathway of consciousness'. Whereas Hegel describes four main stages in the social history of 'freedom', Kierkegaard focuses on four 'stages on life's way' in the development of individual freedom. These stages are deeply Hegelian because they are ordered dialectically in a series of determinate negations, and they exhibit a progression of stages that employs—and then reorders—the key phases of Hegel's 'objective' and 'absolute' spirit. In place of Hegel's sequence—ethics, aesthetics, religion, philosophy—Kierkegaard uses the ascending order: aesthetics, ethics, philosophical religion, orthodox religion.

The first stage in Kierkegaard's account, the aesthetic, is defined by the attitude of giving primacy to the individual self. This primacy can be exhibited in a fairly crude and immediate life of feeling, but its adult form (see the first set of chapters of *Either/Or*) is a highly reflective set of attitudes, 'aesthetic life' in a broadly philosophical sense. Its ultimate focus is not pleasure or beauty as such, but ironic satisfactions of the kind favored by German romanticism: the endless pursuit of 'the interesting', as the subject discovers its capacity to reflect and to 'see through' all objective structures.⁵⁰

In the second stage, the ethical, the priorities are reversed. Ethical persons are defined by having tamed subjective reflection by objective reason, and by having learned to put others above themselves. This stage can be manifested in merely following the common duties of everyday life (see the second set of chapters of *Either/Or*) and Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, but it can also take the extreme form of tragic sacrifice in giving one's own life, or that of an individual very close to oneself (as in the example of Brutus, who must authorize his own son's death to preserve the law⁵¹), so that the 'universal', the community as such, can be protected. (Kierkegaard also holds, like Kant, that a full appreciation of the ethical involves a recognition of radical evil.)

The third stage, the religious, brings another dialectical reversal: satisfaction is sought no longer in the 'finite' realm, individual or social, but rather in something literally infinite, God. It is possible to present matters as if there are only these basic three stages for Kierkegaard, but he makes such a deep distinction between two types of religious attitudes, 'A' and 'B', that it is more accurate to speak of four main stages on life's way.

'Religiousness A', which parallels an attitude called 'infinite resignation' in *Fear and Trembling*, is taken by Kierkegaard to be the highest stage that can be reached

⁴⁹ Many of Kierkegaard's other titles are also obviously directed against Hegel's systematic approach, e.g., *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and *Philosophical Fragments*. There are also many ironic dimensions to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous approach, and the notion of 'lyric', which I cannot do justice to here.

⁵⁰ See Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), ch. 5; and cf. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), ch. 7.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 59.

by reason as such. One might think of this stage as exemplified by those who accept the classical arguments for God in rationalist philosophy, but Kierkegaard introduces this attitude in terms of a natural development within any self that seeks a truly deep form of satisfaction, something that the lower stages cannot provide. The aesthetic person is too immature to know the lasting value of commitment to others, while the ethical person remains vulnerable to the pain of sacrifice and to the alienating sense that, in the end, its own satisfaction as an individual is of paltry value. In devoting oneself to something infinite, one finally gains something for oneself beyond the limits of 'finite' life, be it aesthetic or ethical. Kierkegaard specifies a threefold advantage gained by the 'knight of resignation'. Its constant focus on the infinite 'beyond' provides it for the first time with a thoroughly deep and personal *unity* as a focus of its intentions; this unity in turn first reveals the 'eternal validity' of one's true *self*, the free and unbounded and, in part, essentially rational self that can alone be the source of such a focus; and the object of the focus, a necessarily transcendent item, leaves the self for the first time 'resilient': nothing that can happen at the finite level can 'shake' such a self, since it has 'resigned' itself from literally 'putting its self into' finite and transient goods.⁵²

From our perspective, this kind of resignation might at first appear to parallel what Hegel had in mind—and deplored—in 'unhappy consciousness'. The remarkable fact is that Kierkegaard seems to be presenting this stage as something that should appear as sane, rather than alienated, and as clearly meeting Hegel's own most important standards. Unlike the lower stages, it is presented as satisfying the individual self as such in both a rational and eternal form. Like the other stages, resignation can be exemplified in a number of ways, but all of these maintain the special virtues of thorough unity, enhanced self-consciousness, and resilience. Kierkegaard introduces it with a story about a poor lad devoted to a princess he could never expect to marry in this life. This story can easily be taken to point to a purer type of fully 'infinite' resignation that focuses entirely on God and takes what Kierkegaard calls the 'monastic' turn. Perhaps Kierkegaard would allow that, somewhere between an ideal princess and a genuinely transcendent and personal God, Hegel's absolute rational system might also serve as an understandable object of something like infinite resignation.⁵³

Fully specifying the content of Religiousness A is not Kierkegaard's highest concern because his main point is that this level is still far from genuinely satisfying the self. Like the ethical hero, the knight of resignation remains frustrated in a fundamental way. Each can take pride in its own heroic attitude, and each can savor the value of something enormous—either the finite but quite immense realm of ethics, or the transcendent and literally infinite object of resignation. In either case, however, one's self as a finite and passionate being remains

⁵² *Ibid.* 44, 59.

⁵³ Kierkegaard discusses as one of the first forms of the despair of 'infinite' the 'fantastic' attitude in which one identifies with 'inhuman knowledge' (*Sickness unto Death*, 31).

condemned. Precisely in order to be a hero at these stages, one dare not hold on with full force to one's interest in one's ordinary individuality as such.

Hegel has a short-cut solution for this problem that Kierkegaard must have considered. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard treats Hegel as the philosopher who makes the ethical 'the absolute'.⁵⁴ This strategy does justice to the fact, noted earlier, that, in Hegel's idealism, it is objective spirit, social life in all its concrete dimensions, that appears to be the fundamental area of human fulfillment. Art, religion, and philosophy merely express in their more reflective ways the basic structures that spirit manifests in objective self-satisfaction. Central to this satisfaction is the value that Hegel calls 'freedom', the 'being at home' with oneself through being related to others in a mutually satisfying manner, and in particular through participating in structures that link individuals and the 'universal' (the rational society of the *Philosophy of Right*) in a deeply symmetric, necessary, and immanent way. Hegel equates this kind of 'freedom' with the achievement of 'infinite'.⁵⁵ He is, of course, using neither of these terms in their traditional meaning. By a 'free' self he does not mean one with a known power of absolute choice, of uncaused causality, as in the philosophy of Augustine, Kant, or Kierkegaard. 'Freedom' for Hegel is rather a state of self-relation, of rational 'self-determination' in a formal rather than absolute efficient sense.⁵⁶ 'Infinity' is another Hegelian term for the same property, since, as he uses the word, an 'in-finite' being is one that has no limits in the sense of an external bound but is rationally fulfilled in an endless reflexive and symmetric relation to itself and other selves. It is not literally uncaused, or without end in space or time, but rather 'concrete'—that is, 'substantive' and 'subjective' at once. By being a developed individual, at home in a particular rational society, and appreciating this society's place in the rational scheme of reality in general, the Hegelian self is simultaneously finite and 'infinite', reconciled and in balance.⁵⁷

Kierkegaard cannot believe that the self (especially any self alive to Western history) can be fully satisfied in such a purported reconciliation. He would say this, no doubt, even if he were made fully aware of all the difficulties in modern society that Marx stresses *and also* believed in all the improvements in society that Marx anticipates. Kierkegaard's ultimate problem with the value of the social domain has nothing to do with the specific structures of Hegelian ethical and political theory; it has to do with his own belief that the individual self as such has a dimension to which no such structure can do full justice—and that it is

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 54.

⁵⁵ See *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, sects. 4–24, esp. sect. 13, on thinking rather than mere will as 'infinite' and sect. 22: 'it is the will whose potentialities have become fully explicit which is truly infinite because its object has become itself.'

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* sect. 23: 'only in freedom of this kind is the will by itself without qualification, because then it is related to nothing but itself.'

⁵⁷ See *ibid.* 12: 'we recognize reason as the rose of the cross in the present, this is the rational insight that reconciles us to the actual . . . to comprehend, not only to dwell in what is substantive.'

this dimension alone that properly deserves the term 'infinite'.⁵⁸ Following the German romantics, whom Hegel castigated as hopelessly eccentric,⁵⁹ Kierkegaard takes the notion of the infinite in this sense to have a not to be denied vertiginous pull on the self, and to have a meaning that can never be captured by the new definitions Hegel had manufactured (in this way even the aesthetic stage reveals a value that is dialectically satisfied in the final, and only the final, stage of life). Here Kierkegaard lays the groundwork for later existentialism by emphasizing two traditional notions in a way that parallels not Hegel but Schelling (and, earlier, Kant).⁶⁰ The two most basic truths in Kierkegaard's philosophy uncannily correspond to precisely the two main departures from early idealism that Schelling came to emphasize in his late work: the 'positive', or underivable, facts of our absolute freedom and the existence of God (as an individual)—facts that cannot be equated with either a 'reconciled' part or the all-inclusive whole of Hegel's thoroughly rational theoretical system.

It is only in the final stage on life's way, Religiousness B, that the self can face its infinite aspirations in a satisfied way. Unlike the knight of resignation, the Kierkegaardian knight of faith is devoted to both the finite and the infinite. The God it worships is not the abstract 'philosopher's God', infinite and aloof, but a being whose Incarnation paradoxically combines infinitude and finitude both in itself and in its promise of satisfaction for the believer. Kierkegaard reads the story of Abraham as an anticipation of this paradox. Abraham does not simply resign himself in obedience; he makes a 'double movement', believing that he is serving a transcendent, infinite God, a partner of his own infinite self, and also that this God will allow him, in some way that reason cannot foresee or explain, to retain satisfaction in a finite way, among his people and the generations to come. Abraham's story is used by Kierkegaard to illustrate how each Christian believer must commit to a paradoxical double movement. First, there is the long but 'strictly human' step toward appreciating the full force of the ethical as well as the need to respect a value beyond the finite altogether. Secondly, 'by virtue of the absurd', there is the return to oneself as forgiven and as anticipating salvation, a satisfaction of one's passion and finitude. This step is not merely free, in an absolute sense, as all the individual stages are; it is the only one that in principle lacks any rational foundation and thus can never be justified to others. This is why Kierkegaard called his work a dialectical *lyric*. The key transition is a 'leap of faith', and it cannot be made or grounded by any logic, not even that

⁵⁸ As Kierkegaard makes clear in *Sickness unto Death*, the infinite dimension is in fact present at all stages of life, and so there is a kind of infinity in the aesthetic and ethical dimensions as well, but it does not have the literal transcendent dimension that is discovered only with resignation.

⁵⁹ See Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik*, rev. edn. (Munich: Fink, 1998).

⁶⁰ On Kierkegaard's education and his attendance at Schelling's 1841 Berlin lectures, see James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953); cf. Dieter Sturma, 'Politics and the New Methodology: The Turn to Late Romanticism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 219–38.

of speculative idealism. Moreover, as Kierkegaard emphasizes in his even bleaker late work, the *Sickness unto Death*, the failure to take this last step does not leave us 'fairly well off', three-quarters of the way toward satisfaction. On the contrary, it leaves us in a perpetual disequilibrium between the finite and infinite sides of our own self, in an ever-deepening despair, with all the pervasive patterns of deception of self and others that Sartre eventually catalogued in his marvelous Kierkegaardian epitaph to idealism, *Being and Nothingness*.

If, in our own time, most reflective intellectuals are defined, above all else, by a rejection of the traditional philosopher's optimistic attitude toward rationalism (a rejection reinforced by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, the postmodernists and many others working in Kierkegaard's wake), then—whether or not we can follow Kierkegaard's leap of faith—we are, in our non-rationalism, still much closer to him than to Hegel, or Feuerbach, or Marx. In that case, unless something like 'rational faith' (itself a seemingly paradoxical term) can be resurrected with integrity, it can appear that the end of the idealist era brings us back to the fundamental choices presented by Hamann and Jacobi at the birth of German Idealism: the either/or of traditional faith or despair.⁶¹

⁶¹ See Frederick Beiser, 'The Enlightenment and Idealism', in *ibid.* 18–36; Daniel Dahlstrom, 'The Aesthetic Holism of Hamann, Herder, and Schiller', in *ibid.* 76–94; and Paul W. Franks, 'All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold and Maimon', in *ibid.* 95–116.

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PART IV
CONTEMPORARY
INTERPRETATIONS

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On Beiser's German Idealism

Frederick Beiser's magisterial new volume on German Idealism provides the latest and most ambitious installment of his account of the main periods of classical German philosophy.¹ This book contains nearly 600 pages of text, 97 pages of notes, and a well-organized 25-page bibliography that covers merely a portion of the extensive scholarship that was consulted. Its four parts can each be regarded as significant works of their own, concerning, in turn (1) Kant, (2) Fichte, (3) absolute idealism, and (4) Schelling. The volume exhibits the well-known features of Beiser's earlier work, notably his engaging style and unique gift for reconstructing relatively obscure philosophical debates in a way that provides a gripping intellectual drama for readers of all kinds. This account of German Idealism is by no means a mechanical survey of the period that merely summarizes previous work. It delves deeply into an enormous range of primary and secondary sources, covers numerous important controversies effectively for the first time in English, and offers a challenging new perspective on the era as a whole.

The book's subtitle, 'The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801', indicates an orientation that is highly appropriate in several ways. First, it properly expresses the fundamental fact that, despite their emphasis on the distinctive powers of mind, or subjectivity in general, the major philosophers of the German Idealist period are all very much oriented *against*, rather than toward, 'subjectivism' as it is ordinarily understood in English—for example, in the sense of any reduction of ontology to a set of mental states. Second, the subtitle is an indirect reminder of the fact that there is a struggle here that concerns not only these primary figures but also the intense dispute about their interpretation, which has been going on ever since 1781. The tendency to invoke the spectre of subjectivism as a heavy-handed club against earlier thinkers is a mistake that still must be struggled against, and it is a problem that often can be found in the Idealists' attitudes toward their own immediate predecessors, as well as in uncharitable

¹ Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). This volume complements two earlier hefty monographs, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), and *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), as well as two volumes that Beiser has edited with substantive introductions: *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

and still influential contemporary readings. On this point I am in deep overall agreement with Beiser, whatever differences may arise concerning details.

Third, the theme of subjectivism also has the advantage of providing a clear focus and a sensible principle of limitation for Beiser's study, which concerns arguably the two most fruitful decades ever in German thought. Of course, such an approach inevitably has some drawbacks, since the significance and relevance of other themes cannot be fully explored. This limitation has to be kept in mind especially when reading the part on Kant, which is by no means meant as an exhaustive account of Critical philosophy. With respect to the three other parts of the book, however, the fact is that there is still very little work available in English which even attempts to offer a reconstruction that—like Beiser's—treats *all* these post-Kantian philosophies in a way that is at once synoptic, historically informed, up to date, and truly accessible for a wide audience of scholars. For this reason alone, readers will be extremely indebted to the expository portions of the parts on Fichte and Schelling, and above all to the part on 'absolute idealism'. Because of the time period under consideration, this part, despite its title, does not focus on Hegel but instead features individual chapters on Hölderlin, Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel—a set of chapters that (I believe) is a first in a contemporary philosophy book by a major American scholar. In the wake of path-breaking work by German scholars such as Dieter Henrich, Ernst Behler, Manfred Frank and others,² international respect for these figures as philosophers of general significance, and not 'only' as notable writers or aestheticians, has grown considerably of late. Their chances for finally gaining a position on standard reading lists in the Anglophone philosophical world have received a major boost from the way they are singled out in Beiser's extensive chapters.

I. OVERVIEW

Rather than even attempting to summarize the full range of ideas in this enormous work, I will very briefly note some of the main points in its four parts, and then focus on a few central philosophical issues concerning the problem of subjectivism.

Part I does not attempt to cover all of Kant's work. It discusses various texts, throughout his career, in which Kant is concerned with arguing in different ways for an external world, and with defending his own transcendental idealist position from the objection of entailing a subjectivist ontology. This issue comes to a head in the reactions to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781),

² See, e.g., Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatte am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

and in the reformulations that Kant undertakes in response to his critics in the *Prolegomena* (1784), in the new 'Refutation of Idealism' in the B edition of the *Critique* (1787), and in repeated argument sketches in the *Opus Postumum*. The topics of this part concern traditional issues that are most familiar to contemporary readers of philosophy, but they are also the ones on which it is hardest to break new ground. Although the philosophical positions discussed in the later parts are exceptionally interesting, I suspect that, like myself, most philosophical reviewers will not be able to escape giving this first part the most attention—after all, it is impossible to approach the post-Kantians properly without first clarifying the Kantian system to which they are all reacting.

Part II traces Fichte's main works and defends in detail an interpretation of his philosophy as emphasizing the study of subjectivity—that is, an a priori determination of the basic powers of mind, while nonetheless holding to a strongly realist, rationalist, and ultimately morally grounded system. Fichte's philosophy has attracted much attention lately, but his fundamental works still remain obscure. Beiser provides helpful new analyses of the pre-*Wissenschaftslehre* essays (1792–3), the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–7) itself, and then the major works on natural right (1796) and ethics (1798). The fact that Fichte attempts to explain knowledge and reality in reference to something that he calls the 'I' or 'absolute ego' does not signify any actual doubt about, or lack of concern with, physical reality. In criticizing Kant's notion of the 'thing in itself', for example, Fichte does not at all mean to challenge the existence of what most of us would call external reality; rather, he wants to expose what he takes to be absurdities in a metaphysics that posits transcendent entities altogether beyond what consciousness in principle could reach.³

Part III is perhaps the most controversial part of the book. It begins by defining a general position, called 'absolute idealism', which is said to be common not only to the early Hegel and Schelling but also to the three literary giants, Hölderlin, Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel.⁴ This form of idealism is a unique mix of the philosophies of Spinoza, Plato, and Herder. It is 'absolute' because it is a *monism* that affirms one all-inclusive being, an 'absolute' that can be thought of, at first, in terms of something like Spinoza's all-encompassing substance. This

³ See pp. 269–72, and p. 317: 'In the end, despite Fichte's scorn of it, the concept of a thing-in-itself does play a central role in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. It essentially serves as a limiting concept to express what remains beyond our powers in our infinite striving to control nature . . . it acts on our sensibility, providing the raw matter of experience. There is still one respect in which Fichte's concept differs from Kant's: the Fichtean check is infinitely determinable rather than absolutely indeterminate for the powers of the understanding; in other words, its unknowability is a matter of kind, not degree.'

⁴ A fact that should never cease to amaze us is that all of these extraordinary figures—and many others—met directly with one another during this period in the small university town of Jena. See Theodore Ziolkowski, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena: Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/5* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998), and *German Romanticism and its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

position is called 'idealism' not because of any psychological, individualistic, or skeptical orientation but because these German thinkers affirm a broadly Platonic kind of *rationalism*, one that is meant to be unlike Spinoza's insofar as it adds Herder's influential claim that nature has a basic teleological and *vitalistic* form. Nature involves historical and dynamic processes that are, at the very least, analogous to higher human spiritual activities.⁵

This interpretation is highly controversial in view of the fact that Manfred Frank and others have argued for a sharp distinction between post-Kantian idealism as such and the more modest position of Early German Romanticism. The romantic position, represented especially by Novalis and the early Schlegel, aims directly at challenging the foundationalist methodology of philosophers such as the early Reinhold and Fichte.⁶ Even if it is conceded that the Jena thinkers all agree in allowing that there is something like a Spinozist whole of 'being' that defines 'the absolute', writers in the Early Romantic subgroup have been taken by these interpreters to be distinctive in strongly emphasizing restrictions in principle in our philosophical capacity to determine this absolute whole. For them, our consciousness encounters the absolute as something that it *cannot understand* as fully identical with itself. Hence, instead of being attracted to a completely rational system, they emphasize an appreciation (often literary) of the necessarily fragmented relationship of our consciousness to anything like an 'absolute'. This thought is important not only as a feasible reading of a unique group of gifted writers long ago in Jena, but also because in many circles, ever since at least Walter Benjamin's work, it has been taken to express a philosophical option that can appear to be the most appropriate one for the twentieth century and after.⁷ Beiser contends that what is most important about this group is that they all still claim in some way to 'know' something about the 'absolute', even if not by ordinary 'discursive' (or perhaps: demonstrative?) determinations (p. 354). Other interpreters would no doubt counter that, by stressing the fundamental limitations on our knowledge of the absolute, the Early Romantics were not so much modifying a common project as instituting a fundamentally new attitude,

⁵ Cf. similar considerations in my 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism', in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–17.

⁶ Cf. Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Aesthetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989); Charles Larmore, 'Hölderlin and Novalis', in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 141–60; and Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000). Beiser implies that Frank discounts the cognitive philosophical claims of the Early Romantics and characterizes them too often as skeptics. Despite striking differences in terminology, both interpreters seem to agree on the fundamental point that, whatever these Romantics were doing positively, they were clearly distancing themselves from what they took to be Fichte's excessively foundationalist and self-focused type of system.

⁷ See, e.g., Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988); and Azade Seyhan, *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

a never-to-be rescinded suspicion about the purity and completeness of modern philosophy as such.

Part IV offers a remarkably extensive analysis of Schelling's early career. Here again the naturalist and realist aspects of German Idealism are stressed, and the overall positive scientific effect of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is documented.⁸ Beiser's accounts of Schelling's various systems from 1797 through 1801 provide numerous details that go beyond other studies in English. The intrinsic appeal of this philosophy is harder to see, however, especially since Beiser does not emphasize Schelling's more popular historical, aesthetic, and religious insights. Beiser also restrains himself here from exploring Hegel's thought in detail. He does note, however, that at that time Hegel is very close to Schelling in emphasizing an approach that models itself on teleological *Naturphilosophie* rather than on the kind of highly formal 'transcendental' methodology that Fichte encouraged, which for the most part prescind from considerations of natural science.⁹ This point has implications that go far beyond methodology and reveal a serious rupture in the German Idealist movement that Beiser himself is not inclined to highlight: the Fichtean emphasis on *individual freedom* of will, which is clearly the rallying point for the early partisans of the movement, seems to stand in direct conflict with the *deterministic* implications of the *Naturphilosophie* and Spinozistic holism that are the initial focus of the followers of post-Fichtean idealism. To this extent, the internal split between the main versions of post-Kantian idealism may involve a deeper and more irreconcilable tension than that found in the much maligned 'dualisms' of Kant's philosophy.

II. STRUGGLING WITH SUBJECTIVISM

I have already noted my deep agreement with Beiser's major thesis that the main German thinkers of this period are clearly opponents, rather than proponents, of subjectivism as this term is now generally understood. One might accept this point, however, and still question the degree to which this issue is truly a central concern of the age. One might contend, for example, that charges concerning subjectivism in these philosophies are so manifestly offbase that the main works of the period do not warrant entertaining a subjectivist interpretation even as a serious hypothesis. I have argued elsewhere that, even if subjectivist readings remain common among excellent philosophers in our own time, this tendency can be traced largely to understandable but fairly crude confusions of Kant with

⁸ Cf. Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Poetry and the Organic in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also forthcoming work on Schelling by Paul Franks and Michael Friedman.

⁹ For an exception, see Eckart Förster on Fichte's influence on Goethe's scientific thought: 'Da geht der Mann dem wir alles verdanken! Eine Untersuchung zum Verhältnis Goethe-Fichte', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 45 (1997), 331–45.

empiricists such as Hume and Berkeley.¹⁰ Anglophone philosophers often still tend to assume that all modern philosophers—and hence Kant and his successors as well—must be preoccupied with skeptical worries about an external world, and that any talk about ‘representations’ must be taken in an individualist, psychological sense—rather than, sometimes, as primarily an attempt to focus attention on epistemological considerations as such. It is also true, of course, that at the ontological level the German Idealists all put a special emphasis on ‘ideas’, but this can be understood largely as an innocent heritage of a branch of the Platonic rationalist tradition that is well known on the Continent but often forgotten elsewhere (p. 29; cf. pp. 364–5, 383–4).¹¹ According to this tradition, as Beiser notes, ultimately ‘the ideal realm consists not in personality and subjectivity but in the normative, the archetypal, and the intelligible’ (p. 6).

Accepting all this, I disagree nonetheless with an implication of an earlier part of the same sentence from Beiser, in which he appropriates this Platonic view of the ‘ideal’ as part of his own story of German Idealism as what he calls ‘the progressive de-subjectivization of the Kantian legacy’ (p. 6). He goes on to claim: ‘The subjective played a diminishing [NB] role in German Idealism, as the post-Kantian idealists realized that the Kantian transcendental subject plays a residual role in the constitution of experience, whose objectivity ultimately depends on its universal and necessary normative structure’ (p. 6). The controversial implication of this remark is that there is some kind of relatively ‘undiminished’ bad form of subjectivism in Kant after all, as if, *instead of* accepting the sensible ultimacy of a ‘universal and necessary normative structure’, Kant makes matters relative to a ‘mere subject’ after all.

Not surprisingly, I want to argue against this insinuation against the solid objective credentials of the Critical philosophy. Before doing so, however, it should be noted that there may be a sense in which Beiser’s point is meant as a ‘returning of the compliment’ with regard to what he seems to believe is a parallel misguided charge on my part, in earlier work, against his special heroes. In a note at the very beginning of his book, he indicates that at times I share the ‘popular and persistent’ bad subjectivist interpretation of the post-Kantians (p. 1, n. 1). He continues: ‘According to this interpretation, German idealism [a term which in this context usually signifies the main philosophies *after* Kant’s] is essentially the culmination of the Cartesian tradition. It accepts some of the central assumptions of this tradition: that epistemology is *philosophia prima*; that only

¹⁰ See above, Ch. 4.

¹¹ Cf. Frederick Beiser, ‘The Enlightenment and Idealism’, in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, 18–36; and ‘Two Concepts of Reason in German Idealism’, in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 1 (2003), 15–27. I have also argued that, despite obvious differences, there are many parallels between Kant’s general philosophical position and Platonism. See my ‘On Being Neither Post- nor Anti-Kantian: A Reply to Breazeale and Larmore Concerning “The Fate of Autonomy”’, *Inquiry*, 46 (2003), 272–92. See also my *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

self-knowledge is certain; that the immediate objects of knowledge are ideas; and that knowledge consists in contemplation rather than action' (p. 1). In particular, according to this bad interpretation, 'Kant's great successors—Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel . . . achieved their grand ambition, first by purging dogmatic residues from Kant's system (the thing-in-itself, the given manifold), and then by extending its underlying principle (the creative powers of the subject). The story ends with the triumph of the subject, which is now expanded to cosmic dimensions so that it becomes the source of *all* reality. The development of German idealism is a tale about the *expansion, aggrandizement, or inflation* of the transcendental subject' (p. 2).

This is an exciting list of charges that no doubt applies, at least in large part, to several Anglophone interpretations—but I do not recognize my own view in it. Some distinctions are called for, and it may help at this point to distinguish three main views about the period. Call the first view the Radical Apology, in other words, Beiser's own position, a defense of post-Kantianism as a process of 'de-subjectivizing' an allegedly subjectivist 'Kantian legacy'.¹² Call another view (one directly opposed to Beiser's) the Extreme Dismissal, a position defined by attributing to German Idealism—including Kant—all the controversial features of the 'Cartesian tradition' that Beiser has just listed. Finally, there is the view that covers everything in between, which can be called the Mixed Middle. My own position is a version of this view, one that is characterized by interpreting later German Idealism as in general anti-subjectivist but somewhat *less* clearly so than Kant himself. That is, it suffers from some—but *only some*—so-called Cartesian tendencies, and these are shortcomings that are *not* the specific grievous charges that Beiser recounts.¹³ On this position, there is *in fact* no relatively subjective Kantian position for later thinkers to correct, even if it must be conceded that they often *present* their own position as a correction of alleged earlier 'subjective' tendencies. In other words, rather than seeing this period, *apologetically*, as a liberation from 'Kantian 'subjectivism', or, *dismissively*, as a headlong descent into a bizarre 'inflated subjectivism', one might understand it *therapeutically*—that is, as a complex. It is a mixed bundle of interesting but overly ambitious programs, programs that in part are inspired by sound Kantian ideas, but that in part are also infected by extreme versions of questionable ideas (some of which no doubt have traces in less cautious aspects of the subject-oriented *rhetoric* of earlier figures such as Descartes and even Kant himself).

¹² Part of the problem here may be terminological. Beiser may be calling 'subjectivist' certain features of Kant's philosophy that I believe reflect what are simply 'subjective' elements in Kant's philosophy. Since Kant writes about experience, the self, the subject, and so on, his philosophy—like most philosophies—makes room for subjective phenomena. By itself, however, this does not imply, let alone entail, the *subjectivist* idea (e.g., in phenomenalism) that what exists is fundamentally subjective *rather than* objective. See below, nn. 14–17.

¹³ See below, n. 18.

To be more specific in evaluating these options, it is useful to consider more closely the controversial claims that Beiser lists as charges to German idealism. I will focus on six main points.

1. The Epistemology First charge: that German Idealism makes epistemology the most basic discipline.
2. The Cartesian Base charge: that it makes 'only' self-knowledge certain.
3. The Phenomenological Representationalism charge: that it says the 'immediate' objects of our knowledge are ideas, which are simply inner states (and not, e.g., physical or Platonic objects).¹⁴
4. The Passivity charge: that it says our knowledge 'consists in contemplation rather than action'.
5. The Creationist charge: that the 'underlying principle' of this Idealism is a grounding in 'the creative powers of the subject'.
6. The Triumphalist charge: that in its logical culmination this Idealism puts 'all reality' within a 'cosmic' transcendental subject.

These are familiar charges. They can often be found in influential dismissive interpretations of the German Idealists developed by old-line Anglophone philosophers, and also in the presumptions of new-wave writers belonging to the deconstructivist wing of the Marx–Nietzsche–Heidegger tradition. Note, however, that even if Beiser is basically right to defend German Idealism against these charges, it may turn out that this still leaves the ultimate evaluation of German Idealism far from settled.

Among these six points, I see the Epistemology and Passivity charges as relatively minor. From the very beginning of their careers, it is obvious that the German Idealists all have deep metaphysical and activist interests. They understand well that, for the purposes of building a philosophical system, epistemology

¹⁴ Beiser shifts this issue sometimes (p. 21; cf. sects. 7.2–7.5) from the question of what we first cognize to the question of whether what we are immediately 'aware' of is only our individual 'ideas'. This is a very different issue and not one that I see as central for understanding Kant (see also p. 118, which conflates conditions of 'awareness' with conditions of experience, i.e., knowledge), who concentrates on 'consciousness' and 'experience' and not on primitive 'awareness'. Perhaps the difference is missed because sometimes Beiser conflates the *meaning* of 'experience', in Kant's epistemic but relatively modest sense, with full 'systematic unity and lawful interconnection' (p. 117; cf. p. 241, where this same conflation seems to have been made in important early reviews of Kant that Beiser recounts). These highly specific characteristics need not be understood as contained, in a vicious circle, in Kant's definition of the basic notion of experience, but can be understood to turn out to be required for it upon full examination of our general epistemic situation, i.e. as the conclusion and not the premiss of transcendental arguments. The issue here must also be distinguished from the ontological problem (p. 21; cf. sect. 7.6) of whether the 'external' characteristics that I know are 'only' appearances and not things in themselves. The ultimate metaphysical characterization of 'external' properties is not basically a matter of phenomenology or the epistemology of perception.

of some sort is surely important but it cannot be carried out in total isolation from other concerns. Note that even Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic begins with a 'metaphysical exposition' before it moves on to a 'transcendental' exposition of space and time. Similarly, each of the Idealist systems has its own version of what can be called a principle of the 'primacy of the practical'—but for the most part this takes the form not of an extreme denial that knowledge can take a contemplative form, but simply a recognition that activity of some kind is inherent even in our contemplative cognitive processes.

The remaining four points fall naturally into two pairs. The first pair, the Cartesian and Representationalist charges, are surely offbase from the start. Kant's Refutation of Idealism denies that there can be any self-knowledge, in the ordinary sense of the term, that is independent of knowledge of what is outside the self, and thus it is aimed directly against all advocates of a so-called Cartesian Base. And, precisely because the Refutation argues that external knowledge is, in contrast, 'immediate' (B 277),¹⁵ it clearly rejects the common modern 'representationalist' presumption that our own inner ideas are the focus of our knowledge. At times Beiser notes this point himself, but at other times he seems to go along with the idea that Kant is in fact trying to meet the Cartesian on his own ground by arguing, for example, that there is 'self-evident' 'self-awareness' that is supposedly enough to show that there must be a 'coherent' and 'therefore' external world.¹⁶ I would challenge any reconstruction of this kind, which goes too far in

¹⁵ That is to say, Kant argues that 'outer experience'—which here means knowledge of something spatial—is prior to 'inner experience', i.e., *knowledge* of what is inner. This means that external knowledge is 'immediate' in the sense of being *not mediated* by knowledge of another kind. This is not to say that it is in all senses 'immediate'; it obviously requires, for example, a complex combination of given and spontaneous components.

¹⁶ Beiser also contends that Kant 'has to justify ordinary belief from some self-evident basis' (p. 62). This point is made in opposition to my claims that Kant ultimately relies on 'common knowledge' (p. 611 n. 3). See my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39, 57, and cf. my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*. Beiser's objections to my position here suggest that I ascribe to Kant a wholly uncritical acceptance of the position of 'common sense', especially as it was used in the disputes of the day, something that I explicitly deny (*Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 58). I see no evidence for Beiser's contrasting view, that Kant is relying all the way down explicitly on a 'self-evident' basis. His own reconstruction of the Refutation relies not on such a basis but on the substantive premiss that there is (cognitive) *experience* of time *determination* (pp. 117–18). At one point (p. 121), Beiser claims that Kant is appealing to a 'self-evident fact' here, but Kant himself never characterizes his premiss that way. Beiser himself rephrases the premiss of the Refutation as 'I am having an experience at such and such a time'. I take it that this is meant to refer to an *objective* time point, one time objectively distinguished from others, for otherwise it is hard to see how the argument could proceed as it does. It is striking that there is no attempt by Kant or Beiser to show that this premiss is literally self-evident, that there could not be radical skeptics who hold back from any such objective claims. Hence I believe it makes more sense to say that Kant's argument proceeds on the supposition that there is some 'experience', which is always empirical cognition of some sort, and so the question in dispute is whether the items that are first cognized can be simply inner. Beiser says the aim of Kant's argument is 'to demonstrate that we have an experience of things' (p. 17; cf. p. 120, 'Kant's aim in the Refutation is to prove that we have an *experience* of objects'; Beiser seems not to notice the difference between this phrase and Kant's more specific claim—which he

the direction of implying that Kant is trying to work out from a 'subjectivist' base after all.¹⁷ In other words, despite the general character of much of his own later analysis (e.g. ch. 1.6; cf. p. 621 n. 13), the way Beiser *initially* frames the contrast between Kant and the post-Kantians seems to encourage the unfortunate thought that Kant himself is not entirely free from at least the Cartesian charge.¹⁸ It is true that *in fact* the charge was often pinned upon Kant by his readers, and that its reoccurrence has *understandable* roots in some of his own troublesome formulations, especially in the A edition of the *Critique*—but all this is compatible with denying that later philosophers were ever right in implying that, properly understood, Kant himself espoused a 'Cartesian' position in his Critical texts.

Moreover, even if it is conceded (as Beiser wants to argue) that at times the later Idealists were clearer in their rejection of this kind of Cartesianism, this does not show that in some *other* sense they (much more than Kant) might not have still fallen prey to a debatable privileging of the mind. One way to express this

cites here—to demonstrate 'that we have experience . . . of [NB] outer things' (B 275)). This is as if Kant's aim is to prove, categorically, that we have experience at all. From my perspective, such an interpretation obscures the fact that here again Kant is working *from* the basic fact, or 'common knowledge', that there is (some kind of conceded) experience, *to a specific* and significant further characterization of it. See below, n. 17, and cf. Beiser's own analysis of the *opus postumum* in these terms (p. 191).

¹⁷ See n. 10 above and also my 'Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument', *Kant-Studien*, 69 (1978), 273–85; and 'Problems from Van Cleve's Kant: Experience and Objects', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66 (2003), 196–202. Beiser adds that Kant's position is 'subjectivist' because it 'attaches all appearances to a transcendental subject, which is their source . . . [and] this subject cannot be simply impersonal . . . [but has] self-awareness and spontaneity' (p. 21; cf. pp. 159–61). I do not follow the objection here, since 'subjectivist' would seem to be much more appropriate as a term having to do with claims that things, rather than 'appearances', must be 'attached' to a subject (as it seems only natural to think that appearances are in some way relative to a subject). Moreover, Kant does not talk literally about a transcendental subject as a person or self (to conflate these is to fall into paralogisms), but about a 'transcendental I' in the sense of a transcendental representation of the I. This is a representation of the I as transcendental, i.e. a representation of all the knowledge-constituting capacities that any actual subject of knowledge must exhibit. So, when an ordinary person exhibits these capacities, it is being 'transcendental' and 'self-aware' as well, but (just as with Fichte or Hegel) this does not mean that there is a being that is a transcendental subject (that is free, conscious, etc.) *in addition* to the actual knowing subjects that exist (see p. 155, and cf. my 'Apperzeption und Subjekt. Kants Lehre vom Ich', in Dietmar H. Heidemann and Kristina Engelhard (ed.), *Warum Kant heute? Systematische Bedeutung und Rezeption seiner Philosophie in der Gegenwart* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 76–99). I do not see that the fact that these capacities may be at once 'subjective' and irreducible implies any kind of generally 'subjectivist' philosophy, since being as such is never claimed to be subject relative (even if subjects may be among the ultimate beings that there are). At the same time, Kant's position here need not involve having to reduce the I to something 'impersonal', a 'merely logical' or 'scientific function', as some neo-Kantians would prefer.

¹⁸ To this extent, Beiser seems to be following the traditional Hegelian thought that Kant has a one-sided 'subjective' approach to the problem of 'subject-object identity', in contrast to the equally bad 'objective' approach, and the supposedly proper and balanced approach of 'absolute idealism'. I prefer to stay away as much as possible from these kinds of formulations, because the notion of 'identity' here is extremely vague and ambiguous, and it seems anachronistic to attempt to apply it to Kant's basic concerns, which can be explained in terms of other traditional concepts such as judgment, categories, and objectivity.

worry is to stress the fact that, unlike Kant, many of them (but not the 'Romantic wing') rejected the notion of an unknowable thing in itself so radically that it would seem that they were saying that there absolutely cannot be any reality transcending the reach of the human mind in principle. This is a position that might in fact be true, and that could even be held now by some varieties of optimistic scientific realism, but, all the same, it is a bold and controversial thought, a thought that in one sense leaves nothing beyond 'our subjectivity'—even if not in a psychological or representationalist sense.¹⁹ In sum, the German Idealists' attitude toward subjectivism is not exhausted by the fact that they reject, even more emphatically than Kant, the specific charges that Beiser lists. There can still be reasons why contemporary realists (e.g., Thomas Nagel) would be uneasy with them at a metaphysical level, even if it is agreed all around that there exist objects that are external to minds in any individual or global psychological sense.

These concerns are also relevant to the final pair of suspicions about German versions of 'inflated' egoism: the Creationist charge and the Triumphalist charge. The claim that Idealists insist on a principle of the 'creative powers of the subject' is certainly a commonplace, but the Mixed Middle position of the interpretation that I favor is not committed to it. Kant's own publications constantly repeat the theme that we are finite and receptive subjects (cf. p. 200), and that in neither theory nor practice do we literally create anything of substance. As for the later Idealists, on this point I would again start by agreeing with Beiser that they are, if anything (and despite their reputation in some quarters), even more adamant than Kant about the limitations of the subject in any ordinary sense. As quasi-Spinozists, they hold that all that we ordinarily call subjectivity must be a principle that is *within* the totality of being, the absolute. Nonetheless, as Beiser's

¹⁹ It is the problem of this thought that in large part stands behind some remarks of mine that seem to have led Beiser (p. 1 n.1) to take my way of reading the Idealists as tantamount to an inappropriately 'subjectivist' and dismissive interpretation. I do say that 'Fichte's philosophy, and most of the whole era of German idealism, can be seen as a massive attempt to work out the implications of this model [in Kant's moral theory] of an 'optical illusion' of passivity by going so far as possible to argue that whatever seems to be a given of nature is in some hidden sense the product of an autonomous mind' (*Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, 227). Note, however, that I say only that this concerns 'most' of German idealism, and it involves a model that is attempted 'so far as possible'. Above all, I clearly do not mean that the notion of 'autonomous mind' that is relevant here has to be anything like a psychological and individual subject; it can be the kind of rational and teleological vitalist 'absolute' monism that Beiser characterizes in his own account. Similarly, I contend that 'Hegel did challenge the Cartesian tradition in many ways, but he often remained bound to its presumption that self-perception (as in the metaphysical articulation of the forms of *Geist*) has a special privilege' (ibid. 308). This point involves the very difficult question of whether the 'movement' of the Hegelian *Begriff*, in some totally objective sense, is the model for understanding his notion of apperception, or vice versa. Robert Pippin, Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, Fred Neuhouser, Robert Wallace and others are exploring this difficult issue of Hegelian apologetics in helpful new detail now, but I think it is agreed on all sides that Hegel's non-Cartesian 'idealism' still has a theoretical focus on analogies from models of personal self-determination that go beyond Kant's claims (which, for example, are willing to allow something like mechanism as an ultimate characterization of nature), and to that extent it remains caught in a more 'mind-like' metaphysics. This is different from a charge of 'subjectivism', which I do not make.

own formulation of the charge indirectly suggests, the key issue here might not be literal creation as such, but rather the suspicion that at least a basic part of reality—or even all of it, if the Triumphalist charge can be made to stick—is *dependent* on, or at least not independent of, subjectivity in some special ‘transcendental’ sense.

The relevant and threatening transcendental sense here can be understood if we recall that the basic meaning of the term ‘transcendental’ is ‘that which makes our a priori knowledge possible or intelligible’. The problem of an ‘aggrandizing’ transcendental subject thus has to do with the point, noted earlier, that *post-Kantian* idealism excludes any possible reality, any thing in itself, that is beyond this human knowledge as such.²⁰ For such idealism, there *cannot be* anything that the ‘transcendental subject’ cannot reach, and thus, even if this subject might not ‘create’ the world, it can be said to capture all there is through its own ‘inflated’ self. Of course, one can, and should, immediately add that this ‘subject’ is not any sort of psychological, individual, finite mind—but all that is precisely taken for granted anyway in the ‘cosmic’ German Idealist position. Thus, even without creation-dependence, a significant form of dependence remains in this idealism, one that clearly contrasts with the Kantian thought of a thing in itself that can remain precisely independent of all the crucial determinate forms of *our* knowledge. Of this thing it can be said that (for all that we can theoretically know) it may be *not* ‘like’ or even accessible to any mind, or at least to any ‘subject’ with characteristics from which the forms of our experience can be deduced. That is the ultimately realistic point of Kant’s ‘restriction’ thesis concerning the ideality of space and time. For this reason, I conclude that, without going back to something like the *objective* legacy of Kant on this point (and getting beyond congratulating itself for overcoming mythical notions of his view as still relatively subjectivistic), German Idealism may run into serious objections of a kind of ‘quasi-subjectivism’ after all—even if it can escape from the specific objections from which Beiser’s massive study has liberated it.²¹

²⁰ See, e.g., n. 3 above.

²¹ For help in working on the issues of this essay, I am very indebted to Fred Beiser, Paul Franks, Anja Jaurenig, Fred Rush, and Eric Watkins.

The Key Role of *Selbstgefühl* in Philosophy's Aesthetic and Historical Turns

I. SUBJECTIVITY AND THE AESTHETIC TURN

In philosophy are the terms 'subjective' and 'aesthetic' primarily terms of praise *or* of disdain, and—whichever answer is taken—why? This is, of course, an incomplete question; in some contexts, some eras, one answer can seem clearly appropriate, whereas in another context just the opposite answer could seem better. This leads to more specific questions: how was it that these terms *became so* closely linked and relevant to philosophy, when did they first dominate, and what is their status and relation today? These are very broad questions that no doubt could be approached in a variety of ways, but I shall try to make some headway with them by focusing on the area I am most familiar with, the ongoing history of Critical philosophy.

From the start, Critical forms of philosophy showed an especially strong tendency to combine and privilege realms that they *explicitly* designated as subjective and aesthetic. Consider the 'Copernican turn' and Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the subversive fragments of the German Early Romantics, and the resounding manifesto of the 'Earliest System Program' of the Tübingen/Jena post-Kantians. Soon, however, the subjective—but *not* so much the aesthetic—component of Critical thought came under heavy attack from within mainstream German philosophy itself. For the Hegel of 1801 and after—as also for dominant later thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gadamer—the achievement of a fully modern appreciation of the resources of a liberated and therefore properly aesthetic orientation, hence of an authentic life and culture at all, lay in overcoming any (supposedly) 'merely subjective' response to the alliance of earlier dogmatic ethical and religious views.¹ Thus Kant himself, and then each of his 'Critical heirs' in turn—Fichte, Schlegel, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach, and so on—came to be scolded by their successors for remaining all too subjective in their approach, for not grasping and utilizing the 'real premisses' and fully objective sources of progress and liberation.² Then the screw turned yet again. For the 'Critical Theory' generation, the nineteenth

¹ See above, Ch. 9.

² See above, Ch. 10.

century's pseudo-scientific notion of an absolute and fully 'objective' ground of liberation became itself an obstacle to be overcome. Twentieth-century theorists such as Benjamin and Adorno, and followers such as Terry Eagleton and Jay Bernstein, began to salvage the Critical potential of the subjective notes of dissonance expressed in perceptive (and primarily aesthetic) fragments by figures such as Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Kierkegaard.³ Nonetheless, in many quarters the interest of Critical Theory in subjectivity became submerged in discussions of social formation, consensus, and structures of discourse.⁴ At the same time, in the dominant strands of twentieth-century thought, the subject, especially in its so-called Cartesian (or allegedly Kantian) 'monological' form, came under heavy siege from all directions and was repeatedly declared dead by Continental 'neo-structuralists' and analytic philosophers alike.⁵ And yet, at the end of the millennium, auspicious signs of another reversal began to appear. Work by leading analytic philosophers such as Saul Kripke, Roderick Chisholm, and Thomas Nagel gave new encouragement to the minority in Anglophone philosophy and elsewhere who continued to suspect that notions such as consciousness and subjectivity are irreplaceable in the most rigorous scientific and philosophic positions.⁶ Meanwhile in Europe, more positive treatments of subjectivity (across the spectrum, from Todorov and Renaut to late Foucault and Badiou) appeared in France, and in Germany mainline figures such as Dieter Henrich and his students made influential arguments for a conception of subjectivity that need not be undermined by the deconstructive claims of the ever-growing crowd following Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, and others.

Within this latest movement, the work of Manfred Frank deserves special attention because of its extensive exploration of the close links between subjectivity, aesthetics, and the history of Critical thought. In earlier work, I have drawn attention to the complex relation between two 'bipolar' manifestations of subjectivity that Frank has emphasized: first, the 'base-level' subjectivity of *immediate 'feeling' qua self-familiarity*, called *ungegenständliche Selbstvertrautheit*

³ See Jay Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1992), especially the first chapters. See also Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism* (London: Continuum, 2002), and Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), especially the Kierkegaard chapter (the Kant chapter, 101 n. 14, has an unusual footnote chiding me for reading Kant in a 'hostile' manner, although that is the opposite of my intention).

⁴ Dieter Henrich, 'Was ist Metaphysik—Was ist Moderne? Zwölf Thesen gegen Jürgen Habermas', in *Konzepte: Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 11–14.

⁵ See, e.g., Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), *Who Comes after the Subject?* (London: Routledge, 1991); Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (eds.), *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), and Manfred Frank, *What is Neo-Structuralism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

⁶ See, e.g., Manfred Frank, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), and Manfred Frank (ed.), *Analytische Theorien des Selbstbewußtseins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994).

or *Selbstgefühl*, and, second, the higher-order phenomenon of *personal style*, particularly as expressed in the complexities of understanding and writing featured in the path-breaking hermeneutical investigations by Romantic figures such as Schleiermacher.⁷ (Simply for shorthand purposes, I will take the liberty sometimes of referring to all of these different, but also closely related, aspects of subjectivity under the common heading of *Selbstgefühl*, the title of Frank's most recent book on the topic.)

Note that the phenomena Frank highlights have an obvious significance for *aesthetics in general*, since it is easy to see how their everyday manifestations can serve as the natural source for paradigmatic explicitly aesthetic experiences. Furthermore, the distinctive character of *modern aesthetics in particular* seems very closely connected to the Romantics' specific way of emphasizing feeling and style, and to their innovative philosophical conception—inspired by figures such as Rousseau and Jacobi—of the ultimately *receptive* nature of the subjectivity that underlies these phenomena. As Frank has argued in great detail, many of the most significant philosophical and aesthetic achievements of the Early Romantics rest directly on their surprising and literally revolutionary idea of the subject. Their key claim, which was pressed especially by Novalis, is that the subject—*contrary* to Fichte and most stereotypical understandings of Romanticism itself⁸—does *not* 'posit' itself as an absolute ego (which would know anything passive only as a posited counterforce to its own original activity), but is instead encountered originally in a basic and continuous experience of *Selbstgefühl* marked by the key passive feature of feeling, that is, of *givenness*.⁹ In other words, despite the unforgettable claim of Goethe's Faust that 'in the beginning was the deed', it does *not* follow that the avant-garde of Weimar/Jena all thought in such terms—Faust and Fichte are not necessarily the best guides to show you the town.

To substantiate his point further, Frank has most recently documented in great detail how several now-forgotten philosophical psychologists of the eighteenth century (not only Platner and Tetens, but also Heydenreich, Merian, Hissman, and others), who were closely connected with the Romantics, explicitly employed numerous variations of the new term *Selbstgefühl*, or *sentiment de soi-même*, as the

⁷ See Karl Ameriks, 'The Ineliminable Subject: From Kant to Frank', in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1995), 217–30. Cf. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, ed. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), and Manfred Frank, *The Subject and the Text: Essays on Literary Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸ See Charles Larmore, 'Hölderlin and Novalis', in Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 141–60; Novalis: *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Manfred Frank, '*Unendliche Annäherung*': *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

⁹ Manfred Frank, *Selbstgefühl: Eine historisch-theoretische Erkundigung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002), esp. 37.

signature for this primordial kind of receptive experience, which was suddenly arousing widespread interest.¹⁰ The depth of this interest cannot be explained by the merely external fact of the precipitous loss of respect for traditional sources of meaning. One must also consider the fertile and bipolar internal nature of the experience itself. At its base level, it offers an immediate revelation of both the self and existence (actuality, being) as such, and thus provides an intimate form of certainty found nowhere else. Furthermore, the base experience also naturally lends itself toward being elaborated in several higher-order forms, culminating in the development of a personal and authentic style, as in the aphorisms, fancies, and novels of Novalis and Jean-Paul. This style takes one far beyond the wholly preconceptual immediacy of the base level, and yet, in all its sophistication, it remains essentially connected to the ineliminable subjective particularity of that level.¹¹ It thus is to be sharply contrasted both with any specific *quality* of a typical sensory state—for this reveals only *how* something feels but not *that* it is, and that it is *for* a subject—and with any *typical* conceptual, introspective, or reflective *activity*, for this is defined by an objectifying character lacking a direct sense of one's subjectivity as such.

It is worth noting that there are other features related to the experience that could be and were emphasized. In many quarters, the initial understanding of *Selbstgefühl* stressed a kind of heightened psychological or moral self-awareness (recall the double meaning of the French term *conscience*, and the ambiguity of the German term *Selbstbewusstsein*, which can signify either self-awareness or self-confidence), such as the immediate Kantian appreciation of one's individual human dignity,¹² or versions of Schleiermacher's intuitive feeling of our being fundamentally dependent in a religious way.¹³ These kinds of experience were very familiar at the time, and they also manifest the basically receptive nature of subjectivity that is central to *Selbstgefühl*, and so there is an important question here about why these forms eventually came to play a *secondary* role in what proved to be the most influential line of thought concerned with this phenomenon. Despite the deep pull of new 'subjective' experiences of both morality and religion, the fact of the matter is that it was instead the specific complexities of the new forms of what we would call basically *aesthetic* creation, appreciation, and life (though they themselves often gave it other names) that provided the Romantics with the main manifestations of the general structure of *Selbstgefühl*. It was in this sphere, more than anywhere else, that the Romantics showed how the complexities of *Selbstgefühl* exhibit, in an especially vivid manner, those striking peculiarities of an individual's feeling and personal style that go beyond anything fully explainable by mere material or psychological data, or by any pre-given

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, especially chs. III and VII–VIII; the new interest in Spinoza (generated by Jacobi's work) was also a large part of this phenomenon.

¹¹ See Frank, *The Subject and the Text*, 63: 'style is that aspect of a work which is irreducibly non-general.' Cf. *ibid.* 79, 92.

¹² See Frank, *Selbstgefühl*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid.* 190–1.

sets of common rules or behaviour—that is, the products of ‘typical conceptual, introspective, or reflective activity’. This was a momentous event. After the late modern separation of science and philosophy, philosophy might well have sought its main partner in religion, morality, or politics. Some may even contend that this is what happened—but, on my interpretation, the reason why Romanticism seems as important to us as it does now is that, for better or worse, it prefigured the fact that, from Bloomsbury to Freiburg and Paris, modern philosophy on the whole has turned out to take what is best characterized as an aesthetic rather than an ethical or religious ‘turn’.

One reason that this turn was possible is that, even though the moments of feeling and style, which mark subjectivity’s distinctive ‘low’ and ‘high’ poles, are especially closely connected to aesthetics in its best-known forms (the creation and criticism of the arts), they do not have a ‘merely’ aesthetic significance. They are important not only because of the Romantics’ intense artistic interest in them, but also because, by no accident, their features parallel the best-known stumbling blocks for contemporary forms of philosophical materialism. These are sentience and sapience, or the mysterious phenomena of qualia and intentionality, both of which are closely connected to the peculiar feature of the apparently irreducible direct self-referentiality of subjectivity.¹⁴ I say ‘mysterious’ because the ‘irreducibility’ of these subjective phenomena remains a matter of intense and seemingly interminable debate in the professional literature.¹⁵ At this point, however, rather than offering yet another attempted solution to the vexed question of irreducibility, or even claiming that a clear resolution will ever be in sight, I will simply make two observations. First, the issue seems to be a deep and genuine one, not to be dismissed as an incidental pseudo-problem or matter of words. Second, there is nonetheless an important and relatively neglected question here on which some progress may be possible for us—namely, *how* is it that the phenomena of subjectivity *have in fact come* to take on such a central role in our thought and culture? In other words, whatever subjectivity is ‘in itself’, what does it say *about us* that we now worry so much about it, and how does this interest relate to what I would argue is the other striking feature of the philosophy of our time—namely, that our way of trying to do justice to subjectivity involves not only an aesthetic but also a *historical* turn?

II. THE HISTORICAL TURN

Before turning back, in a third and final section, to offering an assessment of what I consider to be some of the most striking implications of the phenomena

¹⁴ See, *ibid.*, *Excurs 3* (on Shoemaker), *Excurs 5* (on Block); on related points in Chisholm and Prauss, cf. my ‘Contemporary German Epistemology: The Significance of Gerold Prauss’, *Inquiry*, 25 (1982), 125–38.

¹⁵ For one recent overview, see Vincent Descombes, *The Mind’s Provisions: A Critique of Cognitivism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

highlighted in Frank's work on *Selbstgefühl*, I must first devote a transitional section to explaining the main features of what is meant by the 'historical turn' in philosophy, because, on my account, this happens to be very closely connected to the mysterious fact of modern philosophy's aesthetic turn and its preoccupation with subjectivity.

Victor Cousin was not the first to notice the phenomenon of a historical turn, but he reacted to it in an especially memorable way when he pressed the question—which now must also be our own—of what, if any, is the 'higher need'¹⁶ behind philosophy's growing interest in the history of philosophy? There is a relatively obvious immediate response to Cousin's question, but it is one that only scratches the surface. It is well known that in the 1800s the study of the history of philosophy suddenly became a dominant part of philosophy itself, especially in courses at German universities that in effect replaced the old focus on theological accounts of providence. These courses aimed at perpetuating the 'legend' that there is something like a timeless and rationally satisfying 'idea' of philosophy that we need to learn through its history. The immediate source of this idea is clear enough—it was mainly, although not uniquely, stimulated by Hegel's thought that 'history represents the coming into being of our science (i.e. philosophy)'.¹⁷ (Elsewhere, I have argued that Hegel's most valuable ideas here, and the key sustainable features of the 'historical turn', were anticipated in a fundamental way by another Jena figure, Karl Reinhold, Kant's first and most influential interpreter—but, since Hegel is much better known, for simplicity's sake I will concentrate on him here.¹⁸) Hegel's historical approach involves insisting on systematic characterizations of the 'main' 'principles' present in various works and eras, and ordering them tightly in terms of a logical and metaphysical narrative of an all-encompassing process of 'development' and 'progress'. This notion had an enormous impact far beyond its initial idealist context, but most of us would now agree that there are serious problems with the extraordinarily demanding nature of Hegel's specific conception of 'development'. All the same, the general thought behind his approach obviously goes back to significant ideas that are not limited to his own audacious system, and they deserve careful re-examination.

As Hegel himself would be the first to stress, his work must be placed in a broader context. If one steps back just a bit, the growing attention given to the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century appears as part of a much

¹⁶ See Ulrich Johannes Schneider, 'Teaching the History of Philosophy in Nineteenth Century Germany', in J. B. Schneewind (ed.), *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Center for the Study of Human Values 2004), 284. From Victor Cousin, *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris, 1828; repr. Corpus des Oeuvres philosophiques en langue française, 1991), 23).

¹⁷ Ibid. 288. Quoted from G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), v. 20, at 466.

¹⁸ See above, Ch. 8.

broader pattern, one in which disciplines and lifestyles of *all* sorts had become *explicitly* historical even earlier—most notably, toward the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Once one reflects on this *general* process of historicization, however, developments in *philosophy in particular at this time* take on an especially puzzling appearance. It is, after all, a discipline that had always made an especially strong claim to remaining above the flux of time and culture, and this is an idea that Kant and the dominant figures of his generation clearly intended to vindicate. Nonetheless, as I have argued in detail elsewhere, it was precisely in the first hotbed of Kantian studies, that is, late 1780s Jena, that the original and remarkable phenomenon of a ‘historical turn’ in philosophy occurred.²⁰ It was at this time and place that—all at once—historical considerations *suddenly* and *irrevocably* became *central* to *mainstream* philosophy.²¹ Moreover, although this turn has long had an influence, it seems to have taken on its most interesting form at precisely the two key moments that are of prime concern to us here: at its birth in the Romantic era right before the nineteenth century, and then in our own time. One cannot help but ask, what is the ‘higher need’ that originated the historical turn *even before* 1800 and the influence of Hegel, and what need is it that still makes it seem so relevant to us now, *long afterwards*?

At different times, of course, different versions of this need may dominate. The most widespread interest in history in our own time, for example, is probably attached not to orthodox Hegelian claims about necessary ‘progress’ or ‘development’, but rather to the suspicion that what history discloses is precisely the lack of any such development. Consider that side of our interest in history that has to do primarily with themes such as historicism, relativism, ‘strong reading’ and deconstruction, and with the more provocative ideas disseminated by figures such as Harold Bloom, Paul Feyerabend, and Richard Rorty. Since the influence of their work, what the word ‘history’ conjures up at first for most of us is not at all a linear image of ascent or decline, or a picture of a static or cyclical dominance of ‘eternal principles’, but instead a process that can be even much more

¹⁹ This section grew out of work for a conference on ‘Teaching New Histories of Philosophy’ at the Princeton University Center for Human Values, 4–6 April 2003. See above, n. 16, and Ulrich Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes: Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), and *Philosophie und Universität. Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1999). Cf. Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio, the Romantic Muse: The Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), which traces the path that this process takes at the beginning of the nineteenth century in fields such as religion, law, and science as well as philosophy.

²⁰ See above, Chs. 7 and 8.

²¹ See also my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and see above, Ch. 1. On the issue of the interdependence of philosophy and history, I have been directly influenced by—in addition to those cited—writers such as Robert Pippin, Allen Wood, Gary Gutting, Dieter Jähnig, Tzvetan Todorov, Hans Frei, and Karsten Harries. Heinrich Heine anticipated (and stimulated) the most influential contemporary attitudes on this topic in his ‘Nietzsche/Rorty’ tract, *The History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (1835).

anarchic than anything Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Foucault outlined—for, the work of these figures, after all, still offers what is at least a structured genealogy with fairly distinct periods and clearly dominant directions.

The threat of a *radically historical, that is historicist*, conception of history is especially relevant for the history of *modern philosophy* for the following reason. Recall the general fact, just noted, of an historicization of disciplines *throughout* the modern university, and the fact that this was accompanied by an intense interest in the phenomenon of ‘progressive development’. This is a remarkable fact—but note that all this is still compatible with the practice of a complex of disciplines and a view of knowledge that in a sense remains basically *non-historical* in nature. In the exact sciences, not only the objects of the disciplines, but also the findings of the specialists themselves, involve change, and even ‘revolution’ in all sorts of ways. And yet there still remains strong confidence that here we have gained possession of a core set of *constant* principles and refined methods that are *clearly* agreed upon and that can be adequately approached by focusing simply on *current* techniques. For these disciplines, despite what some readers of Kuhn might contend, history is more an incidental background than a fundamental problem.

With areas such as philosophy, however, historical concern has a more central role, one involving the disquieting modern worry that the discipline itself, despite what figures such as Hegel and Kant insist, is not—and never will be—a ‘science’ at all in any strict current English sense. This worry took on a very pressing character in the later eighteenth century. Right at that time, two highly disturbing trends were beginning to develop. First, there was a slow, but growing, decline in relatively easy moves back and forth between the new exact sciences and philosophy, moves that geniuses such as Leibniz and Descartes once made with eerie confidence, in their basic principles and day-to-day scholarly life. (And so it became more and more odd for physicists to be called professors of ‘natural philosophy’.) The highly developed exact sciences began to grow in a way that eventually forced most philosophers to realize that what they are doing is *not* ‘science’ in the new strict (and paradigmatically clear) sense; Hume is not ‘another Newton’.

Second, and simultaneously, an avalanche of social, economic, and religious changes made Europeans in general more sensitive than ever to the diversity of human cultures as a kind of variety that is not a matter of easily charted steps on a progressive chain (as in natural science), or an illustration of principles that are eternal and such that their temporal instantiation is merely incidental. I take Herder to be the philosopher who encouraged historicist thinking along this line in the most vivid and influential manner.²² The crucial implication of Herder’s

²² Herder’s charm is that he does not do this consistently, and he is occasionally still caught in ‘progressivist’ (or ‘retro’) or ‘eternal’ presumptions of his own. See *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

work is that philosophy is on the whole more like art than science—and more like ever-changing romantic art than any kind of perennial classicism. Herder's work was path-breaking in emphasizing that ancient (and even pre-Athenian) art and thought is remarkable in its own manner, and is not a mere form of pre-modernism or even 'pre-Socratism'. Different eras, and the different leading thinkers who crystallize the 'principles' of these eras, appear to think *differently*, and not necessarily 'better' or 'worse' than others in any sense that involves trying to get closer to exactly the same kind of target. (To be sure, this idea by itself does not necessarily lead to historicist relativism, and Herder's own position is much more complex than I have indicated, but its main effect was surely the encouragement of a radically historicist position, and for the sake of simplicity I will use his name to signify that position.²³)

Herder's work was very well known at first, especially to Kant, Reinhold, and Hegel (all of whom he knew directly), but their reactions tended to smother signs of his direct influence. Kant notoriously rejected the views of Herder—his former student—altogether, because Kant (despite his very interesting work on explicitly historical topics) aimed to protect a classical vision of philosophy as an eternal science still very much like mathematics. What Reinhold and then, most famously, Hegel—and others such as Schelling, Schlegel, and Schleiermacher—attempted was something more ambitious. They can be read as moving, not from Kantian ahistoricism to radical Herderian historicism, but instead toward a way of doing philosophy that expressly presents itself as a *synthesis* of both the ahistorical systematic intentions found in figures such as Plato, Leibniz, and Spinoza, and the deeply historical insights stressed by Herder (and somewhat kindred figures such as Montesquieu and Rousseau). In contrast to what they took to be Kant's overreactionary ahistoricism and Herder's overly relativistic historical approach, they invented a model of a philosophy that is *at once* historical and systematic.

There was, of course, not always a perfect balance. The Romantics often tended toward historicism, and in many of the Idealist philosophies the systematic element was still very dominant, since they aimed to display nothing less than a *complete* solution to the whole dialectic of fundamental problems that had arisen in the extremes of earlier philosophies. Whatever the exact balance, the main point is that, in integrating the task of a detailed historical *Auseinandersetzung* with their predecessors into the basic structure of their philosophic writing, the Jena school found a way of presenting the sequence of Herder's diverse 'main' 'principles' as not a mere colorful cavalcade but a necessary—and necessarily argumentative—sequence, a *Bildungsgeschichte* that *must be philosophically experienced* if we are truly to know others and ourselves. Hegel's own *Phenomenology*

²³ Further complications related to this point are explored in Nicholas Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

(see especially the Introduction) was distinctive, and overly restrictive, in insisting on a very strong threefold demand that the development of this history be demonstrably metaphysically ‘necessary’, that it move through the specific dialectic of ‘determinate negation’, and that it exhibit a ‘complete’ rational system. This Hegelian model was enormously influential, but it should not monopolize our thinking. Without giving up the most basic features of the historical turn, philosophers can retreat—and have retreated—from all three of Hegel’s ‘dead’ strong demands in order to pursue a ‘living’ and more ‘modest’ historical approach that stresses elements of fundamental contingency, incompleteness, and a plurality of ‘developmental’ models.²⁴

This historical approach has advantages that can help explain its growing appeal. On the one hand, against non-historical thought, the historical approach, in its stress on the importance and difficulties of interpretation and contextual understanding, marks out a way in which philosophy can appear, in many ways, deeper and more complex than natural science, something that addresses aspects of subjectivity that cannot be measured or explained by science’s ‘merely objective’ or predictive improvements in our knowledge of natural fact. On the other hand, against the historicists, this approach can insist that it remains backed by systematic arguments, by the giving of intricately connected general reasons that show that—despite the conflict of historical doctrines—there exists a meaningful and evolving conceptual pattern underlying the maze of options that philosophy presents.

The historical approach has had its own historical ups and downs. Hegel’s uniquely ambitious form of an attempt at a synthesis soon outlived its high point. Despite the ‘legend’ of a progressive history of philosophy presented at mainline nineteenth-century universities, leading thinkers did not really believe it. We can now see that the key motor of philosophical progress then was rather an initially ‘off the main track’ radicalization of the deep Leibniz/Herder split that had arisen just prior to the unique synthesis proposed by the historical idealists from Reinhold to Hegel. Thus there arose the ‘revolution in philosophy’ led by neo-Leibnizians, from Bolzano to Russell and Carnap, which formed the dominant analytic departments of the twentieth century that tended to turn their back on the notion that the history of philosophy has an essential significance.²⁵ And there also arose the

²⁴ The theme of a ‘modest’ systematic philosophy, also touched on by Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 56, is explored in my *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*, and in my Introduction to *Interpreting Kant’s Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

²⁵ Sometimes this is done with the thought that a unified systematic philosophy may be possible after all—for example, as Michael Dummett has suggested, under the heading of a general theory of meaning. Alternatively, it may be done with no metaphilosophical thought, or simply with the idea that it is sufficient for philosophy to be a formal discipline that points out technical infelicities in the arguments of others, or constructs clarifications in new regional disciplines, such as the semantics of natural language, that have not yet settled into the steady path of a ‘normal science’. The main error here, I believe, is to keep thinking of philosophy as either a typical science—or else simply a kind of art or ‘literature’. The error is understandable because philosophy is like art, since there is a

opposed ‘underground’ movement of quasi-Herderians—not only Isaiah Berlin, but all the anarchists, existentialists, postmodernists, and particularists who feel more at home in a literature, history of ideas, or sociology department than in a mainline philosophy seminar.

In our own time, however, a significant third party has again arisen in contrast to these long-opposed extremes. It retains the *core* feature of Reinhold’s and Hegel’s ‘turn’—namely, the idea of a *basic linkage* of historical and systematic thought, while stressing the need for a new and more modest form. This new perspective—which can be found, for example, in the ‘Cambridge ideas in context’ projects of figures such as J. B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner, and Raymond Geuss—involves the practice of combining historical and systematic considerations *without* assuming, as Reinhold and Hegel did, that there is an *evident* and *necessary* pattern of *unified progress* to be plotted out in *all* our basic ways of thinking. In other words, philosophical writing can be at once fundamentally systematic *and* historical, and even in some sense developmental, *without* becoming either historicist or naively linear, even in a complex dialectical fashion.

The move to history, on this perspective, involves not a proof of ‘progress’ in any allegedly scientific sense, but rather a disclosure of *significant dependence* in our self-understanding in a way that is both deeply conceptual and contextual. What makes the views of earlier thinkers on key topics—for example, Aristotle and Kant on virtue and self-control—specifically historical and relevant to us (despite their not leading to a science) must be something more than the mere fact that these figures are different and not here. If that were all there is to it, we might as well be looking at an exotic bird through a telescope. What is crucial is that we acknowledge figures such as Aristotle and Kant as our *own argumentative* but *distant* ancestors. The key idea here is that we can understand ourselves as who we basically are only by (among other things) figuring out better how we can ‘become true’ to the ‘events’ that past thought introduced as the main, even if highly non-transparent, guides to the self-defining culture that we have become and presume that we will continue to be.²⁶ On this view, there is, for example, no reason to suppose that there is a ready-made problem of ‘virtue’ ‘in itself’, totally

part of it that essentially involves the signature of individual creativity. It is also like science because it essentially involves commitment to intellectual progress. But neither art nor science essentially requires a turn to history, whereas there is, I believe, a central strand of philosophy that now realizes that, as an unrestricted discipline of universal critical reflection, it cannot avoid focusing on the influence of history as such.

²⁶ In speaking in terms of what we need to be ‘true to’, I am anticipating the notion that doing philosophy can be at once a matter of achieving a form of self-determination (with international as well as individual implications) and of gaining insight into one’s culture and the ‘real world’. (Hence it is not simply a matter of ‘understanding’ a topic but can also be a way of *becoming* one’s ‘true’ self, as when, for example, a contemporary Jew learns Hebrew not as a mere scholarly exercise but as part of a process of identity formation that reveals and realizes basic truths that would otherwise lie dormant.) These are not two separate projects, but one complex interconnected enterprise. The project of ‘self-defining’ ourselves now is not a matter of independently legislating a new identity or simply discovering an old one, but is rather an issue of simultaneously appreciating our background

independent of the very complex causal and intentional history that has come down to us, and formed our very self-image and self, our second nature, from the days in which the notion was discussed among the Greeks. This is not to say, however, that the problem is a 'mere' historical construct; rather, there is every reason to think that it, somewhat like various natural techniques developed over time, gives us a better insight into what we 'really' are.

If past figures were not approached as *argumentative* ancestors, we could appropriate their ideas without systematic consideration, as a prejudice, or simply in the objective way that a weather reading from an old manual might be taken over by a later scientist, without any philosophical reflection. And, if they were not *distant* ancestors, we would not have to engage in the special hermeneutical work that—as Herder, Schleiermacher, and other Romantics have taught us—is required if we are to remain genuinely open to uncovering a way of thought that may be deeply different, perhaps more 'world-disclosing' now than ever before, and not simply a crude form of what we already believe. And, if they were not *our* main predecessors, linked through a common causal and intentional path to problems that confront us now as well, then we would not always have to keep attentive to the possibility that in some ways they may turn out to be 'closer' to our very selves—that is, more revelatory of our own fundamental nature—than anything 'merely' contemporary.

In sum, even if, contra Hegel, our concern with philosophy and its history need *not* be a matter of philosophy's ever literally 'becoming a science', it can still be true that the Jena writers were correct in turning us around toward a genuinely philosophical concern with our own conceptual history, a concern that is more than a matter of merely 'understanding' something 'other'.²⁷ The 'higher need' that we are satisfying when we turn to history then is not to confirm, whiggishly, what our great 'progress' supposedly has already been or had to be, but rather to learn, by detailed description and argument, how much the past can still reveal to us of what we must yet do to know and truly to satisfy our very own selves. This is always in large part a matter of becoming truer to our own *philosophical* origins—just as any proper descendents may seek best to realize themselves, as well as their ancestors, by uncovering the deepest and most 'sacred' 'charges' that

and actualizing what we see that we can do with it in our current situation. Analogs of this process would be the efforts of poets such as Eliot and Heaney to define their own language and world in terms of a fitting expression of their pre-modern inheritance. Examples of it in philosophy would be the attempts of thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Williams to define themselves, and the best philosophical orientation of our era, in terms of a critical appropriation of the fundamental ideas of ancient non-Socratic thought and practice.

²⁷ My own—largely Kantian—position is not that this historical approach is the only proper path for philosophy, but that it definitely has a special value and should be accepted as at least one of the most important ways of doing philosophy now. It does regard philosophy as one way of overcoming the 'repressed', but it does not have to be committed to any particular theory that this repression is conspiratorial or intentional or psychological in any ordinary sense. (Thanks to John Cooper for pressing this point.)

have not yet been fulfilled by the event of their own 'family' (a family that can, of course, always become further extended).²⁸

III. SUBJECTIVITY AND THE AESTHETIC AND HISTORICAL TURNS TOGETHER

What has been clarified so far is a phenomenon that could be called the first step of the historical turn, which is a matter of *turning* toward and emphasizing for oneself the philosophical investigation of historical matters. The second step of the turn involves *expressing* and trying most effectively to influence others with what has been found. Here the manner of expression is by no means incidental, and it is in this context that aesthetic factors and the peculiarities of subjectivity highlighted in Frank's work again appear especially relevant. His historical recovery of the notion of *Selbstgefühl* can help us to see that the uniquely historical focus and mode of expression that philosophy began to take on in the late eighteenth century was no accident. On the contrary, this historical focus was in large part precisely the most appropriate way at hand to do justice to, and replicate, the crucial phenomena of subjectivity and aesthetics that, at that very moment, had become the special province of philosophy (even if not its total field) as it moved (lurching) toward giving up the old dream of being itself a kind of scientific system or an entirely objective moral or religious authority. The last desperate version of that dream was the literally messianic belief (which, I have argued, exceeded Kant's own more modest intentions²⁹) that Kant's *Critique*, or the foundational system(s) supposedly modelled directly upon it, could allow philosophy finally to reign as an apodictic, complete, and basically ahistorical system, one that could encompass even the latest scientific and political revolutions. This dream began to dissolve when it was realized by Reinhold, and then Hegel and other students of Kantianism in Jena, that a close account needed to be given of why the supposedly self-evident new Critical philosophies were in fact received, even by highly sympathetic readers, as far from truly evident, consistent, or all-encompassing. The fruitful kernel of the Jena response was to insist on investigating the history of philosophical interpretation itself, to

²⁸ That so many intellectuals, from 1800 until now, look for these charges more and more in the history of *philosophy*, and not in literally sacred traditions, is another explanation of where, as Hegel surely knew, *our* 'higher need' to turn to history comes from: It is not a merely academic task, but a deeply personal project, one that, for better or worse, obviously has taken on an ever greater intensity to compensate for the decline in the way that standard religious sources appear to be capable of satisfying our historical thirst. In history we can all seek, as believers or non-believers, a 'higher' common ground—and as philosophers we can find it even in endless controversy. For recent discussions on these issues I am indebted to my associates at Notre Dame, especially Gary Gutting, Paul Franks, Vittorio Hösle, Lynn Joy, Fred Rush, Philip Quinn, Hindy Najman, Mathias Thierbach, James Turner, and Anja Jauernig, as well as to discussants at meetings in Princeton, Munich Essex, George Mason, and Lucerne.

²⁹ See above, n. 24.

show exactly how one's predecessors had misunderstood each other, and then to explain, as a consequence of a philosophical grasp of all these historical complexities and their 'result' in current thought, how there was still a way to indicate a clear improvement on the past and thus an escape from the spectre of relativism after all.

Frank does not himself stress the theme of history in this way, but the extensive historical work that he has done gives us a crucial clue for understanding the remarkably close philosophical relation, especially at this time, between history, aesthetics, and subjectivity. He reminds us that rather than trying to define the notions of subjectivity, aesthetics, and philosophy in a timeless vacuum, we need to explore the details of their intersecting development right at the moment of their taking on their dominant modern form at the end of the eighteenth century. What this implies for our purposes is that we need to realize not only *that* these notions were developed within that same moment but also to see *how* it was that their prominence fit the historical turn so well that they have properly remained a central part of our increasing concern with the historical as such. To put it another way, if each era of philosophy is, as Alain Badiou has suggested, always a particular systematic way of 'collecting' and reacting to its basic 'conditions' (he proposes: the mathematical, the poetic, the political, the erotic; a quartet that roughly matches my own except for the intriguing French substitution of the 'erotic' for the religious),³⁰ and if (as Badiou also suggests) late modern philosophy is marked by an understanding of itself as 'architectonic' but *not scientific* in a literal sense, then we should expect that the revolutionary modern era that is the Critical period is likely to be characterized by a distinctive style (or set of styles) that expresses its collecting of these conditions in a way that remains fundamentally argumentative, and thus distinctively philosophical, while more and more getting over the pretense of being a genuine science—and thus opening the way for an aesthetic approach.

There are all sorts of ways in which this 'non-scientific' but still philosophic style of writing *might* have developed, but my hypothesis is that what has *in fact* occurred is this: the distinctive feature of 'leading' philosophical writing now—as in late-eighteenth-century Jena—has become nothing less than an ability to display a 'full grasp'—that is, a genuinely philosophical appreciation, of the specific *historical* relations between the systems of one's major predecessors, and of the way that they prefigure one's own 'more adequate' position, where 'adequate' needs to be understood in terms that, for want of a better word, are largely aesthetic. At the same time, precisely because this is still a *philosophical* effort, it must be understood as involving an ability to provide a reconstruction of the contours of earlier thought in a way that does *conceptual* justice (or at least energetically attempts to) to its origins and involves studying that thought's founding *subjectivity*, its motivating feelings, intentions, and style.

³⁰ See Alain Badiou, *Ethics* (London: Verso, 2001).

Originally, Kant's immediate successor, Reinhold, supposed that this kind of reconstruction would triumph easily through the use of Enlightenment-style analysis (the term *Aufklärung* is connected explicitly by Reinhold with analytically 'clearing up' matters), while Hegel supposed it might occur through a somewhat more complex, but in principle still evident, process of 'dialectic'. Over time, however, these suppositions have in effect been supplanted by the Romantic idea that philosophical 'success' is largely a matter of convincing without the sufficiency of these means, let alone anything like scientific or logical closure. Philosophical achievement thus has become, in large part, a matter of manifesting an argumentatively persuasive *style*, that is a relatively *aesthetic*, rather than a clearly 'demonstrative', superiority over a large range of competitors.³¹ In other words, more and more of the dominant philosophy of our time has come to the point of expressing itself in a series of 'phenomenologies of spirit', in the 'modest' sense noted earlier, where one major figure after the other offers not a 'necessary path of the Idea' but simply a strikingly innovative and more inclusive conceptual narrative, or genealogy, of our cumulative philosophical situation.

It is hard to give a positive *definition* of exactly what makes an approach aesthetic in this sense, but it is appropriate, and I hope sufficient for now, to recall how many prominent examples there are of this approach. Consider the well-known content and form of the work not only of Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Habermas, Frank, and Badiou, but now also, in the Anglophone world as well, figures such as Wilfrid Sellars, Thomas Kuhn, John Rawls, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, Stanley Cavell, Robert Brandom, and Michael Friedman. These extraordinary philosophers differ in many ways, but they share an evident mastery of the techniques of the historical turn, and it is not a merely incidental feature of their work that it is for the most part aesthetically captivating, and deeply sensitive to subjectivity, even at the core of its conceptual originality.

(To avoid misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that all this is not meant as an argument for concluding that this is the *only* kind of philosophy that is highly significant. The special role of 'master thinkers' of this kind is consistent with, and clearly a needed complement to, the valuable persistence of large tracts of relatively 'non-aesthetic' philosophy that remain woodenly beholden to either a strictly ahistorical or a largely empiricist–historicist method. And yet, even in more analytic circles, the aesthetic factor should not be underestimated in the success of writers such as Moore, Austin, Ryle, Quine, Strawson, Dennett, and Davidson. In general, analytic philosophy should not be reduced to any one very

³¹ There are dangers here, as Badiou has noted in his discussions of rhetoric and sophistry. Consider also the perplexity expressed about the reputation of Bernard Williams, who, quite properly, was immensely respected 'despite' not having a 'theory', in Colin McGinn, 'Isn't it the Truth?', *New York Review of Books*, 50, 10 April 2003, 70: 'his influence lies more in the style . . . '.

limited school, such as positivism, as all too often is still suggested—for example, in Badiou.³²)

If we bracket these complications, and allow for now that the general notion of a new historical–aesthetic approach has at least many recognisable instances, how should we evaluate this trend? Ironically, a striking problem with recent narratives of this kind is not that, when read closely, they are too ‘grand’ or absolute, and hence naively ‘pre-postmodern’. The difficulty is rather that, once their subtleties are appreciated, they remain astonishingly self-effacing and may appear to be ‘mere interpretations’. Hence, one cannot help but wonder whether the best philosophy now has moved so far beyond—in its first step—focusing on subjectivity, aesthetics, or history merely as themes, that it has begun—in its second step—to treat them as *excessively* central to its own ‘method’ and style, and so it has moved to the verge of becoming *merely* subjective, merely aesthetic, and merely historical after all. It is no accident that Badiou, for example, has spoken critically of European philosophy from Nietzsche to Heidegger as existing in ‘The Age of Poets’, an age when philosophy suffers the danger of sacrificing its unique systematic power to the poetic ‘suture’ that is *only one* of its conditions.³³ In this way the old worry from the initial stage of post-Kantian thought, that philosophy is becoming *too* subjective, aesthetic, and historical, re-emerges in our time in an especially virulent and possibly nihilistic form. The recourse to an ‘anti-theory’ knit-picking particularism, or to a ‘mere story’ about how one’s present position can accommodate and, simply from its own perspective, seem aesthetically to surpass earlier ones, could be regarded as basically a failure of nerve. It may reveal a lack of ability in presenting a straightforward theoretical system for our complex world, and a lack of practical confidence in the power to remake the social world in a progressive direction in line with an underlying rational structure. The challenge for genuinely Critical philosophy then becomes one of maintaining the Critical non-relativist and non-historicist systematic vision that Kant’s work exemplified, while including an honest but not excessive appreciation for post-Kantian and Romantic insights about the fragmentary and necessarily limited capacities of philosophy and thought in general.

I will end not by suggesting that there is an easy solution to this problem, but by contending that, despite its seriousness, at least some of the most common worries about it are misplaced. The main precondition for appreciating the true nature and value of the best of modern philosophical writing is, I believe, to overcome the tendency, common especially in Anglophone thought, of having a very narrow and pejorative notion of what is meant by writing that is fundamentally subjective and aesthetic. There are still all sorts of ways in which the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘aesthetic’ are used as tantamount to signifying ‘triviality’, ‘arbitrariness’, ‘subjectivism’, ‘aestheticism’, and so on. There is, however, as Frank’s work reminds us, an alternative, a natural and ‘deep’ sense of ‘subjective’ that

³² See, e.g., Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 42.

³³ Badiou, *Manifesto*, 69–77.

goes together well with a 'broad', but still understandable and very significant, positive sense of 'aesthetic'. As a start, think of the 'subjective' as not the incidental, but as simply the inside aspect of experience in general, our fundamental capacity to have feeling and style at all. And think of the 'aesthetic' not as what is 'artistic' in some very narrow sense, but as simply all the higher intentional and creative developments of subjectivity, considered apart from any privileging of other more easily demarcated projects such as science ('the mathematical'), ethics (including 'the political'), or religion. This, of course, is not to deny that all these fields can have their aesthetic aspects too, but the point is that *there* these aspects cannot be fundamental.

Appreciating these deep and broad senses of the notions of the subjective and the aesthetic makes it much easier to link them to the phenomenon of the historical turn in an accurate and positive way. It is clearly the broad sense of the aesthetic that is central to the 'aesthetic turn'. That turn took place not only when the late-eighteenth-century philosophical field of aesthetics first gained something like its modern autonomous form, but also when aesthetic *life* in a very general sense, and the value of writing as such, was no longer assumed to be subservient to prior scientific, hedonist, moral, political, or religious standards (and thus philosophy came better to understand itself as related to, but *distinct* from, for example, Badiou's 'conditions'). This development can be readily understood as related to the growing appreciation for the deep aspects of subjectivity disclosed in Frank's study of the structure and prominent role of the new notion of *Selbstgefühl*, since to stress *Selbstgefühl*, to stress feeling and style, is precisely to stress the subjective and aesthetic at once. This stress evidently complements the *content* and *form* of philosophy's historical turn. If—and only if—philosophy's distinctive destiny is to be, in large part, a systematic but fundamentally historical form of writing, then it seems only natural that its orientation will not be *simply* objective and non-aesthetic, and that it will take off from and keep circling back to the intricacies of *Selbstgefühl*. More specifically: There is an easily understandable reciprocal relation between grasping the distinctive *content* of human conceptual history and taking account of how it is permeated by the depth of *subjectivity*; similarly, the fact that the *form* of the expression of this kind of history cannot be a matter of science, in our now standard mathematical–nomological sense, goes along with the fact that, in some very broad but still understandable sense, it must, if it aims to be (responsibly) successful at all, take on what can be called an *aesthetic* form.

Of course, *if* there were an alternative purely 'objective' ethical, political, religious, or metaphysical system that one could now *expect* to command the respect of all modern readers as such, then the turn toward the subjective and aesthetic could seem very odd—that is, unlikely in fact and questionable in value. At the same time, it must be conceded that there is nothing in the factual 'success' of the historical and aesthetic turns that proves they are beyond philosophical reproach. It could still be true that there is, or will be, an encompassing objective

philosophical system, or at least some very important subsections of philosophy,³⁴ that can be laid out for all in a way that largely ignores the complexities of our historical and aesthetic interests (positivism, and then the more sophisticated analytic dream of a ‘theory of meaning’ were influential and relatively unpromising, but not exhaustive, versions of this thought). In addition, it seems only proper to leave a place right now for arguments showing that specific versions of the aesthetic approach conflict, to their detriment, with evident scientific or ethical considerations.³⁵ For the time being, though, it seems very hard to deny that a leading place in our time is taken by philosophical approaches that combine an outstanding sensitivity to the subjective, the aesthetic, and the historical at once—*without* having a commitment to other main traditional interests in a way that goes so deep that it cannot be bracketed. It is true, of course, that philosophers such as Taylor and MacIntyre, for example, connect their philosophies with deeply religious beliefs, and that other philosophers work with a similar overriding interest in all sorts of scientific or political projects. Nonetheless, it seems clear that most of their philosophical readers can and do take over most of their thought while bracketing such commitments, and to that extent what I mean by an ‘aesthetic’ approach remains dominant. It is not crucial that the philosophers focus on the traditional phenomena of aesthetics as the main content of their work, or that even on reflection they be willing to grant that the main point and form of their own work is primarily ‘aesthetic’ (even in a broad sense); the main thing is that its general reception and appreciation rest more on its aesthetic philosophical character than an acceptance of particular demonstrated ‘doctrinal’ (for example, ethical, religious) elements.

The final and obvious worry for my account is that it rests on stretching the notion of the ‘aesthetic’ much too far. It is very important for my purposes, however, that this term be permitted to have a very broad and functional meaning, one that requires and allows considerable filling out, with all sorts of concrete contrasts. In particular, it is important to liberate the term from the overly narrow and outdated meaning, still found all too often in Anglophone thought, which consigns it simply to the limited realm of something like ‘mere’ fine art and recreation. Precisely because I do think it is fair to raise serious questions about the dangers of philosophy taking too sharp an ‘aesthetic turn’, it is important to make clear from the start that the term ‘aesthetic’ can stand, and has stood, for a very substantive domain, one closely linked, for example, to the deep and general philosophical aspects of subjectivity noted earlier.

³⁴ In my own work, I am most concerned with a hybrid of these two, a kind of modest Kantianism that would be relatively, but not completely, ahistorical in comparison to the perhaps more interesting but also more questionable radical post-Kantian practitioners of the historical turn. See above, nn. 21, 27.

³⁵ On the distinction between the aesthetic and the ethical, see Alexander Nehamas, ‘The Art of Being Unselfish’, *Daedalus*, 4 (2002), 57–68.

In some continental circles, I fear there is a similar fundamental misunderstanding about the relationship between the aesthetic and the subjective, one that likewise has the effect of underestimating both of them. For a long time, a leitmotiv of much work on this topic has been the complaint that Kant's Critical philosophy introduced the notion of an autonomous aesthetic sphere at the cost of reducing it to a 'merely subjective' validity and significance.³⁶ Thus, as I noted at the beginning, ever since Hegel, Heidegger, and others, there has been a repeated attempt³⁷—and then a repeated criticism of the attempt—to rescue a more 'ontological', and supposedly less subjective *because non-Kantian*, dimension of aesthetic value.

There is obviously something very understandable about this reaction (since there no doubt has been a growing 'subjectivization' of value in general since at least the beginning of the Critical era), but there are also some basic presumptions at work here that seem unnecessary and unfortunate. In particular, largely because of a few complex oddities in Kant's terminology (his speaking of taste as merely 'subjectively' valid, whereas, as I have argued elsewhere, what his own theory implies corresponds most closely to what *we* now understand, in most respects, as a kind of 'objective validity'³⁸), a very important point has been missed: the fact that philosophers (such as Kant) may insist on speaking of something as 'subjective' and 'aesthetic' need not at all mean that their prime concern is with what is 'merely subjective' or 'merely aesthetic' in a negative philosophical sense. On the contrary, the whole point of their focusing on the admittedly subjective *dimension* of basic aesthetic experience (and this is especially true of Kant, who is concerned above all with what the aesthetic reveals about our place in nature) can be precisely to disclose something that is *much more* than merely subjective. Moreover, in the 'real world' of aesthetics now, the notion of aesthetic value typically concerns not merely the 'precious' perception that something is tangibly beautiful, or sublime, but also—or much more often—realizations that it is 'interesting', 'arresting', 'surreal', 'authentic', or fits some other fairly 'thick' term. The 'much more', or 'other', of the aesthetic moment can be—as it often is with the Romantics and existentialists—a bare sense of 'being' or 'existence' itself, but it can also be a much more detailed 'objective', that is, general, truth about a deep 'structural' or 'historical' feature of our subjectivity as such. Thus, even if each intense modern aesthetic experience involves a variety of *Selbstgefühl* and understands itself as *taking place essentially within* an individual subject, *what* the experience discloses, when it has genuine 'aesthetic' value, will be very much

³⁶ See, e.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), esp. pt. 1.

³⁷ See above, Ch. 9, a discussion of Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³⁸ See my *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*, pt. III.

about what the *world* of 'subjectivity' is like as such, and this is by no means something merely particular and idiosyncratic. Hence it is no wonder that even a politically obsessed thinker such as Adorno could be fascinated by what Beckett reveals about 'how it is' to be an 'immediate' subject in our time, or that Frank has stressed that the main point of most (Jena) Romantic discussions of the self is precisely not to suggest that the mere individual (whether empirical or transcendental) can or should 'posit', control, or escape from the world as such (as in caricatures of Fichtean Idealism). The aim of the leaders of the aesthetic turn, then and now, is rather precisely to indicate ways in which (as Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schlegel, Nietzsche, and others express in detail) the self originally *finds itself* 'thrown' by, and thereby disclosing for others, the basic forces of nature, language, culture, and so on.

What all this means is that, at a first approach, it is a mistake to assume genuine Critical philosophy ever needed to be rescued from mere subjectivism³⁹ or mere aestheticism. The 'disease' never existed there, so the 'cure' would have been an overdose from the start. At the same time, it can be admitted that a very strong stress on subjectivity and aesthetics alone (that would leave out developments in science, metaphysics, and so on) can signal a problem, a weakness, of modernity—even if it is not the kind of *idiosyncratic* problem that is generally assumed. Fortunately, Critical philosophy, and all its major immediate variations, never lost sight of objectivity and the common world as such, and, from the beginning, aimed to use insights about subjectivity and aesthetics to give us a better sense of the full contours of our social and natural life.⁴⁰ The Jena philosophies of nature and art (especially Schelling's) are but one paradigm of this attitude. Whatever their weaknesses, they surely were not aimed at constructing any form of a merely individualistic subjectivism, or a *l'art pour l'art* aesthetics. On the contrary, they were clearly designed, under the influence of Spinoza and Rousseau, as part of what could at the same time be called a kind of 'objective' ontology and ethics—that is, one that would overcome the overly narrow atomistic and mechanistic objective systems of earlier phases of modernity. Similar Critical options and challenges face us today.

³⁹ Cf. above, Ch. 11.

⁴⁰ See Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

13

Historical Constellations and Copernican Contexts

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The achievements of ‘constellation research’ (*Konstellationsforschung*) are incontrovertible. Using this approach, the ‘Jena Project’ initiated by Dieter Henrich has demonstrated in overwhelming detail that key aspects of the motivation and structure of the fundamental philosophical developments of German Idealism need to be understood from a holistic orientation that goes beyond the entire ‘public’ work of its leading individual proponents.¹ An entire conceptual space (*Denkraum*) of previously invisible connections has to be disclosed in order to make understandable how there could have arisen such unprecedented phenomena as the highly complex and rapid philosophical reactions that immediately followed the works of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte.

The Jena Project has illuminated this period in a way that combines systematic philosophical insight with the historical accomplishment of uncovering and annotating important new materials and texts. At the level of data, or ‘observation’, as well as of theory and interpretation, the project has provided a remarkable new perspective on a supposedly already well-known era. The importance of networks of direct contacts, the influence of supposedly peripheral or minor figures, and the impact of informal and unpublished discussions have been established in numerous surprising ways for the highly significant eighteenth-century philosophical constellations of Tübingen, Homburg, and Jena. It is now established beyond doubt that for properly appreciating these constellations an extremely intense intersection of historical and systematic considerations is fundamental. Moreover, history is relevant here not only in the sense of a discipline of academic research but also as a central

¹ The main scholarly results of the Jena Project can be found in Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); Immanuel Carl Diez, *Briefwechsel und Kantische Schriften* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997); and *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus: Tübingen-Jena (1790–1794)*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004). It is useful to compare this work with independent but somewhat parallel results in studies such as Theodore Ziolkowski, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena: Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/5* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), and *Clio, the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

theme of systematic reflection and a medium in which philosophers repeatedly react to one another by defining their own work by means of arguments placing their predecessors at very specific 'stages' in the development of thought. Hence, research concerning the constellations of this period in particular clearly exhibits what I will call the feature of deep 'Historical–Systematic Connection'.² This term signifies that the development, meaning, and value of these constellations cannot be properly determined from any perspective that assumes it is feasible sharply to separate historical and systematic (*argumentationsanalytische*) considerations.

Granted this fact about the particular constellations of German Idealism, one cannot help but wonder whether the feature of Historical–Systematic Connection that is evident in this case is symptomatic of constellation research in general, and whether it must even be normative for philosophy in general. In addition to these questions about the most general positive significance of the methods of the Jena Project, there is also a critical question that must first be addressed concerning the serious negative implications that seem to arise naturally from its specific kind of historical approach to German Idealism. This question concerns the threat of a possibly self-undermining relationship between the distinctive 'Copernican' tendencies of constellation research and the original idea of self-determination that is at the very heart of German Idealism. For this reason, after an overview, in Sections II and III below, of the positive characteristics of constellation research in general, Section IV focuses on the critical issue of how the historical structure of constellation research itself generates three related and very troublesome kinds of 'self-undermining' considerations that are especially relevant for German Idealism. A final section (V) argues that the worries generated by these considerations can be alleviated once a few basic modifications are made in the classical Idealist understanding of the relation between philosophy and history.

II. THE SUBJECT–OBJECT FIT OF IDEALIST CONSTELLATION RESEARCH: ADVANTAGES

It is important to realize from the very start that there is a deep parallel between the subject and the object of constellation research concerning German Idealism: the Historical–Systematic Connection manifested in the research process of those who are now carrying out the Jena Project turns out also to be present

² See Marcelo Stamm, 'Konstellationsforschung—Ein Methodenprofil: Motive und Perspektiven', in Martin Mulsow and Marcelo Stamm (eds.), *Konstellationsforschung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 74–97; and cf. Dieter Henrich, 'Konstellationsforschung zur klassischen deutschen Philosophie: Motiv-Ergebnis-Probleme-Perspektiven-Begriffsbildung', in *ibid.* 15–30.

in the object (that is, content) of the complex eighteenth-century philosophical positions that this process studies. Indeed, one of the most distinctive and significant aspects of the philosophical attitude inaugurated in these eighteenth-century constellations is precisely its insistence on the Historical–Systematic Connection. Most of the major positions in these constellations (whether they are identified primarily with the thought of Hegel, Hölderlin, Schelling, or others) bring history and system together to a degree that is fundamentally unlike what had happened anywhere else—and perhaps unlike what would happen ever again, until perhaps now. I say ‘perhaps now’ because it can be argued that work on the Jena Project itself is to be understood as an essential part of the building of a contemporary constellation of philosophical systems that seeks, above all, to have the effect of reactualizing the Historical–Systematic Connection as a general phenomenon. That is, in its ‘reactivation of Idealism’ (*Vergegenwärtigung des Idealismus*, to invoke the title of one of Henrich’s essays³), the current Jena Project can be regarded as aiming at much more than a place in the annals of historical scholarship. The project also aims at becoming a major factor in re-instituting, in the style and the content of the leading philosophy of our own time, something very much like the extremely close connection between historical and systematic considerations that marked the philosophy of the original Jena period—although presumably in a more moderate form that does not require allegiance to the most notorious claims of classical Idealism.

Elsewhere I have already explored various aspects of the origin and impact of the striking concern with history in classical Jena. An analysis of Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* (which includes a reference to a review of Reinhold in its full title⁴) led me to the hypothesis that this crucial turn-of-the-century text incorporates, in an exemplary way (and yet almost without itself recognizing this fact), what is perhaps the most influential and revolutionary feature of Reinhold’s work, an innovation that I have designated ‘the historical turn’ in philosophy.⁵ The controversial claim that there is such a ‘turn’ rests on a number of hypotheses. First, that for a very long time the reigning view of philosophy was that it was a basically systematic-but-ahistorical discipline (consider Plato, Descartes, Leibniz); second, that in very recent times an increasingly influential—and, I would now say, even dominant—view of philosophy (even in many ‘analytic’ circles) is that it is a fundamentally historical-but-asystematic form of writing (consider pragmatism, the decline of positivism, and the influence of ‘successors of Herder’ such as Thomas

³ Dieter Henrich, *Merkur* (1996).

⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte’schen und Schelling’schen Systems der Philosophie in Beziehung auf Reinholds ‘Beyträge zur leichtern Übersicht des Zustands der Philosophie zu Anfang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, 1stes Heft’* (Jena: Seidler, 1801; repr. Hamburg: Meiner, 1962), trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris as *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977).

⁵ See above, Introduction, and Ch. 8.

Kuhn, Bernard Williams, Stanley Cavell, and Richard Rorty); and, third, that, instead of an abrupt transition between these two directly opposed views, there is a place for a ‘turning point’, an in-between position, where elements of the two perspectives productively overlap and the Historical–Systematic Connection reigns. More specifically, I have argued that this turn occurred precisely in the practice of Reinhold’s work and the immediate reactions to it. In repeatedly focusing on the ‘fate’ of the initial reception of the Critical system—that is, the very special difficulties that attended the first attempts to make sense of and appropriate Kant’s extraordinarily difficult *Critiques*—Reinhold began a trend in which each later Idealist felt obliged to explain in detail how his own work incorporated and transcended the achievements of his predecessors.

The main issue here is not the primarily historical aspect of this hypothesis, the task of settling the issue of which writer was responsible for the phase of a ‘turning point’ like this. The main issue is rather how, as we look back on and appreciate the specific constellations of German Idealism, we can best argue for trying to bring back the balance that they exhibited—that is, for reactivating the Historical–Systematic Connection in a sensible way in our own time, albeit with more moderate views about the notions of both history and systematicity. The challenge is to find a way to do this that stays true to what is best in German Idealism, while still warding off the twin philosophical dangers of ahistorical naivety and historicist relativism.

Even if it is fairly clear that a philosophical ‘reactivation’ project is central to the constellation research initiated by Henrich and his students and collaborators, it is not so clear what its ultimate substantive motivations are. There remains the systematic question (which cannot be explored further here) of whether its main aim is to encourage the development of a contemporary philosophy that is merely structurally analogous (that is, insofar as it merely incorporates the Historical–Systematic Connection in some way or other) to the original Idealist systems, or whether it is devoted to the more ambitious project of building directly on particular doctrinal claims found within these philosophies (for example, in a theory of irreducible subjectivity).⁶ This question becomes especially important in contexts of interaction with contemporary analytic philosophy, where it is still by no means to be assumed that research on German Idealism has special philosophical value simply because it involves figures who once upon a time had considerable significance in some cultural circles. The challenge of explaining the philosophical significance of constellation research within one tradition to those who do not yet see themselves as having to be connected to that tradition still needs to be met. Continental historical scholars still need to develop something

⁶ Cf. my, ‘The Ineliminable Subject: From Kant to Frank’, in Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (eds.), *The Modern Subject: Conceptions of the Self in Classical German Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 217–30; and Robert B. Pippin, ‘Introduction: “Bourgeois Philosophy” and the Problem of the Subject’, in Pippin *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–23.

like what Reinhold called the ‘communication bridges’ that he believed the most advanced philosophy of his time could and should build to connect with the educated public in general.⁷

III. THREE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF CONSTELLATION RESEARCH

Instead of directly developing an argument for constellation research along Idealist doctrinal lines myself, I will simply explore a few of the most distinctive historical features of this general approach and of the accounts that have been given of it so far. I will first note three main complications, having to do with what I take to be three central features of any constellation, and then I will gather together questions about these features by expressing them as reactions to what I take to be the understandable but highly disturbing ‘Copernican’⁸ nature of constellation research as a distinctive enterprise.

The most obvious question here concerns how we are to take the very notion of a ‘constellation’. One dictionary defines it casually and crisply in terms of three notions—namely, as ‘any *group of stars forming a pattern*’.⁹ This is, of course, not all that the notion means in the present context, but there is already more than enough here to merit serious reflection. For example, with this definition we see from the very start a reminder of constellation research’s crucial emphasis on the group,¹⁰ and thus on something that transcends the individual as such—which has, all too often, been the prime focus of previous discussions of past philosophy. It will not be difficult to show how this feature can naturally lead to a kind of distinctively ‘Copernican’ uneasiness.

Secondly, the definition makes a reference to ‘stars’. This is a helpful reminder of the fact that we are dealing with luminous phenomena, and thus, in the case of philosophy, with systems and ideas that truly shine and have a very significant meaning. This implies that worthwhile constellation research can never be simply descriptive. It must be driven by the normative thought that some ideas

⁷ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Schriften zur Religionskritik und Aufklärung, 1782–1784*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Bremen: Jacobi, 1977), 130. Cf. above, Ch. 7; Reinhold, *Briefe über die kantische Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1790), repr. in *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923), 369; and Dieter Henrich, on the relation between Idealism and ‘experiences ordinary people have’, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 15.

⁸ Cf. Henrich’s talk of a ‘direct reversal of orientation’, *Konstellationen*, 44.

⁹ *The New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary* (emphasis added). A more detailed and highly relevant account of the concept of a ‘constellation’ is to be found in the work of Walter Benjamin. See Fred Rush, ‘Jena Romanticism and Benjamin’s Critical Epistemology’, in Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin (eds.), *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 123–36.

¹⁰ See Henrich, *Konstellationen*, 220.

are especially valuable (either as close to significant truth or as instructive about significant error) and worth focusing on now—and that the ultimate aim of this study must involve bringing out the full worth of the ideas disclosed, even if they turn out to have a very different kind of meaning than was originally supposed. The luminosity of stars is also a reminder of the dynamic, intensifying quality of interactions within a constellation: the action of A on B, C, etc., and of B, C, etc. on A, does not end there, but gets constantly mirrored and ramified, so that, in giving out energy, A also picks up energy from its surroundings, including, in a new form, some of its own initial energy. In situations where a ‘critical mass’ is present, there can be an explosive acceleration of developments that yields something far beyond the sum of energy that would have been given off if the individual units had developed in separation.¹¹

What all this shows is that the striking and oft-noted phenomenon of ‘rapidity’ within a ‘constellation’ is in one sense not so surprising after all. From the outside, of course, it is astonishing, how Reinhold and Hegel (like Mozart and Schubert, for example, or Einstein and other physicists of his era) could suddenly accomplish so much in a very short time—but, *given* their interactive environment and their genius, there is a sense in which this kind of accomplishment is what we should expect. We would not regard something as a ‘constellation’ if it did not have something like this feature, just as we would not find books on a best-seller list unless they truly were popular. Nonetheless, there must be something more than public recognition and a rapid string of achievements to make constellations as such especially interesting for the history of *philosophy*. Presumably, we need to suspect that they manifest something like a relevant ‘hidden catalyst’, interesting ‘reinputment’, or significant ‘potential’ of ‘alternatives’, so that the particular way in which the extraordinary achievements of a constellation come about is something especially worth researching in detail and reflecting upon philosophically at a particular time.¹² It should also be noted that, unlike natural stars, philosophical ‘stars’ are not simply evident to physical perception; seeing them at all, especially in the past, requires specific historical and systematic skills on our own part. It will not be difficult to show how these features can naturally lead to a distinctive kind of ‘Copernican’ uneasiness.

The third and most complicated part of the definition concerns the notion of a pattern. Notoriously, a pattern can be something that is more a subjective phenomenon than an objective discovery. Recent research has uncovered that when early in the twentieth century the renowned American astronomer Percival Lowell claimed he was seeing a stunning growth of canals on another planet, he was truly reporting something that he was seeing—and yet what he was in fact seeing, it now appears, was merely the reflection of the blood vessels in his eye

¹¹ See Henrich’s reference to a ‘supernova’, in *Konstellationen*, 218.

¹² See Martin Mulso, ‘Zum Methodenprofil der Konstellationsforschung’, in *Konstellationsforschung*, 74–97.

as mirrored in his telescope.¹³ Historians of philosophy are, of course, engaged in an even more speculative enterprise than astronomers, but they still hope that they are not ‘finding’ only this kind of bogus pattern. Nonetheless, the ancient astronomical notion of a ‘constellation’ very naturally invites something like this kind of delusion. For, when we look at stars from a great distance—like events far off in the past—and literally see them forming what looks to us like a significant pattern, we can very easily miss the fact that the distances and ages and interactions of the stars are very different from what we might at first suppose from our position. Despite appearances, there is no reason that even a striking ‘visual constellation’ must have the kind of immediate dynamic relations that exist in the force fields of a relatively directly connected planetary or star system, let alone in anything as complicated as the whole actual world, which we now suspect has not only innumerable stellar bodies but all sorts of even more powerful invisible ‘dark matter’ and ‘dark energy’. This kind of phenomenon in history is precisely what generates the need for constellation *research*—we have to sort out real from apparent motions, and real from apparent interactions or non-interactions. This process can easily be infected by projections of our own, even if not by projections that are as dramatic as Lowell’s—and thus it should not be difficult to show how this feature also can naturally lead to a distinctive kind of ‘Copernican’ uneasiness.

IV. THREE COPERNICAN PROBLEMS FOR CONSTELLATION RESEARCH

It is time to begin to tie the three basic features of a constellation together directly with the general problem of a Copernican reorientation, and with the introductory suggestion that constellation research typically involves the Historical–Systematic Connection. The first complicating characteristic of constellation research concerns the thought that we need to be ready to take the group rather than the individual alone to be worthy of special interest. I presume that this idea need not go so far as hypostasizing a special entity that can exert supra-individual philosophical forces. It might be enough to realize that, heuristically, it is simply too limiting to hold to the typical perspective of individual awareness as such, or at least to evidence that we can reconstruct by focusing solely on its kind of perspective. Once we know about the ‘discourse’ or ‘networks’ of a group as a whole, including such matters as what issues they take to be so obviously important or unimportant that they do not bother saying so explicitly, it can become much easier to understand what it is that particular individuals are really doing—despite whatever they themselves might say.

¹³ *New York Times*, 10 Sept. 2002, p. D3.

There are many 'Copernican' aspects to this phenomenon, but I will note merely three obvious ones in this context. First of all, this reorientation toward groups is clearly 'revolutionary' in the simple sense that it disrupts our natural and initial static perspective. As subjects ourselves, and as the philosophical and historical observers of other subjects, we can easily start with the Cartesian thought that we are each determined primarily by our own self-oriented 'horizon'. To realize that the hidden tendencies and often unspoken agendas of groups may be a major factor in our own thought, or that of other subjects, is obviously to undergo a kind of unsettling motion. We can suddenly realize that we ourselves, like the philosophical subjects we are studying, have not simply been guided by a fixed perspective on external objects but rather have been unwittingly carried along and infected by their motion.

Second, the historical nature of constellation research, which permeates the subjects carrying out the study (as well as the subjects who are the objects of the study), can dramatically accelerate the 'Copernican vertigo' (an experience that the Idealists' Early Romantic successors reacted to at times with astonishing exuberance) created by this shift to a group orientation. The subject-object 'fit' that seemed to be the glory of constellation research can thus also become a source of deep unease. It is dizzying enough to suspect that one is caught up in the forces of one's contemporary group; but this vertigo can become radically intensified when we realize that the relevant group character is not merely a matter of present surroundings but can turn out to involve hidden influences within past groups, and hidden historical aspects of one's contemporaneous group, as well as all the hidden features that come with the historical distance between present investigators and constellations of the past. Call this the phenomenon of a *group-historical* Copernican vertigo brought on by constellation research.

The second Copernican problem concerns the feature of 'hidden luminosities'. Here a crucial factor is the nature of the hiddenness, which typically is not a matter of mere ignorance but is something that presumes a fairly developed kind of knowledge. What makes constellation research especially valuable is the presumption that the nature of development within a constellation is precisely not what it has seemed to be to previous observers. A 'breakthrough' in constellation research usually occurs only after something has already been well known as a constellation, and all sorts of reasons have been recognized for saying why this group of thoughts and thinkers is worth considering as a whole. The significance of a breakthrough is that it reveals how the nature of the thought of a past group is to be regarded as in some remarkable way very much unlike what it was believed that we already knew. For example, after we reflect on the (relatively recently discovered) fragment *Urteil und Sein*, it can suddenly appear that in certain key ways Hegel was influenced more by Hölderlin than vice versa, contrary to what was long supposed. Here the unsettling 'Copernican' experience occurs largely at the level of a relatively advanced interpretive theory. What

happens in this case is something that resembles not so much an overturning of a first-level phenomenon (as when ‘the moving sun in the sky’ suddenly becomes seen as a fixed point that hurls our own selves into motion) but rather a higher-level displacement of an entrenched theory that had given us a particular kind of speculative and evaluative orientation with respect to the past. In this case the ‘revolutionary’ Copernican character of constellation research very directly concerns a striking new understanding of our relation to a historical phenomenon as historical. We may have once had a view of the ‘timeless legitimacy’ of a particular phenomenon—for example, the claims of modern (capitalist) liberalism—and then, with new developments, it can turn out that even the seemingly incontrovertible ‘new’ perspective of the ‘moderns’ looks very antiquated. All this can happen precisely because we want to explain and appropriate a constellation more effectively—that is, in a way that the participants themselves could not, and yet in terms that give a deeper meaning to their very own motivations. The theoretical vertigo that is relevant here can intensify radically with the consideration that this kind of process might be reiterated without end and without convergence. Call this the phenomenon of a *historicist–interpretive* Copernican vertigo brought on by constellation research.

Third, there is the problem of mistaken patterns that arise specifically because of projections on our own part. Once we become Copernican and realize that the world is not a wholly independent and fixed object but something determined only through our own interpretations, we can wonder if we are not reading our own present needs into the data—especially when, as in this case, the data cannot easily reply to us, since the past era is long gone, and it is presumably being investigated precisely because there is something strange and intriguing about it to us.

One important positive point to keep in mind here (which is easily forgotten in analytic philosophy) is the fact that in a sense the data can ‘reply’—because some of our interpretive projections can be tested, even if they concern the distant past. We can make new hypotheses about who influenced whom and how—and then, in a way that we might not have ever expected, it can and does happen that new data can confirm (or refute) these hypotheses. This can happen with regard to arguments considered initially from a basically systematic perspective, as when one could have hypothesized that an anti-foundationalist reading of Kant (or an anti-foundationalist reaction to the early Reinhold and the early Fichte) is intrinsically so sensible that it could well have played a role even in early Jena—and then this hypothesis can turn out to be verified by surprising recent discoveries in the correspondence of Diez, von Herbert, and the Niethammer circle.¹⁴

¹⁴ See Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer: *Korrespondenz mit dem Erhard und Herbert-Kreis*, ed. Wilhelm Baum (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 1995); and Manfred Frank, ‘Unendliche Annäherung’: *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

The systematic component of philosophical research in general can be a helpful control here. A philosophical constellation is essentially a matter of rational 'debates', and not of mere 'stimuli' or causes, and so, as long as we have enough of a systematic appreciation of the common public core of a familiar constellation, it would seem that we need not be like a top astronomer taken in by an elementary optical illusion. And yet, it happens time and again that we see historical interpretations by leading philosophers that at one time are very popular and at a later time appear all too 'whiggish', too aimed at anachronistically justifying one's own current position.¹⁵ For example, the early twentieth-century analytic focus on philosophy of language, or the continental 'existential' emphasis on an all-devouring 'will to power', did considerable injustice, it now seems, not only to complex idealist systems such as Kant's but also to relatively 'straightforward' philosophies such as Descartes's.¹⁶ Similarly, it can be objected that elements of sexism and other kinds of prejudice still color much mainline work in the history of philosophy. It might then seem that we are after all still at the mercy of our own current distorting projections. Of course, some theorists have believed that the turn to history can bring immediate solutions for its problems along with it, and that we can easily overcome the worry about distorting projections simply by getting a sense of the past as a whole and learning our relative place within it. But this strategy can also backfire, as when Husserl's late historical turn and his discovery of the 'life-world' seemed to intensify rather than put to rest concerns about historical 'infections' of phenomenology.¹⁷ Similarly, Heidegger's exposure of stages in the history of conceptions of being appear in the end to have led him to embrace rather than to seek to escape from the notion of an ultimate arbitrariness in the 'projections' (*Entwürfe*) of our historical self-understanding.

A fundamental difficulty thus remains. The worry about group influences and 'hidden luminosities' basically concerns the problem of missing key features of what is 'out there'. The worry about 'projecting patterns', however, concerns the more specific and disturbing fact that philosophical 'stars' and 'starlight' are not only not directly visible—they are also largely self-manufactured. We find 'brilliant' those ideas that appear to match our own interests and needs. It is this factor of self-absorption that inevitably creates a special danger for any interpretive enterprise involving significant historical distance. Of course, one might here adopt the strategy suggested by Harold Bloom and Richard Rorty (who can be seen as following in the wake of Heidegger) and revel in the opportunity to manufacture 'strong readings' of the past that fit our urge to 'top' our

¹⁵ See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: G. Bell, 1931).

¹⁶ See above, Ch. 1.

¹⁷ See David Carr, *Phenomenology and the Problem of History* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

predecessors by our own notoriety and influence.¹⁸ But I take it that the goal of constellation research is to remain ‘research’ and not to become mere influential ‘writing’ (*Wahrheit*, not only *Dichtung*), and so it must seek lasting truth and look its own motives in the eye—realizing all too well, of course, that, like Percival Lowell, it can do this only by looking through its own eyes. Hence there remains a worry about what can be the phenomenon of a *historical–projective* Copernican vertigo brought on by constellation research.

V. RETROSPECT AND PROPOSALS FOR OVERCOMING VIRULENT COPERNICANISM IN CONSTELLATION RESEARCH

Having distinguished, in as threatening a form as possible, three main aspects of a deep ‘Copernican’ insecurity that constellation research itself appears to generate, I will conclude in a more positive way, offering some reasons why further reflection on German Idealism can also provide some grounds for diminishing at least a few of the worries connected with this insecurity. First, however, it is useful briefly to review the distinctive Idealist context of the ‘Copernican problem’.

The special relevance of Idealism for the Copernican problem of current constellation research can be explained as follows. One can try to understand the strong emphasis on historicity that distinguishes constellation research in either a modest or a radical way. On the one hand, if its results concerning the complex context of German Idealism are understood in a modest way, as simply a more detailed example of the familiar genre of developmental history (*Entwicklungsgeschichte*)—which has long provided illuminating but ‘tame’ accounts of how philosophical doctrines arise against the full background of their age—then the full originality of Idealism and the special value of constellation research as such would seem to disappear. On the other hand, if—as I think is inevitable—constellation research comes to be understood in a radical way, as involving something like the deep ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’¹⁹ common to the most influential programs that were in fact generated (by no accident) in the aftermath of German Idealism—for example, Schlegelian irony, Marxian critique, Nietzschean genealogy, Heideggerian history of being, Foucauldian archeology, and Rortian pragmatism—then we can seem to be led back to simply one or another version of historicism that undermines philosophy’s traditional claims to objectivity.

¹⁸ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 24.

¹⁹ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

There are a number of ways in which the specific findings of recent constellation research itself can be understood as easily generating the deeply Copernican experience of an unsettling of our basic understanding of the relation of history and philosophical systematicity. Given our new understanding of the many long obscured causes (for example, Diez's impact in Tübingen and his discussions with Reinhold in Jena) of the rapidly changing systems in the philosophical constellations of the Idealist period, as well as the full implications of the 'historical turn' that developed at the end of the eighteenth century, it can seem that each of these paradigmatic modern philosophical systems should now be understood as relativized by a deep structure of historical influences infecting its doctrines in hidden ways before, during, and after its original explicit presentation. Moreover, it must be conceded that by now the standard objective techniques of reacting to this problem by privileging a new teleological framework such as orthodox Hegelianism, Marxism, or positivism no longer appear convincing. Most philosophers would also agree, I believe, that the same can be said even about the more flexible positions that have been advanced more recently—for example, in the schools of Weber and Habermas—to try to save the objectivity of philosophical principles by means of a new conception of rationality that allows for underlying determining forces such as secularization and 'interest'. These unsettling developments suggest that the highly disturbing Copernican features found specifically in recent constellation research can be taken as a sign of a deeper general problem that goes back to 'fateful' self-undermining characteristics right within the core content of German Idealism's original project itself.

Furthermore, if, on the basis of the implications of current constellation research, we conclude that the guiding interests of earlier philosophies are in general subject to basic influences that only later research may unveil, then it is only consistent to acknowledge that our own systematic considerations and historical interpretations are vulnerable to similar future underminings by those who succeed us. Such a threat can affect not only incidental details but also the fundamental ideal of the whole Critical tradition, which is nothing other than a thoroughgoing attempt to vindicate human autonomy in all its dimensions: theoretical, practical, and metaphilosophical.²⁰ To save this ideal, the lessons of constellation research have to be appropriated in a way that is honest about the fundamentally historical character of the philosophical systems of late modernity, and about the significance of hidden influences on them, and yet still avoids falling back into the extremes of either dogmatism or relativism. What is surely needed here is a new, substantive way of conceptualizing autonomy that

²⁰ It is therefore not surprising that a major book on the period, by J. B. Schneewind, is entitled *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)—and that, for some readers, this is tantamount to speaking of the *fabrication* of autonomy.

can provide a non-dogmatic, objective framework for understanding historical developments in philosophy that allows for stability as well as radical innovation.

Recall that the three Copernican problems raised by reflection on constellation research have to do with the dependence of historical considerations concerning: (1) group influence, (2) metaphilosophical implications of discoveries of an inversion of values, and (3) possible distortions through subjective projections. These points can radically put into question a researcher's own claims about 'patterns' constituted by the valuable 'stars' of a 'group' forming a 'constellation'. Rather than being able to control historical interpretation and philosophical construction from a privileged Cartesian base, hermeneutical investigators have to acknowledge that their data and their own position are affected by outside agents, shifting evaluations, and inevitably subjective projections. I take it that this result is truly threatening to any classical or popular conception of the viability of any philosophical or historical knowledge claims that would venture to have conclusively uncovered 'what actually happened' (*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*). Moreover, if autonomy rests on proper self-understanding, if proper self-understanding rests on a genuinely philosophical conception of the person as such, and if, given the particular conception of Historical–Systematic Connection central to constellation research, this conception rests on revolutionary historical insights, then these insights in turn can seem to have led mainly to the result that, whatever we are, we are not Cartesian subjects transparently self-determining ourselves as was originally supposed.

Taken strictly, 'auto-nomy' can in any case seem extraordinary difficult to achieve. It requires not only that one be an agent acting independently through and on oneself (just as an 'auto-mobile' moves itself)—and thus presumably determining itself by its own mind, that is, by what it already knows about itself—but also that the agent does so in a manner that is lawlike, for otherwise its agency would not exhibit a *nomos*. The fact that in our own case agency involves a mind is, of course, a major part of what is supposed to give us at least a chance at real autonomy. The mind is the paradigmatic lawlike agent, since not only can it exemplify or bring lawlike action into being; it alone can also understand and aim for the lawful as such. But, for this very reason, theorists oriented toward strict autonomy have tended precisely not to focus on the pursuit of this aim in history, because this domain, unlike mathematics, logic, or even ideal political theory, does not appear to reveal clear laws, or at least not strict rational laws.

For this reason as well, the historical turn in philosophy that occurs in the era of German Idealism can appear to doom the underlying project of autonomy from the very start, even without detailed consideration of the special problems that have been noted concerning constellation research. It can seem absurd from the beginning to turn to history with the thought that thereby we might best understand who we are as such, as persons, and in a way that

autonomously and philosophically settles our nature. A contingent domain seems obviously irrelevant for disclosing the necessary truths distinctive of philosophy. For this reason it is no accident that Kant vigorously attacked Herder's radical approach to history and his views about its deep relevance to philosophy. And for this reason it also cannot be denied that there is something understandably appealing in the kind of autonomy that would come from aligning oneself with whatever *evident* rational laws can be found in fields such as mathematics, logic, and metaethics—and hence that a relative unconcern with history is quite understandable for philosophers most concerned with *strict* autonomy.

Nonetheless, even Kant (and contemporary followers such as Rawls) does not believe that history and historical understanding is irrelevant to the *full* meaning of the Critical ideal of autonomy.²¹ On the contrary, Kant's accounts of the fulfillment of exact science, as traced in his narrative about scientific development in the Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B x–xiv), of the fulfillment of morality, as traced in his narrative about the development of a moral community in *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* and related works, and of the fulfillment of 'metaphysics as a science', as traced in his narrative about the 'dialectic' of reason in the history of philosophical schools given at the end of the first *Critique*, all show that even Kant accepted a broadly teleological conception of history according to which our autonomy is *completed* only through the full practical process and theoretical understanding of developments in the historical domain as such.²²

The accounts of philosophy and history in Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all follow at least this much of Kant's thought—even though they are much more interested in the *details* of very recent developments than is Kant, and much more confident about disclosing something like transcendental laws underlying the historical process toward autonomy. Oddly enough, however, Kant himself—like all the German Idealists as well—was not at all paralyzed by the 'Copernican' worries that have been reviewed here. Although he was very aware of and interested in 'cunning' processes ('social unsociability'),²³ whereby significant effects are achieved that are quite unlike those originally intended by individual rational agents, he (again like the German Idealists) stressed the positive side of this phenomenon rather than expressing deep worries about how influential past groups, changing future evaluations, or subjective current projections can undermine key components of our own self-conception. When Kant disclosed the dialectical culmination of past thought in his own philosophy in

²¹ See Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 32, 'Kant is so to speak the inventor of the philosophical history of philosophy.' Cf. Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 7.

²² See especially the final sections of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

²³ See the 'Fourth Thesis' of Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' (Berlin, 1784), in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11–26.

a way that could only shock the past thinkers that he presented as unwitting means toward his end (that is, his conception of his own philosophy's role in bringing about a 'kingdom of ends' in world history), he—like Hegel and his other successors—did not at all imagine that a similar shock would be in store for his own thought. However, now that we have gone through a series of many such shocks in the aftermath of Idealism, and now that constellation research has revealed even more hidden factors in Idealism than nineteenth-century revisionist interpreters ever imagined, how can we construct a positive narrative of modern philosophy that escapes the naivety that characterized the attitude of even such giants as Kant and Hegel?

The obvious strategy needed here is to adopt a much more modest conception of the kind of progress toward autonomy that is taken to define the trajectory of modern philosophy. Kant, Hegel, and their colleagues all still held, each in their own way (despite many interesting but not completely fundamental differences), to a conception of this development as basically necessary, complete, and fully dialectical.²⁴ Now that we live in a post-Kuhnian age that recognizes that these strong requirements are definitely not met even in the few disciplines that can make strong claims to clear progress—namely, the exact sciences—a new conception of 'development' for philosophy needs to be worked out.²⁵ Such a conception cannot return to the old position of complete ahistoricism. But it also need not retreat to the extreme of a historicist relativism that would no more allow philosophical systems to be placed in an ascending order than it would warrant saying that literature after Job and Homer 'improved' with Goethe and Schiller. A viable new conception of autonomy must rest on central notions that still allow some definite progress but involve much more modest substitutes for the traditional claims of necessity, completeness, and rigorous dialectic.

Inspiration for such a conception can come from the findings of constellation research itself. Its insights about the effects of groups, values, and perspectives lead precisely to a recognition that historical shifts from one 'leading'

²⁴ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Jena, 1807), Introduction, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Cf. above, Ch. 10, and my 'Recent Work on Hegel: The Rehabilitation of an Epistemologist?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 52 (1992), 177–202. There are, of course, different senses of 'necessary' (e.g. metaphysical, moral, rational, psychological, causal) that are most relevant in evaluating the positions of different philosophers with respect to claims about necessary development. I have argued elsewhere that Kant generally employs a significantly more modest notion of necessity than do his main Idealist successors. See above, Ch. 5, and my 'Kant's Modest System', in *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch. 1, and 'Introduction: The Common Ground of Kant's Critiques', in *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). If this interpretation is correct, then it can be argued that, despite some undeniably dogmatic conceptions, Kant's own system anticipates the more modest but still rational conception of autonomy and historical progress that I believe is needed for the historical turn to be developed most productively in our own time.

²⁵ See above, Ch. 12. Cf. Michael Friedman, *Dynamics of Reason* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2001).

philosophical system to another are likely to involve elements of contingency, incompleteness, and haphazard rather than strictly dialectical change. The effect of Diez on Reinhold in Jena, for example, led to a retreat from foundationalist philosophy that was not absolutely necessary (since to this day significant foundationalist systems continue to be presented), that left Reinhold's main systems (and those of all its successors) looking fundamentally incomplete, and that by no means could be subsumed under dialectical patterns of negation. As constellation research has shown, significant new philosophical approaches—for example, the flowering of German Romanticism that followed after the Jena Kantian reaction that was in turn a reaction to Diez's objections to Reinhold—can arise for which earlier developments are clear 'catalysts', and yet in such a way that the most significant later effects are fundamentally matters of inspired innovation rather than examples of anything like a thesis–antithesis–synthesis pattern of evolution. When such changes occur, when Kant, for example, 'leads' to (of all things) Romanticism, it still need not be denied that some kind of progress of thought has been achieved. It also need not be denied that some kind of underlying philosophical principles have remained constant while others may have been first disclosed—for example, the discovery at this time of the principle of the intricate relationship between genuine self-consciousness and a 'struggle for recognition'. But this is no longer to claim that the basic character of developments is itself necessary, complete, and recognizably dialectical.

The presence of these traditional characteristics was, to be sure, a major feature of the full classical German conception of our autonomy. Being part of a rational process that involves going along its kind of strongly determined 'pathway' can easily be understood as (and was explicitly characterized as) a matter of 'coming back to oneself'²⁶ in the sense of fulfilling a pre-existent inner legislation of one's own higher self (or of the *Begriff*). But the denial of this kind of pathway, and the admission of significant contingency, incompleteness, and non-dialectical change within a process of genuine philosophical development, can nevertheless leave room for something that still deserves the title of a type of valuable autonomy. The changes that occur here are, after all, taken to be changes within the *advance* of our *own* philosophical self-*understanding*. While giving up at some point on the notion of strict lawfulness, a historically informed post-Idealist conception of our philosophical development can still borrow here from Idealism's more general idea of autonomy as a kind of 'homecoming' (*Heimkunft*), as a matter of learning how to acknowledge lasting structures that are rooted in one's own past, one's actual larger self.

²⁶ See Friedrich Hölderlin's poems 'Heimkunft' and 'Andenken'; and cf. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, 25, and *Der Gang des Andenkens. Beobachtungen und Gedanken zu Hölderlins Gedicht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986).

If a 'shocking insight' of constellation research 'unmasks' and inverts specific features of how we think of major figures in the Idealist background that is now central to our own self-conception, this unmasking is meaningful (as hermeneuticists constantly remind us) only insofar as it still does somehow fit into our more general perspective. What we learn and acknowledge at such a point is how we are *significantly dependent* on our *argumentative* but *distant ancestors*. That is, the very effort of constellation research presupposes a distance here that needs overcoming (hence 'deep' rather than 'surface' hermeneutics is called for); the fact that constellation research is a philosophical rather than 'merely historical' enterprise reveals that our relation to what is disclosed is primarily argumentative, and thus in some sense positively structured and rational; and the finding of research data that, even if shocking, genuinely speak to, and help make sense of, us here and now, shows that we are dealing with ancestors of our own. In other words, constellation research itself allows us to see through a maze of preconceptions and to become better at 'being true' to our philosophical origins, and hence of developing the autonomy of genuinely, and not blindly, holding to our own nature as rational beings.

This process is not a matter of simply finding a truth, let alone an attractive one, on a long hidden, but influential, tablet that we now might want arbitrarily to adopt as our own. On the contrary, we might find an idea in 'our past' that seems repulsive and worth 'getting beyond'—but if it really is, as constellation research at its best always aims to show, a genuine 'skeleton' in our 'closet', then this acknowledgment can also be a path to our own improved self-awareness and self-determination. As an analogy, consider the recent discovery by ancestors of Jefferson that they are common descendants of one of his slaves, and thus of hidden acts of injustice. The proper appreciation and appropriation of this fact can make possible for them a particularly intense form of reconciliation and a new 'freedom' that is hard to imagine arising otherwise. It can be argued that a similar pattern is exhibited by the many leading philosophers of our time who have found their main inspiration for persevering with philosophy at all in the recovery of long-hidden ideas that go back as far as the supposedly primitive 'pre-Socratics'. What all this can indicate, I believe, is that the very factors that generate what earlier was called a form of Copernican insecurity, a *vertigo* that threatens one with a complete loss of self-direction, can also be part of a process that leads, in an especially complex way, back to a form of self-discovery that is uniquely philosophical and perhaps just as interestingly autonomous as its classical predecessor.

Finding one's way toward obeying an entirely general, eternally 'pre-existent', and purely rational law is one noble form of autonomy—indeed, the classical norm for it in philosophy—but it need not be the only one. In more recent and popular contexts, 'autonomy' is often taken, in contrast to very strict forms of the notion, to be a simply whimsical (*willkürliche*) power to determine, here

and now, and all by oneself, what one will do. The historically educated form of autonomy that constellation research cultivates lies somewhere in between these purely rational and the purely whimsical paradigms of autonomy. Like the latter, it can be intensely personal and particular, more concrete than whatever is a matter of merely formal law; but, like the former, it can make an understandable claim to weight and long-term legitimacy. Now that the 'historical turn' has occurred, in what better way can individuals and groups come to govern themselves than by learning how to appropriate the most hidden and influential powers in their own background? Insofar as it serves this purpose, constellation research can help us to realize a modest but highly significant and still rational form of the original Idealist demand for autonomy—even at the same time that it reveals limitations in earlier and overly ambitious forms of this demand.

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