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Introduction: Hegel and the problem of metaphysics

Few thinkers in the history of philosophy are more controversial than Hegel. Philosophers are either for or against him. Rarely do they regard him with cool detachment, weighing his merits and faults with strict impartiality. Hegel has been dismissed as a charlatan and obscurantist, but he has also been praised as one of the greatest thinkers of modern philosophy. As a result of these extreme views, Hegel has been either completely neglected or closely studied for decades.

Whether we love or hate Hegel, it is difficult to ignore him. We cannot neglect him if only because of his enormous historical significance. Most forms of modern philosophy have either been influenced by Hegel or reacted against him. This is true not only of Marxism and existentialism – the most obvious cases in point – but also of critical theory, hermeneutics and, if only in a negative sense, analytic philosophy. Hegel remains the watershed of modern philosophy, the source from which its many streams emanate and divide. If the modern philosopher wants to know the roots of his own position, sooner or later he will have to turn to Hegel.

Hegel demands our attention for more than historical reasons. If we consider any fundamental philosophical problem, we find that Hegel has proposed an interesting solution for it. He claimed that his system provides the only viable middle path between every philosophical antithesis. He held that it preserves the strengths, and cancels the weaknesses, of realism and idealism, materialism and dualism, relativism and absolutism, skepticism and dogmatism, nominalism and Platonism, pluralism and monism, radicalism and conservatism. Indeed, the more we study Hegel the more we find that his system seems to accommodate every viewpoint and to anticipate every objec-

tion. Of course, it is at least arguable that Hegel solved any of these problems. But can we safely ignore his claims to do so? Hegel's sheer presumption challenges us to make a closer study of his philosophy.

But if Hegel is important, he is also problematic. The Hegel renaissance, which began in the 1960s and continues today, has still not removed him from all suspicion. One of the chief reasons Hegel remains supsect lies with his notorious obscurity, which has put him at odds with the premium placed upon clarity in contemporary philosophy. Another, more important reason is Hegel's apparent indulgence in metaphysics, a subject that has been much discredited by the legacy of Kant and positivism. Hegel seems to fly in the face of every stricture upon the limits of knowledge, blithely speculating about such obscure entities as "spirit" and "the absolute." This image of the irresponsible metaphysician began with Russell's famous contention that Hegel's entire system rests upon a few elementary logical blunders.[1]

Not only contemporary philosophers have difficulty coming to terms with Hegel's metaphysics: Hegel scholars also remain deeply divided over its status and worth. Broadly speaking, there have been two antithetical approaches to Hegel's metaphysics. There is first of all the traditional historical approach, which accepts Hegel's metaphysics as a *fait accompli*, and which attempts to explain it by describing its relations to its historical antecedents. For example, Hegel's metaphysics is described as "inverted Spinozism," "dialectical neo-Thomism," or "monistic Leibnizianism." This approach can be found mainly in the older German studies of Hegel, especially those by Dilthey, Haym, Haering, Rosenkranz, and Kroner. Opposed to the historical approach is the more-modern positivistic approach, which tends to dismiss Hegel's metaphysics as a form of mysticism or speculation, but which values him for his many ideas in the fields of epistemology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics. According to this modern approach, we can find much of "philosophical significance" in Hegel, but it has nothing to do with his metaphysics, which is only the "mystical shell" of the "rational core." This approach to Hegel can be found in the Marxist tradition, in the Frankfurt school, and also in those recent studies that regard Hegel's philosophy simply as a form of "categorical analysis."[2]

Both of these approaches suffer from obvious difficulties. If the historical approach lacks a philosophical perspective, virtually invit-

ing us to suspend our critical faculties, the positivistic approach has an anachronistic or tendentious conception of Hegel's "philosophical significance," relegating almost 90 percent of the actual Hegel to the dustbin of history. Apart from their separate difficulties, both approaches suffer from a common shortcoming: they fail to see that Hegel himself regarded metaphysics as a very problematic undertaking in need of legitimation, and that he accepted the Kantian challenge to metaphysics, insisting that "any future metaphysics that is to come forward as a science" must be based upon a critique of knowledge.

The main task of this introduction is to address the chief problem confronting the understanding and evaluation of Hegel's philosophy: the problem of metaphysics. It will do so by examining, if only in rough outline, Hegel's defense of metaphysics, his response to the Kantian challenge. If we investigate Hegel's own justification of metaphysics, we will be able to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional approaches to Hegel. We will not have to accept his metaphysics as a *fait accompli,* nor will we have to reject it as mysticism or speculation. Rather, we will be able to appraise it on its own merits, seeing whether it really does meet the Kantian challenge. The chief advantage of this approach is that we should be able to produce an interpretation of Hegel that is neither obscurantist nor reductivist, that neither regards his metaphysics as speculation about the supernatural nor reduces it to mere categorical analysis.

Any introduction to Hegel's metaphysics should answer four basic questions. 1) What does Hegel mean by "metaphysics"? 2) What does he mean by "the absolute"? 3) Why does he postulate the existence of the absolute? 4) How does he justify the attempt to know it in the face of Kant's critique of knowledge?

Before we examine Hegel's defense of metaphysics, we need some account of what he means by "metaphysics." The term is notoriously vague and ambiguous. It can refer to several different kinds of discipline: to an ontology, a study of the most general predicates of being; to a theology, a study of the highest being; or to a cosmology, a study of the first principles and forces of nature. Rather than defining his use of the term, however, Hegel refuses to adopt it. When he does use the term, it is almost always in a negative sense to refer to the antiquated doctrines and methods of the rationalist tradition,

the metaphysics of Descartes, Leibniz, and Wolff, which had been discredited by Kant's critique of knowledge.[3] The term "metaphysics" had fallen into disrepute by the early 1800s, as Hegel himself noted,[4] so reviving it would have been impossible without invoking negative connotations. Nevertheless, even if Hegel avoided the term, he had a conception of philosophy that can only be described as "metaphysical." In his early Jena years, and indeed throughout his career, Hegel saw the purpose of philosophy as the rational knowledge of the absolute.[5] This conforms to one of the classical senses of the term "metaphysics," a sense given to it by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason:* the attempt to know the unconditioned through pure reason.[6]

If we define metaphysics as the knowledge of the absolute, we are still far from a clear understanding of its purpose and nature. For, to address our second question, what does Hegel mean by "the absolute"? Although Hegel himself never provides a simple definition of the term, one is given by his former philosophical ally, F.W.J. Schelling. According to Schelling, the absolute is that which does not depend upon anything else in order to exist or be conceived.[7] Both in its existence and essence, the absolute is independent of, or unconditioned by, all other things. In other words, the absolute is *causi sui,* that whose essence necessarily involves existence. The historical antecedent of this concept is Spinoza's definition of substance in the *Ethics:* "By substance, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself; in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception."[8] Making no secret of his debt to Spinoza, Schelling readily followed his definition by calling the absolute "the infinite substance" or, less eloquently, "the in-itself" (*das An-sich*).

Schelling and Hegel did not hesitate to draw Spinozistic conclusions from this definition of substance. Like Spinoza, they argued that only one thing can satisfy this definition: the universe as a whole. Since the universe as a whole contains everything, there will be nothing outside it for it to depend upon; for anything less than the universe as a whole, however, there will be something outside it in relation to which it must be conceived. With these Spinozistic arguments in mind, Schelling wrote in his 1800 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy:* "The absolute is not the cause of the universe but the universe itself."[9] Hegel too embraced Spinoza's conclusions. As

late as the 1820s, he paid handsome tribute to the Spinozistic conception of the absolute: "When one begins to philosophize one must be first a Spinozist. The soul must bathe itself in the aether of this single substance, in which everything one has held for true is submerged."[10]

If we keep in mind Schelling's and Hegel's Spinozistic conception of the absolute, we can avoid some of the vulgar misconceptions surrounding their metaphysics. According to one common conception, metaphysics is a form of speculation about supernatural entities, such as God, Providence, and the soul. Such a conception has nothing to do with Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics, however, for their metaphysics does not concern itself with a specific kind of entity. Their absolute is not a kind of thing, but simply the whole of which all things are only parts. No less than Kant, then, Schelling and Hegel warn against the fallacy of hypostasis, which treats the absolute as if it were only a specific thing.[11] Schelling and Hegel also insist that their metaphysics has nothing to do with the supernatural. Their conception of metaphysics is indeed profoundly naturalistic. They banish all occult forces and the supernatural from the universe, explaining everything in terms of natural laws.[12] They admired Spinoza precisely because of his thoroughgoing naturalism, precisely because he made a religion out of nature itself, conceiving of God as nothing more than the *natura naturans*.

It would be a mistake, however, to conceive of Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics in purely Spinozistic terms. In the early 1800s Schelling developed a conception of the absolute as "subject-object identity" a conception whose ultimate meaning is *anti*-Spinozistic. What Schelling meant by describing the absolute as "subject-object identity" is *apparently* Spinozistic: the mental and physical, the subjective and objective, are only different attributes of a single infinite substance. Nevertheless, Schelling gave this doctrine a further meaning that would have made Benedictus turn in his grave. Contrary to Spinoza's rigidly mechanistic conception of the universe, Schelling conceived of the single infinite substance in vitalistic and teleological terms. Following Herder,[13] who insisted on breathing life into Spinoza's dead and frozen universe, Schelling saw substance as living force, "the force of all forces" or "primal force." According to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*,[14] all of nature is a hierarchic manifestation of this force, beginning with its lower degrees of organization and development in minerals, plants, and animals, and ending

with its highest degree of organization and development in human self-consciousness. The absolute is not simply a machine, then, but an organism, a self-generating and self-organizing whole.

Schelling thought he had good reason to conceive of the absolute in organic rather than mechanical terms. Only an organic conception of nature, he argued, agreed with all the latest results of the new sciences. The recent discoveries in electricity, magnetism, and biology made it necessary to conceive of matter in more dynamic terms. Rather than regarding matter as static, so that it acts only upon external impulse, Schelling felt it necessary to see it as active, as generating and organizing itself. Spinoza's more mechanical conception of the absolute was, then, only the product of the sciences of his day, which were now obsolete. Schelling also saw his vitalism as the solution to a problem that had haunted philosophy ever since Descartes: how to explain the interaction between the mind and body. According to Schelling, the mind and body are not distinct kinds of entity, but simply different degrees of organization and development of living force. Mind is the most organized and developed form of matter, and matter is the least organized and developed form of mind. Such a theory, Schelling argued, avoids the pitfalls of both dualism and mechanistic materialism. Since living force has to be explained in teleological terms, the mind is not merely a machine; and since force embodies itself only in the activity of matter, it is not a ghostly kind of substance.

Hegel inherited this organic conception of the absolute from Schelling in the early 1800s, the period of their collaboration on the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* (1802–04). Hegel accepted the broad outlines of Schelling's conception of the absolute. He agreed with Schelling's definition of the absolute: that which has an independent essence and existence. He also followed Schelling in conceiving of the absolute in organic terms, so that the mental and physical are only its attributes or degrees of organization and development. Nevertheless, even during their collaboration, Hegel began to have serious doubts about some of Schelling's formulations of the nature of the absolute. In his *Presentation of My System*, *Bruno*, and *Philosophy and Religion*,[15] Schelling sometimes spoke of the absolute as if it were nothing more than "subject-object identity," the single infinite substance or "the point of indifference" between the subjective and objective. But this limited way of speaking about the absolute

suffers from a serious difficulty. If we conceive of the absolute as only subject-object identity *apart* from the apparant dualism between the subject and object in our ordinary experience – if we see it as only the infinite substance *without* its finite modes – then we seem to exclude the realm of the finite and appearance from it. Contrary to its definition, the absolute then becomes dependent in its essence, conceivable only in contrast to something it is not, namely the realm of appearance and finitude. Hence, in the preface to his *Phenomenology,* Hegel felt that it was necessary to correct Schelling's restricted formulation of the absolute. Since Schelling's absolute excluded its modes, which determine the specific characteristics of a thing, Hegel likened it to "a night when all cows are black." If we are to remain true to its definition, Hegel argued, then it is necessary to conceive of the absolute as the *whole* of substance *and* its modes, as the *unity* of the infinite *and* finite. Since the absolute must include all the flux of finitude and appearance within itself, Hegel called it "a Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunken."

Hegel's ridicule of Schelling should not blind us, however, to his deeper debts to his erstwhile colleague. All his life Hegel adhered to Schelling's organic conception of the absolute, attempting to work out some of its implications. What Hegel was objecting to in the preface of the *Phenomenology* was more Schelling's formulation of the absolute than his underlying conception. Although he vacillated, Schelling himself would sometimes conceive of the absolute in more Hegelian terms, explicitly including the realm of finitude within it.[16] When Hegel later insisted (in the preface to the *Phenomenology*) that the absolute is not only substance but also subject, he was not so much attacking Schelling as attacking Spinoza through Schelling. By conceiving of Spinoza's substance as living force, Schelling had laid the ground for seeing the absolute as subject. Hegel's philosophical development in his formative Jena years consisted not so much in a "break with Schelling" as in a persistent attempt to provide a better epistemological foundation for his views.[17]

Now that we have examined Schelling's and Hegel's conception of the absolute, we are in a much better position to understand their belief in the possibility of metaphysics. Because of their conception

of the absolute, Schelling and Hegel believed they were justified in exempting their philosophy from much of Kant's critique of metaphysics. The target of Kant's critique – the victim of all the "amphibolies," "paralogisms," and "antinomies" – was the old metaphysics of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school. But this metaphysics was in the service of a deistic theology, which conceived of the absolute as a supernatural entity existing beyond the sphere of nature. Schelling and Hegel happily agreed with Kant that metaphysics in this sense is indeed impossible. They had, however, a different diagnosis of its impossibility: it is not because the supernatural is unknowable, as Kant thought, but because the supernatural does not exist. All of Kant's worries about the unknowability of the noumenal world were, in Schelling's and Hegel's view, simply the result of hypostasis, of conceiving of the absolute as if it were only a specific thing. If we conceive of the absolute in naturalistic terms, Schelling and Hegel argue, then metaphysics does not require the transcendent knowledge condemned by Kant. All that we then need to know is nature herself, which is given to our experience.

Schelling and Hegel were convinced of the possibility of their metaphysics chiefly because they regarded it as a form of scientific naturalism, as the appropriate philosophy for the new natural sciences of their day. They rejected any sharp distinction between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori,* insisting that their metaphysical principles be confirmed through experience. And, as we have already seen, they insisted on banishing all occult forces from nature and explaining everything according to natural laws. Although, to be sure, they conceived of the laws of nature in teleological rather than mechanical terms, they were adamant that the purposes of nature be conceived as internal to nature herself and not as imposed by some external designer. For Schelling and Hegel, then, the question of the possibility of metaphysics depended in no small measure upon the possibility of *Naturphilosophie* itself. We ignore this dimension of Schelling's and Hegel's philosophy only at the risk of positivistic anachronism.[18]

Seen in its proper historical perspective, Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics should be placed within the tradition of vitalistic materialism, which goes back to Bruno and the early free-thinkers of seventeenth-century England.[19] This tradition attempted to banish the realm of the supernatural, yet it was not atheistic. Rather, it

conceived of God as the whole of nature. Although it held that nature consists in matter alone, it conceived of matter in vitalistic rather than mechanistic terms. Matter was seen as dynamic, having self-generating and self-organizing powers.[20] The similarities with Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics are apparent. But Schelling and Hegel should also be placed within this tradition because they shared some of its underlying moral and political values: a commitment to egalitarianism, republicanism, religious tolerance, and political liberty. If it seems strange to regard Hegel as a materialist, given all his talk about "spirit," then we must lay aside the usual mechanistic picture of materialism. We also must not forget that for Hegel, spirit is only the highest degree of organization and development of the organic powers within nature. If it were anything more, Hegel would relapse into the very dualism he condemns in Kant and Fichte. It is noteworthy that this materialistic element to Hegel's metaphysics was not lost on his contemporaries, who were quick to praise and damn him accordingly.[21]

If we consider Schelling's and Hegel's naturalistic conception of metaphysics, it might seem as if there is no point of conflict between them and Kant after all. It is as if Hegel engages in a kind of metaphysics that Kant himself would approve, a metaphysics of nature. But this would be a premature conclusion, one which misses the real point at issue between Kant and Hegel. For, in claiming that we can know nature as an organism, as a totality of living forces, Schelling and Hegel were flying in the face of Kant's strictures upon teleology in the *Critique of Judgement*. In this work Kant argues that we cannot confirm the idea of a natural purpose through experience, and that we attribute purposes to nature only by analogy with our own conscious intentions. The idea of an organism has a strictly heuristic value in helping us to systematize our knowledge of the many particular laws of nature. We cannot assume that nature *is* an organism, then, but we can proceed only *as if* it were one. In the terms of Kant's first *Critique*, the idea of an organism is not a "constitutive" but only a "regulative" principle. Rather than describing anything that exists, it simply prescribes a task, the organization of all our detailed knowledge into a system. Here, then, lies the basic sticking point between Kant and Hegel: Kant denies, and Hegel affirms, that we can know that nature *is* an organism.

We have now come to our third question: Why postulate the existence of the absolute? In other words, why give constitutive validity to the idea of nature as an organism? Hegel's answer to this question comes in his first published philosophical writing, his 1801 *Difference between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy.* The thesis of this early work is that there is a fundamental difference between Fichte's and Schelling's philosophy, and that Schelling's system is superior to Fichte's. Such a thesis would have been news to Schelling himself, who had collaborated with Fichte for the previous five years and regarded their positions as the same in principle. Hegel's tract was instrumental in effecting Schelling's break with Fichte and forging the alliance between Schelling and Hegel.[22] The essence of Hegel's argument for the superiority of Schelling's system is that we can resolve the central outstanding problem of Fichte's philosophy only if we assume the existence of Schelling's absolute, that is, only if we give constitutive status to the idea of nature as a living organism. To understand Hegel's argument, then, we must first have some idea of Fichte's problem and of his difficulties in finding a solution to it.

The fundamental problem of Fichte's early philosophy, the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794,[23] began with the Transcendental Deduction of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.* In this notoriously obscure secton of his enigmatic masterpiece, Kant raised a question that would haunt the entire generation after him: How is empirical knowledge possible if it requires a universality and necessity that cannot be verified in experience? This problem arose in the context of Kant's dualistic picture of the faculty of knowledge. According to Kant, empirical knowledge requires the interchange between universal and necessary concepts, which provide the *form* of experience, and particular and contingent intuitions or impressions, which supply the *matter* of experience. While these concepts originate *a priori* in the understanding, a purely active and intellectual faculty, the intuitions are given *a posteriori* to our sensibility, a purely passive and sensitive faculty. The question then arose: If our *a priori* concepts derive from the understanding, how do we know that they apply to the *a posteriori* intuitions of sensibility? Or, more simply, if these concepts do not derive from experience, then how do we know that they are valid for it? Kant's answer to this question – if we can summarize in a few words the extremely involved and intricate argument of the Tran-

scendental Deduction – is that these *a priori* concepts apply to experience only if they are its necessary conditions. If they determine the very conditions under which we have representations, then they will indeed be valid for them, although they will have no validity beyond them.

Under the influence of some of Kant's early critics, Fichte quickly became dissatisfied with Kant's solution to the problem of the Transcendental Deduction. According to such early critics of Kant as J.G. Hamann, G.E. Schulze, and Salomon Maimon, the very manner in which Kant posed his problem made its solution impossible. Kant had postulated such a wide divide between the faculties of understanding and sensibility that there could not be any correspondence between *a priori* and *a posteriori* intuitions. If the understanding is a purely active intellectual faculty, whose activities are not in space and time, and if sensibility is a purely passive sensitive faculty, whose operations are in space and time, then how is it possible for these faculties to interact with one another? According to Maimon, one of Kant's sharpest critics, Kant's problems with the understanding-sensibility dualism were analogous to Descartes's problems with the mind-body dualism.[24] Just as Descartes could not explain how two such heterogeneous substances as the mind and body interact, so Kant could not explain how two such heterogeneous faculties as understanding and sensibility could cooperate with one another. Kant's dualism left his philosophy vulnerable to skeptical objections, for it seemed that his faculties could interact only in virtue of some mysterious pre-established harmony.

The main problem for philosophers after Kant, then, was to find some means of uniting Kant's disastrous dualisms. Philosophers searched for some higher power or source of the mind, of which the understanding and sensibility were only aspects or manifestations. They insisted upon raising a question that Kant himself refused to answer: How is the faculty of thought in general possible?[25] What makes the understanding and sensibility different functions of thought in general? Although it is well known that the overcoming of Kant's dualisms was a central objective of post-Kantian philosophy, this point is usually made in the context of Kant's moral philosophy, where Kant postulates a struggle between reason and desire. What we must see here, however, is that the overcoming of these dualisms was not only a moral imperative. Rather, it was also an

epistemological one, since only in this way would it be possible to solve the problem of the Transcendental Deduction.

Recognizing the problematic status of Kant's dualisms, Fichte insisted that the only way to resolve the problem of the Transcendental Deduction was to postulate a principle of "subject-object identity."[26] According to this principle, all knowledge requires nothing less than the identity of the knower and the known. The subject who knows must be one and the same as the object that is known. We must postulate such a principle, Fichte argues, because any form of dualism leaves us prey to skepticism. If the subject and object are consciousness and the thing-in-itself, then we cannot step outside our consciousness to see if it corresponds to the thing as it exists prior to it. But if they are the concepts of the understanding and the intuitions of sensibility, then we cannot conceive how such distinct faculties interact. Hence the only means to avoid skepticism and to explain the possibility of knowledge, Fichte concludes, is to postulate some principle of subject-object identity.

Assuming that subject-object identity is a necessary condition of knowledge, under what conditions is it realized? Where is subject-object identity to be found? Fichte's answer is that only one kind of knowledge realizes the demanding conditions of subject-object identity: self-knowledge. Only in self-knowledge is the subject who knows one and the same as the object that is known. Hence, for Fichte, self-knowledge becomes the paradigm of all knowledge. If we can show that our knowledge of an object in experience really is only a form of self-knowledge, then we will be able to show how knowledge is possible. This strategy was perfectly summed up by the young Schelling when he was still a disciple of Fichte:

> Only in the self-intuition of a mind is there the identity of a representation and its object. Hence to explain the absolute correspondence between a representation and its object, upon which the reality of all of our knowledge depends, it must be shown that the mind, insofar as it intuits objects, really intuits itself. If this can be shown, then the reality of all of our knowledge will be assured.[27]

Although Fichte followed Kant in spurning metaphysics, insisting that the very spirit of his philosophy was the limitation of knowledge to experience,[28] he never concealed the metaphysical dimensions of his principle of subject-object identity. These become

apparent as soon as we raise the question "Who is the subject of subject-object identity?" It is clear that this subject cannot be the ordinary empirical or individual subject, a person like you or me, or like Jones, Bloggs, or Smith. Such a person does not know himself or herself in knowing empirical objects, which appear to be given and external. Indeed, it would be absurd to attribute to any individual or empirical subject the power to create all of his or her experience. Fichte is perfectly aware of this. He flatly rejects Berkeley's idealism, insisting that any successful idealism must explain the givenness and contingency of experience.[29] The subject of subject-object identity, Fichte maintains, is "the infinite" or "absolute" ego. This absolute ego, which comprises all of reality, creates its objects in the very act of knowing them. It is the divine intellect, the *intellectus archetypus* of Kant's third *Critique*.[30]

If the subject of subject-object identity is the absolute ego, it would seem as if Fichte is committed to an idealism where an absolute ego creates all of the reality of the external world. Then the finite ego's knowledge of an external object is really only its subconscious self-knowledge as an absolute ego. But this all-too-common picture of Fichte's idealism is a travesty, flying in the face of his strictures upon metaphysics. Fichte himself explicitly and emphatically rejected it.[31] Remaining true to the Kantian limits upon knowledge, Fichte insisted that the idea of the absolute ego should be read as a strictly regulative principle. We have no right to believe in the existence of the absolute ego, he argued, but we do have a duty to make it the goal of our moral action. According to Fichte, the idea of the absolute ego is not only a useful heuristic principle but is a necessary postulate of morality itself.[32] The moral law demands that we should become completely autonomous and independent agents, perfectly noumenal or intelligible beings subject to the laws of reason alone. We can fulfill this demand only if we gain complete control over nature, making it submit to our rational ends, for only then do we eliminate our sensible nature, which is subject to natural causes outside ourselves. Hence the moral demand for complete autonomy or independence requires that we strive to become like the absolute ego, a perfectly intelligible being that creates all of nature according to its reason.

True to his strictures against metaphysics, Fichte stressed that the absolute ego is a goal that we cannot realize. The finite ego cannot

attain it without ceasing to be finite and becoming God himself. Nevertheless, the more the finite ego strives to gain control over nature, making it conform to its rational ends, the more it *approaches* its ideal. Through its striving it can make the intelligible content of experience increase as the sensible content decreases.

The underlying spirit of Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, then, is profoundly pragmatic: knowledge is the result of action, not contemplation. We cannot refute the skeptic by theoretical reason, Fichte holds, because mere thinking cannot remove the subject-object dualism, which is the main obstacle to our knowledge. We can diminish this dualism and approach the subject-object identity required for knowledge, only by acting, only by striving to make nature conform to the demands of our reason. The only cure for skepticism is therefore action. Hence for Fichte, as for Marx after him, all the mysteries of transcendental philosophy are dissolved only in practice.

Such, in a nutshell, was the problem and doctrine of Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, which became an inspiration for many thinkers in the mid-1790s. But sometime in late 1799 or early 1800, probably under the influence of their friend Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel became dissatisfied with Fichte's solution to the problem of the Transcendental Deduction. The chief weakness of Fichte's solution, Schelling and Hegel argued, came from his giving the idea of the absolute a purely regulative status. If this idea is only a goal for action, and moreover a goal that we cannot ever attain, then how is empirical knowledge possible? It depends upon a condition that cannot be fulfilled, namely, subject-object identity. But the problem goes even deeper than this. It is not only that the process of striving cannot end; it cannot even begin. In other words, we cannot approach, let alone attain, the goal of subject-object identity. For if the finite ego and nature remain radically heterogeneous from one another – if the spontaneous activity of the ego is purely intellectual or noumenal and the sphere of nature is purely sensible or phenomenal – then the ego cannot even begin to act upon nature to bring it under its rational control. Hence Fichte's philosophy leaves the possibility of empirical knowledge hanging in the balance, still prey to skeptical objections.

We are now in a position to understand why Schelling and Hegel think we must give constitutive status to the idea of the absolute. If we give this idea a purely regulative status – if we assume that subject-object identity is only a goal for action – then we cannot

explain the interaction between subject and object in our actual experience. We must assume, therefore, that subject-object identity exists, and moreover that it exists *within* the subject-object dualism we find in our experience. It is necessary to suppose, in other words, that when the finite ego knows an object that appears given and external to it, this is really only its subconscious self-knowledge as an absolute ego. This is the point behind Hegel's famous insistence that the absolute is not only subject-object identity but the identity of subject-object identity and subject-object non-identity. Only if subject-object identity exists within the subject-object dualism of our experience is it possible to explain the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge.

If we are to solve the problem of the Transcendental Deduction, Hegel argues in his *Difference,* then we must not only postulate the existence of subject-object identity. We must go a step further: we must conceive of subject-object identity along Schellingian lines. In other words, we must regard the absolute as a single infinite substance, whose nature consists in living force and whose attributes are the subjective and objective. The point of conceiving the absolute in this organic or vitalist manner, Hegel contends, is that only then will we be able to overcome Kant's disastrous dualisms. For if we conceive of all of nature as an organism, and the knowing subject as only part of it, then we can explain the interaction between subject and object. Rather than being heterogeneous substances or faculties, they will be only different degrees of organization and development of a single living force. The self-consciousness of the subject will be only the highest degree of organization and development of all the powers of nature, and inert matter will be only the lowest degree of organization and development of all the powers of the mind.

It should now be clear that Schelling's and Hegel's idea of the absolute was anything but an uncritical leap into metaphysics. Rather than ignoring the challenge of Kant's philosophy, their metaphysics was the only means to resolve its fundamental problem, namely, to explain how our *a priori* concepts apply to experience. Only if we remove Kant's strictures upon teleology, giving the idea of an organism a full constitutive validity, Hegel and Schelling argue, will we be able to surmount those Kantian dualisms that make it impossible to explain the possibility of knowledge. What this means, in more Kantian terms, is that we can provide a transcenden-

tal deduction of those metaphysical ideas. For we can show them to be not only useful fictions for systematizing our empirical knowledge but also necessary conditions for the possibility of experience itself.

It would be premature to conclude that Schelling and Hegel have completely satisfied the demands of Kantian criticism. Our fourth question still remains: How do we know the absolute? This question was especially pressing for Schelling and Hegel, who wished to avoid any relapse into the old metaphysical dogmatism. Like Kant and Fichte, they too insisted that we cannot have any knowledge beyond the limits of experience.[33] Nevertheless, they postulated the existence of the absolute, which is a necessary condition of our experience. How, then, does the necessary condition of our experience become the object of it? Who, indeed, has ever had an experience of themselves as an absolute ego? But if the idea of the absolute is not to be a transcendent hypostasis, then it is necessary to show, somehow, that it lies within our experience.

In the early 1800s Schelling developed an elaborate epistemology to justify and supply knowledge of the absolute. This was his theory of "philosophical construction" or "intellectual intuition." Acutely aware of Kant's challenge to metaphysics, Schelling had no wish to revive the old demonstrative methods of Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism. Following Kant, he insisted that we cannot demonstrate the unconditioned through reasoning. He agreed with Kant that our *discursive* powers of conception, judgment, and demonstration cannot know the unconditioned, and that if they go beyond experience they will end in antinomies, amphibolies, and paralogisms. Nevertheless, Schelling refused to conclude that there could be no rational knowledge of the absolute. It is a mistake, he argued, to conceive of reason as a discursive power. Rather, it is a power of intellectual intuition or perception, which is distinct from both the empirical intuitions of sensibility and the discursive powers of the understanding. Such a power is not subject to Kant's strictures upon knowledge, Schelling argued, because these apply only to the discursive powers of the understanding when they attempt to go beyond the limits of experience. An intellectual intuition, however, is a kind of experience, a form of intuition or perception, so that it can provide the basis for a purely immanent metaphysics.

It is ironic that the inspiration for Schelling's theory of intellectual intuition came from Kant himself, and in particular from his theory of mathematical construction. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argued that we demonstrate the truths of mathematical judgments by presenting them in intuition. For example, we show that two parallel lines do not intersect by drawing two equidistant lines on a chalk board. Schelling thought that this power of demonstrating mathematical truths revealed that we are in possession of a power of *a priori* intuition. Although Kant sharply distinguished between the methods of mathematics and philosophy, Schelling insisted upon extending the method of construction into philosophy itself. Accordingly, some of his major works of the 1800s proceed *more geometrico*, beginning with definitions and axioms and deriving theorems from them.

How, more precisely, does intellectual intuition give us knowledge of the absolute? Schelling sketched the mechanics of intellectual intuition in a work he wrote with Hegel in 1802, *Further Presentation of My System of Philosophy*.[34] We comprehend something through reason, Schelling wrote, when we see it in a whole. The task of philosophical construction is then to grasp the identity of each particular with the whole of all things. To gain such knowledge we should focus upon a thing by itself, apart from its relations to anything else; we should consider it as a single, unique whole, abstracting from all its properties, which are only its partial aspects, and which relate it to other things. Just as in mathematical construction we abstract from all the accidental features of a figure (it is written with chalk, it is on a blackboard) to see it as a perfect exemplar of some universal truth, so in philosophical construction we abstract from all the specific properties of an object to see it in the absolute whole. If we thus focus upon the object itself, abstracting from all its specific properties, we should also see its identity with the whole universe, for things differ from one another only through their properties.[35] Hence it is by perfectly grasping any particular thing that we arrive at a knowledge of the absolute, the whole in which all particular differences disappear.

In the early years of his collaboration with Schelling, Hegel too was a champion of intellectual intuition, which he saw as the indispensable organ of all philosophy. "Without transcendental intuition it is not possible to philosophize," he wrote in his *Difference*.[36]

Sometime in 1804, however, when Schelling left Jena, ending their collaboration, Hegel began to have serious doubts about intellectual intuition. It no longer seemed to provide an adequate foundation for knowledge of the absolute or a satisfactory response to the challenge of Kantian criticism. In some of the fragments Hegel wrote around this time,[37] and in some passages of the slightly later *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[38] Hegel came to several critical conclusions about intellectual intuition. First, the insights of intellectual intuition cannot be demonstrated against competing views. If the philosopher intuits his identity with all things, the man in the street sees them as external to himself. How, then, does the philosopher prove that his intellectual intuition is the correct vision of things? Second, we can identify the object of our intuition only by applying concepts to it, for it is only through concepts that we can determine what a thing is. Hence an intellectual intuition will be at best ineffable and at worst, empty. Third, the method of philosophical construction cannot explain the place of a particular in a whole because it abstracts from all its specific differences. The point, however, is to see how *these specific differences* are necessary to the whole and not to abstract from them, leaving the particulars outside the absolute. Fourth, an intellectual intuition is esoteric, the privilege of an elite few, whereas philosophy should be accessible to everyone.

Hegel's rejection of intellectual intuition made it imperative for him to find some discursive method by which to know the absolute. Only a conceptual and demonstrative knowledge would be exoteric, appealing to the intellect of everyone alike; and only it would be able to prove the philosopher's viewpoint against those of common sense. Yet this demand for a discursive knowledge of the absolute put Hegel at odds with Kant's critical strictures upon reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Somehow, Hegel would have to show that, despite Kant's strictures, there can be a conceptual and demonstrative knowledge of the absolute. He would have to avoid the pitfalls of both intellectual intuition and the syllogistic method of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school.

Hegel's response to this challenge was his famous dialectic, which he began to sketch in the early 1800s, even during his collaboration with Schelling.[39] This dialectic is plain from Hegel's early plans for a "logic" that would demonstrate the viewpoint of absolute knowledge by beginning with the concepts of the understanding. This logic

would show how the concepts of the understanding necessarily contradict themselves, and how their contradictions can be resolved only by seeing them as parts of a wider whole. More specifically, the dialectic would proceed through three stages. a) Some finite concept, true of only a limited part of reality, would go beyond its limits in attempting to know all of reality. It would claim to be an adequate concept to describe the absolute because, like the absolute, it has a complete or self-sufficient meaning independent of any other concept. b) This claim would come into conflict with the fact that the concept depends for its meaning on some other concept, having meaning only in contrast to its negation. There would then be a contradiction between its claim to independence and its *de facto* dependence upon another concept. c) The only way to resolve the contradiction would be to reinterpret the claim to independence, so that it applies not just to one concept to the exclusion of the other but to the whole of both concepts. Of course, the same stages could be repeated on a higher level, and so on, until we come to the complete *system* of all concepts, which is alone adequate to describe the absolute.

Although the early logic contained *en nuce* the germ of the dialectic, Hegel did not write his mature logic until after his Jena years. The plan for a dialectic leading to absolute knowledge was first completed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit.* The dialectic of the *Phenomenology* is different from that of the early logic, since it deals not with the concepts of the understanding but with the standpoints of consciousness. Nevertheless, the basic structure and purpose of the dialectic are the same. Hegel shows how the attempt by ordinary consciousness to know reality in itself ends in contradiction, and how this contradiction can be resolved only through rising to a more inclusive standpoint. The dialectic of ordinary consciousness consists in its *self*-examination, the comparison of its actual knowing with its own standard of knowledge. This self-examination essentially consists in two tests: the claim of ordinary consciousness to know reality itself is tested against its own standard of knowledge; this standard of knowledge is itself tested against its own experience. The dialectic continues until a standard of knowledge is found that is adequate to the experience of consciousness. This standard is, of course, that of subject-object identity itself.

It is especially in the *Phenomenology* that we find Hegel's attempt

to legitimate metaphysics before the challenge of Kantian criticism. What Hegel attempts to provide in this work is nothing less than "a transcendental deduction" of absolute knowledge. Just as Kant attempted to provide a transcendental deduction of the concepts of the understanding by showing them to be necessary conditions of possible experience, so Hegel attempts to do the same for absolute knowledge. It is indeed striking that Hegel refers to his dialectic as "the experience of consciousness" and that he calls his phenomenology "the science of the experience of consciousness."[40] This was Hegel's way of meeting the critical challenge on Kant's own terms. The aim of the *Phenomenology* was to show the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a strictly immanent metaphysics based upon experience alone.

Of course, it was one thing for Hegel to sketch the plan for his dialectic and another for him to execute it. Surely, the Hegelian dialectic makes demands of a tall order, which perhaps can never be fulfilled. Yet there can be no doubt that the dialectic presented an original and ingenious solution to the problem facing Hegel: how to legitimate metaphysics in the face of the Kantian critique of knowledge. Even if Hegel's dialectic fails, we cannot accuse him of an uncritical indulgence in metaphysics. It should be clear by now that this would be only to beg important philosophical questions.

The essays in this volume attempt to introduce the modern student to the central topics and issues of Hegel's philosophy. They cover the whole range of his philosophy, his contributions to logic, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, religion, and history. They also consider Hegel's historical significance, particularly the development of Hegelianism in the early nineteenth century, the influence of Hegel on Marx, and the problematic legacy of Hegel for analytic philosophy.

The first article, "Hegel's Intellectual Development" by H.S. Harris, introduces Hegel and places him in his historical context by providing a survey of his most formative period, the years in Tübingen and Jena before the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1806.

Five of the essays treat some of the classical problems in the interpretation of Hegel. The essay by Robert Pippin considers the question of the coherence of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Ever since its publication, the structure of this work has been the source of puzzlement, since it divides into epistemological and historical halves,

which have no apparent connection with one another. Pippin argues that the connecting link between these halves is provided by Hegel's attempt to provide a theory of social subjectivity.

The essay by John Burbidge discusses the problematic status of Hegel's logic. Is Hegel's logic a metaphysics, a transcendental system of categories, or a traditional formal logic? Burbidge contends that all these characterizations are partially correct, and that the guiding thread behind every aspect of Hegel's logic is his attempt to provide a general theory of reasoning about reasoning.

Tom Wartenberg deals with the troublesome question of Hegel's idealism, the precise characterization of which has created much dispute. Hegel's idealism has been described as the doctrine that "only minds and mental events exist" (Russell), but it has also been claimed that Hegel's philosophy is not idealism at all but a form of materialism (Lukács). Wartenberg maintains that there is a clear sense in which Hegel's philosophy is idealist, although not in the Berkelian or Kantian mould. Rather, Hegel's idealism is a form of conceptualism in that Hegel thinks that concepts determine the basic structure of reality.

Michael Forster examines perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hegel's thought, his dialectical method. Some scholars have denied that Hegel has such a method, while others dismiss it for committing elementary logical blunders. Forster argues that Hegel has, indeed, such a method, that it is not guilty of any simple fallacies, and that it plays several important roles in Hegel's thought.

Kenneth Westphal, while providing a general introduction to the structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, investigates Hegel's political views. Ever since the division of the Hegelian school into a left and a right wing, Hegel's philosophy has been seen as both radical and reactionary. By examining Hegel in his historical context, Westphal finds that it is more accurate to view Hegel as a liberal reformer who was anxious to steer a middle path between the extremes of revolution and reaction.

Another four essays discuss some central but less controversial aspects of Hegel's philosophy. Allen Wood analyzes Hegel's ethical theory, which he regards as neither teleological nor de-ontological, but as a theory about the conditions of self-actualization. Robert Wicks surveys Hegel's aesthetics, outlining Hegel's account of art history, his organization of the arts, his analysis of beauty, and his

"end of art" thesis. Laurence Dickey attempts to explain the historical significance of Hegel's philosophy of religion by locating it in the context of his Berlin period (1818–1831). Only by placing Hegel's philosophy of religion in such a context, Dickey argues, can we determine what is characteristic of Hegel's position and rescue him from some of the stereotypes foisted upon him by his contemporaries. Finally, my own essay considers Hegel's historicism, the central role it plays in his philosophy, and the method, metaphysics, and politics behind it.

The last four essays consider either Hegel's historical influence or his problematic relation to other philosophers. Paul Guyer examines Hegel's polemic against Kant, arguing that it usually misses its target while obscuring their more important philosophical differences. Allen Wood considers Hegel's influence upon Marxism by focusing on the close affinities in their social and political theories. Investigating the question of Hegel's relationship to analytic philosophy, Peter Hylton concludes that Russell and Moore were reacting more to the legacy of Kant than Hegel. Finally, John Toews provides a general survey of the development of Hegelianism in Germany from 1805 to 1846.

If there is a common conviction behind all these articles, it is that Hegel's philosophy is important, both philosophically and historically, but that we still have a long way to go in appropriating the Hegelian legacy.

I wish to thank Allen Wood, Paul Guyer, Kenneth Westphal, Raymond Geuss, and Michael Hardimon for their advice in preparing this volume.

NOTES

1 Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London: Unwin, 1914), 48–49 n. Cf. *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Unwin, 1961), 713–15.

2 See especially Klaus Hartmann's "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View" in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), 101–24. A similar approach is followed by Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983), and by Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

3 See, for example, Hegel's characterization of metaphysics in the *Enzyklopädie, Werke,* ed. E. Moldenahuer and K. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969–72), VIII, 93–106, §26–36.
4 See Hegel's essay "Wer denkt abstrakt," *Werke* II, 575. Cf. *Wissenschaft der Logik* V, 419.
5 See Hegel's *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie, Werke* II, 25.
6 See *Critique of Pure Reason,* B 366–96, esp. B 395.
7 See Schelling, *Werke,* ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: Beck'sche Verlag, 1927), III, 11; IV, 98, 115; *Ergänzungsband* II, 78, 128.
8 Spinoza, *Ethics,* Part I, def. 3.
9 Schelling, *Werke* III, 25, 32.
10 Hegel, *Werke* XX, 165.
11 This warning is especially apparent in the early writings of Schelling. See his *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie, Werke* I, 105, 130, and 167. One of the targets of Schelling's *Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus* is the attempt to justify belief in the existence of God as a regulative idea. See *Werke* I, 208–16. In his *Enzyklopädie* Hegel would later argue that the Kantian thing-in-itself is only the hypostasis of the abstract idea of pure being. See *Werke* VIII, 120–21, §44.
12 On Schelling's naturalism, see his *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie, Werke* II, 180. On Hegel's naturalism, see his statement that reason explains things according to their immanent necessity. *Enzyklopädie* VIII, 41, §1, and IX, 15, §246.
13 See Herder's *Gott, Einige Gespräche,* in Herder, *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. B. Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881–1913), XVI, 451–52. The young Schelling was an avid reader of Herder.
14 The essential works for Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* are his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), *Von der Weltseele* (1798), and *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* (1799).
15 See Schelling, *Presentation of My System,* §16, 33; *Werke* III, 17, 25–26; *Bruno, Werke* III, 140, 194; *Philosophy and Religion, Werke* IV, 25.
16 See *Bruno, Werke* III, 131–32; and *Jahrbücher, Werke* IV, 88.
17 On Hegel's relationship to Schelling in this respect, see the essay by H.S. Harris, Chapter 1, pp. 40–41, 42, 44, 45–46.
18 This is a pitfall of the approach developed by Hartmann and others. Seeing Hegel's philosophy as a form of categorial analysis does not explain the importance he or Schelling gave to *Naturphilosophie,* however respectable it might make them appear from a more contemporary perspective.
19 On this tradition, see Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1981).

20 The *locus classicus* for this view of matter was John Toland's *Letters to Serena* (London: Lintot, 1704), pp. 163–239.
21 For some of these early reactions to Hegel, see Shlomo Avineri's article "Hegel Revisited" in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1972), pp. 329–48, esp. 335, 337, 338, 339–40.
22 See Klaus Düsing, "Spekulation und Reflexion: Zur Zusammenarbeit Schellings und Hegels in Jena," *Hegel Studien* V (1969), 95–128.
23 The fundamental works of this phase of Fichte's thought are the *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre* (*Doctrine of Science*) trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, Grundriß des Eigenthümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre* and *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (all translated by Daniel Breazeale in *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).
24 See Maimon, *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie, Gesammelte Werke*, ed. V. Verra (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965) II, 62–65, 182–83, 362–64.
25 See *Critique of Pure Reason* A xvii.
26 See Fichte, *Werke* IV, 1–2.
27 See Schelling, *Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre, Werke* I, 366.
28 See Fichte, *Werke* II, 333.
29 See Fichte, *Werke* I, 423, 438.
30 Kant, *Critique of Judgement* §76–77.
31 Fichte, *Werke* I, 270, 252–54, 277.
32 Fichte, *Werke* VI, 293–301.
33 Note, for example, Hegel's statement from the preface of the Phenomenology: "Consciousness knows and conceives nothing but what is in its experience.". *Werke* III, 38.
34 See Schelling, *Werke Ergänzungsband* I, 391–424.
35 Schelling adheres to Leibniz's principle of the identity of indiscernibles, according to which one thing differs from one another only in virtue of its properties. See his *Jahrbücher, Werke* IV, 114, 122.
36 Hegel *Werke* II, 42.
37 See, for example, the fragment "Anmerkung: Die Philosophie . . ." in *Jenaer Realphilosophie I: Die Vorlesungen 1803/04*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Leipzig: Meiner, 1932), pp. 265–66, where Hegel anticipates the conclusions of the introduction to the *Phenomenology*. See also Hegel's *Wastebook, Werke* II, 543, 545, 548–49, 554, 559, 561.
38 Hegel *Werke* III, 20, 22, 71.
39 On the origins of Hegel's dialectic, see the essay by Michael Forster, in this volume.
40 Hegel *Werke* III, 80.