Gregory S. Moss *Editor*

The Being of Negation in Post-Kantian Philosophy

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For My Teachers:
Richard Dien Winfield and Edward Halper

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Chapter 1
Introduction: The Being of Negation in Post-Kantian Philosophy: The Problem of Negation

Gregory S. Moss

1 The Paradox of Negation in Ancient Greek Philosophy

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. The classical injunction of philosophy is to inquire into what is *universal*: that in virtue of which any particular instance of wisdom counts as wisdom. As an inquiry into the principles of all wisdom, philosophy means to inquire into not only what is universal but that which is not conditional upon anything: it aims to know that upon which all wisdom depends. Accordingly, since philosophy aims at knowledge that is *unconditionally* universal, and the absolute is unconditionally universal, philosophy aims at knowledge of the absolute.

Aristotle, having perceived that anything that can be known must *be* in some way, construed first philosophy, the inquiry into the absolute, as an inquiry into being. As Aristotle famously states in book Γ of the *Metaphysics*, there is a science of being qua being:

> ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ἣ θεωρεῖ τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὄν.[1]

However, in order to know what it is to be, the Ancients understood that one must know what distinguishes being from what it is not, namely nothingness—τὸ μὴ ὂν (that which is not). Thus, metaphysics requires *meontology*: an inquiry into nothingness *qua* nothingness. Because philosophy must parse the difference between being and nothing, philosophical inquiry into the negation of being must conceive of its object in terms of *relationality*:

[1] Aristotle (2002, 1003a21).

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> In fact, my friend, it's inept to try to separate everything from everything else. It's the sign of a completely unmusical and unphilosophical person.
>
> [καὶ γάρ, ὠγαθέ, τό γε πᾶν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἐπιχειρεῖν ἀποχωρίζειν ἄλλως τε οὐκ ἐμμελὲς καὶ δὴ καὶ παντάπασιν ἀμούσου τινὸς καὶ ἀφιλοσόφου.][2]

In what follows I give special attention to Plato's *Sophist* as an *Anstoß* by which to uncover closely related concepts and paradoxes that both *stimulate* and *arrest* our thinking in any meontological investigation.[3]

What *is* nothingness? From the very beginning of philosophy in the Occident, the concept of nothingness has appeared to be deeply paradoxical. Because one can only think or speak about something *that is*, we read in Parmenides that nothingness can neither be known nor spoken about:

> You cannot know that which is not—for it is impossible—neither can you speak about it.
>
> [Οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐὸν - οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν - οὔτε φράσαις].[4]

From its earliest conception in Greek thought, nothingness is conceived as the negation of Being, as non-being—*μὴ ἐὸν*. Rather than standing by itself, nothingness is the nothingness *of* being. Nothingness *negates* being.

Indeed, whenever we ask 'what is nothing?' we are implicitly asking 'what is it for nothing *to be*?' To answer with a judgment of the form 'nothingness is such and such' inevitably identifies the being of nothing. To think nothingness by itself cannot be achieved without introducing what nothingness *is not*—namely being. Thus, inquiries into nothingness turn back on themselves [*παλίντροπός*] in the manner of Heraclitus' back turning harmony [παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη][5] in which we are and we are not [εἶμέν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶμέν.].[6]

However, it has long been noted that Parmenides' argument against the possibility of thinking or speaking about nothingness *negates itself*.[7] In his *Sophist*, Plato explains why:

Visitor:	You shouldn't' expect more clarity from me. I was the one who made the statement that that which is not should not share in either one or in plurality. But even so I've continued after all that to speak of it as one, since I said that which is not. You understand?
Theatetus:	Yes.
Visitor:	And again, a little earlier I said that it is unutterable, unsayable, and inexpressible in speech. Do you follow?
Theatetus:	Yes, of course.

[2] Plato (1997c, 238e–239a).

[3] Note that here I do not intend to lose myself in a close exegesis of Plato's text, and its meaning. Rather, I take Plato as an inspiration to think more precisely about the problem of non-being.

[4] Plato (1997a, II.5).

[5] Barnes (2002, 9.2).

[6] Barnes (2002, 49a).

[7] Plato (1997c, 238d).

> Visitor: So in trying to attach being to it wasn't I saying things that were the contrary of what I'd said before? [οὐκοῦν τό γε εἶναι προσάπτειν πειρώμενος ἐναντία [239α] τοῖς πρόσθεν ἔλεγον […].[8]

In order to argue that nothingness cannot be thought about, Parmenides must think about nothingness. Because nothingness must be in order to deny that it is, by denying that nothingness is, one affirms its existence.

Because nothingness, the *complete* void of being, is self-negating, the thinking of nothing—nothing qua nothing—is an inquiry into nothing *qua being*—the nothing that is. Inspired by the Platonic insight that any *inquiry* into non-being must impute non-being with the *being* of non-being, this book sets out to think the being of nothing.

Nothingness is that which is *not* being. Thus, nothingness appears to be *relative to* being. Plato acknowledges the relativity of non-being when he qualifies non-being as that which is *different* from or *other* than *(*ἕτερον) being. The otherness of non-being is narratively embodied in the *visitor* or the *stranger*, who instructs us about non-being[9]:

> Whenever we speak about that which is not, we do not speak about the contrary of being, but only something different. (ὁπόταν τὸ μὴ ὂν λέγωμεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐκ ἐναντίον τι λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος ἀλλ' ἕτερον μόνον.)

Because non-being is not being, it is *different* from being and set over against it. As a result, non-being occupies one side of a difference between being and non-being. Accordingly, non-being is what is other to being.[10] 'Not x' is the contradictory opposition of 'x'—whatever is not x falls into the class of 'not x.' It has a greater scope than that indicated by contrariety [ἐναντίον]. To employ Aristotle's example, 'white' is not identical to 'not-black.'While 'white' may be the contrary of black, 'not-black' entails more than 'white,' for *anything other* than blackness counts as not-black.

Because the category of difference applies to being as well as to non-being,[11] being is other to non-being. In order for being to have its own *separate* determination, it must exclude non-being. Because being is not non-being, Plato is right to acknowledge that non-being applies to being. Being too *is not* non-being.[12] Being too partakes in otherness, for it is the non-being of non-being.

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[8] Plato (1997c, 238d–239a).

[9] Plato (1997c, 257b). Throughout the course of the dialogue 'non being' is pluralized in the sense that there are many forms any that are not the same as being, e.g. 'same,' 'different,' etc. are not identical to being. As Plato writes: "[…] we dared say that that which is not [τὸ μὴ ὄν] really is just this, namely each part of the nature of the different that's set over against [ἀντιτιθέμενον] that which is." Plato (1997c, 258e).

[10] Plato (1997c, 258b).

[11] See Plato (1997c, 255e): καὶ διὰ πάντων γε αὐτὴν αὐτῶν φήσομεν εἶναι διεληλυθυῖαν: ἓν ἕκαστον γὰρ ἕτερον εἶναι τῶν ἄλλων οὐ διὰ τὴν αὑτοῦ φύσιν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου.

[12] See Plato (1997c, 257a). καὶ τὸ ὂν ἄρ' ἡμῖν, ὅσαπέρ ἐστι τὰ ἄλλα, κατὰ τοσαῦτα οὐκ ἔστιν: ἐκεῖνα γὰρ οὐκ ὂν ἓν μὲν αὐτό ἐστιν, ἀπέραντα δὲ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τἆλλα οὐκ ἔστιν αὖ.

In his epistle to Jelles, Spinoza famously writes that "determinatio negation est"—*determination is negation*.[13] But this insight does not begin with Spinoza. As is evident, already in Plato's *Sophist* we discover that for anything to be *determinate*—this or that—it must be what it is, and not be what it is not, such that it negates what is other to it. Without negation, determinate being is impossible. In short, because difference applies equally to being and non-being, both being and non-being are determinate, relative beings. Accordingly, our inquiry into non-being also engenders an investigation into determinate being. Just as determinate non-being cannot be thought without being, so determinate being cannot be thought without non-being.

Since what is determinate excludes what is other to it, determinate being is not unlimited, but has a *limit*. The concept of limit is further constitutive of the concept of *finitude*, which is something that is *internally* limited. Accordingly, inquiries into non-being cannot be totally un-related to questions concerning the being of limitation and finitude.

On its face there does not appear to be anything particularly paradoxical about *determinate* negation. No contradiction arises when one posits that a human being is what it is and is not what it is not. In fact, such cases appear to be perfectly consistent. However, the situation is quite different when non-being *itself* is the object of the discourse. Both non-being and being are determinate because each excludes the other. Yet, in order to exclude each other they must include each other. For being is non-being by admitting non-being, and non-being has its own being only by precluding being.

Enigmatically, Plato himself will refer to non-being as having its own nature (τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν) and its own form:

> In the same way that which is not also was and is non-being, and is one form among the many that are?
>
> [οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν κατὰ ταὐτὸν ἦν τε καὶ ἔστι μὴ ὄν, ἐνάριθμον τῶν πολλῶν ὄντων εἶδος ἕν;][14]

Indeed, although in the dialogue the Visitor proclaims non-being to be one of the forms [εἶδος], forms are the things that are, whereby to be a form [εἶδός τι] is to exist all by itself αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ.[15] However, negation does not exist by itself, since it is that which exists in relation to being as *other to being*. Thus, whatever kind of form non-being may be, it would be the form of non-form, or the form whose nature is to be *the negation* of form.

The judgement that 'non-being is the other to being' specifies the being of non-being. Non-being is the being that is not-being. As determinate, non-being *negates all being*, since it is non-being. Yet, it must itself *be* that which denies all being.

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[13] See Spinoza (2017, 75). Spinoza writes: "Therefore, because the shape is nothing but a determination, and determination is (as they say) a negation, it cannot be anything but a negation."

[14] See Plato (1997c, 258c).

[15] Plato (1997a, 128e–129a). Plato also points out that knowledge only concerns what is. Ignorance is of what is not, whereas opinion concerns being and non-being. Plato clearly problematizes *knowledge* of what is not. Plato (1997b, *V*, 477–479, 1104–1106).

Thus, it must be one single being and negate every being. As a result, nothingness must be constituted by *self-denial*, as we indicated at the outset in our discussion of Plato's *Sophist*. Since this is a contradiction, one cannot inquire into the being of negation without encountering the problem of *contradiction.* If it is true that the negation of being itself has being, and this is a contradiction, then 'the being of negation' would engender a true contradiction. If we acknowledge the being of the negative, we risk affirming the truth of contradiction and we endanger the truth of the principle of non-contradiction. If non-being is a contradiction, then the consistent *application* of non-being to any particular case can no longer be taken for granted.[16]

The self-negation of nothing that constitutes the contradiction appears to be *infinite.* Because nothing is the absence of the absence of all beings, it must also be the absence of the absence of the absence of all beings. However, as the absence of all beings, it must be the absence of the absence of absence, *ad infinitum*. Nothing refuses to be identified with anything. Nothing appears to exhibit the structure of *ἄπειρον*. With nothing there is always a remainder.

With the acknowledgement of the contradictory aspect of non-being, another fundamental question arises concerning the meaning of non-being. If we can meaningfully speak about beings that do not exist, then it seems that the negation that is constitutive of the identity of a determinate concept, e.g. 'human being,' should not be uncritically identified with the negation which signifies the non-existence of that determinate being. In short, 'not' can be taken to be the 'not' of non-identity or the 'not' of non-existence. For example, zombies do not exist (they are not), but they do have some determinate being constituted by negativity, e.g. they are *not* werewolves.

However, the *thematization of non-being itself* problematizes this common distinction. Non-being itself is determinate because it is not being. However, exactly because non-being is the denial of *all* being, and nothing cannot exist if it has no being at all, the determinacy of non-being is nothing other than its very non-existence. Thus, in the case of non-being *itself*, the 'not' of determinate non-identity and the 'not' of non-existence become indistinguishable.[17]

---

[16] See Priest's argument for a dialetheic concept of nothingness in Priest (2022, 16) (Forthcoming).

[17] More generally, if one denies that one cannot meaningfully speak about what does not exist, then the truth of such a distinction can no longer be taken as a self-evident given. Although such distinctions invoke concepts that demand further clarification, here it is sufficient to indicate that any inquiry into non-being must critically investigate the distinction between the non-being constitutive of determinate identity, and the non-being that signifies the non-existence of such determinate identities. In any case, we must (at least) acknowledge that the negation constitutive of the determinacy of something already entails some commitment to non-existence in some form. The proposition expresses the mutual *exclusion* of two concepts, such that in the species 'elephant' one finds an *absence of humanity*, or the non-instantiation of the concept 'humanity.' Likewise, the statement, 'there are no humans in the Espresso Cove Café in Hong Kong,' signifies the *absence* or non-existence of particular human beings in the café. Even though the former case specifies the non-identity of the concept of human beings with the concept of another kind of entity, while the latter case specifies the non-existence of particular human beings at a certain place and time, in each case nonbeing indicates an *absence* of being from some determinate context or other—whether this be the species of elephant or the café.

In the preceding discussion, the paradoxes plaguing our discussion have to do with the fact that we have used 'nothing' as a *noun*. However, 'nothing' can also be employed as a quantifier. Consider the proposition: 'no thing is identical to nothing.' 'No thing is identical to nothing' appears to be true in virtue of the fact that nothing is *the absence* of *all* beings. Employing nothing as a quantifier is formulaic for the expression of determinate negation, e.g. 'no thing is identical to nothing' distinguishes nothing from all things. On the one hand, 'no' in 'no thing' quantifies over all things: it denies that any-thing is identical to nothing. On the other hand, the term nothing at the end of the proposition is a noun phrase that refers to *the thing* 'nothing' to which no thing is identical. One may try to avoid speaking about nothing as a noun with the hope of avoiding the paradox of non-being. However, if one wishes to know what makes being be what it is, then one must also understand what differentiates it from nothing, and one must thereby thematize *nothing* as a noun and ask: what *is* it by which nothing is different from being?[18]

At the outset we indicated that one cannot successfully inquire into being without inquiring into negation. However, it is equally true that one cannot fully understand negation without understanding being. One cannot fully navigate the question about the meaning of negation as *non-existence* without asking about that which non-existence negates: what is it to exist?[19] The question concerning being leads to questions concerning negation, and that of negation back to being.

On the one hand, since nothingness is the negation of being, it is not all-encompassing, but occupies one side of an opposition. Thus, nothing appears to be a *relative* determination. On the other hand, since both being and negation are constitutive of determinate being, the determinacy of being and negation must themselves be constituted by a *unity* of being and negation. Thus, we discover that whatever is or is not must instantiate the concepts of being and non-being. As a result, not only are being and non-being universal, but they are unconditionally universal, for whatever there is instantiates them. Thus, non-being must also be *absolute*, since there is nothing that lies beyond it. In short: nothingness appears to be both relative and absolute.

Since negation is realized in both determinate being and negation, negation is universal. Since there is not anything that exceeds being and non-being, negation must be unconditionally universal or an *absolute* nothingness. As a result there would be nothing beyond determinate negation. As a result, relative nothingness—nothingness that negates being as its other, itself appears to be absolute. Naturally, this is a contradiction, since nothing would not be other to anything, but must nonetheless be other to being. Since there cannot be anything beyond absolute

[18] I agree with Priest that Carnap has unduly restricted our capacity of speak about nothing when he restricts the use of nothing as a quantifier. See Priest (2022, 7) (Forthcoming).

[19] What is more, some philosophers, e.g. Hegel, will further distinguish being from existence. Accordingly, a further question must be asked about the meaning of non-being and whether it is identical to expressions of non-existence.

nothingness from which it could be different, and determinacy always requires some other that stands beyond it, absolute nothingness is absolutely *indeterminate.*

If negation is absolute, then it does not stand in contrast to anything and must be indeterminate. If it is absolutely indeterminate, then nothing cannot be nothing. Negation is no longer negation—it is no longer that which is other to being, since there is nothing other to it. Absolute nothingness is not even non-being—it must be absolutely *self-negating*. However, if being and nothing are absolute, and the absolute is indeterminate, then neither being nor nothing can be distinguished from the other. Since nothing cannot be distinguished from being, they must be indistinguishably *one.* If nothing is nothing, then nothing is not just nothing—it is being too.

Because the unconditioned condition transcends any difference between being and nothing, Plato has good reason to hold that the first principle transcends being altogether [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας].[20] But if the Good is *not* being, if it is *beyond* it, then it too would be subject to the paradoxes affecting negativity. Pseudo-Dionysius has it right: the principle of unity of all things, the "being beyond being" or υπεροὐσία οὐσία,[21] "is not."[22] Anything affirmative attributed to God would impute being to what is *beyond* being, and thereby result in contradiction. Accordingly, the first principle can only be known negatively—apophatically—by denying the application of concepts to God. As a method, the Neo-Platonic philosopher must endorse a *negative* theology, for only the negative speaks to the God who, in his very being, "is not."

As a result, in absolute nothingness all determinacy vanishes, and a new question arises: how is it possible for there to be any determinate being (or determinate negation) if all things are fundamentally indeterminate? This question is not so precisely formulated in the ancient Greek context. In fact, it is this question that distinguishes the problem of negation in Classical German philosophy and German Idealism in particular. In order to lay bare the problem as it appears in German Idealism, one must first consider negation and its role in Kant's Copernican revolution.

2 Negation in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

In the ancient context, the me-ontological inquiry is situated within an overall *metaphysical* framework that immediately inquiries into being *qua* being. However, as Kant would have it, any philosophy which does not inquire into the *knowing* of being, but instead immediately inquiries into being is *dogmatic*, since it fails to be critical of the very knowing that underlies its own scientific appropriation of the

[20] Plato (1997b, 509c).

[21] See Pseudo-Dionysius (1990, 49) [585–88].

[22] See Pseudo-Dionysius (1990, 85).

object. Kant's critical philosophy attempts to lay bare the conditions under which the knowing of an object is possible *from the side of subjectivity*. Kant inquiries into the *subjective* conditions of all knowledge claims, namely those forms of unity that condition our knowing of the object *as subjects* of knowledge. Reason must set the limits on its own knowing, in order to know what it is and is *not* capable of grasping. Accordingly, Kant's methodology takes *epistemology as first philosophy*.

The concept of limitation always invokes *negation.* As Kant himself recognizes, limitation entails a synthesis of the categories of reality and negation.[23] To draw a limit between Þ and ø one excludes the one from the other. The act of exclusion requires negation: Þ is not ø. Although each has its own *reality*, each is *not* the other. Because the critical philosophy must set limits to reason, for it must determine what reason can and cannot know, and limitation always invokes negation, the critical philosophy cannot be complete without a meontological inquiry. Indeed, with Kant's Copernican revolution comes a me-ontological revolution.

In order to analyse our experience into separate representations, Kant recognizes that the representations must first be *combined into one consciousness*. In order to give an account of knowledge and conceptual determinations that constitute its material, empirical consciousness must presuppose the *givenness* of psychological content to consciousness. Because empiricism must assume the fact of some psychological content, it cannot account for *the very fact that it is given*. The fact of givenness— and the forms in which it is given—most fundamentally the form of consciousness (or subjectivity) itself—remain something for which no *empirical* account can be given. Kant's asks: what is the condition for the possibility of the givenness of the contents of consciousness? In Kant's terms, in order for there to be an awareness of an object, the various contents of consciousness must be combined into *one* awareness. Only once the contents are combined or synthesized into *one* awareness, only then is it possible for one to isolate any particular object and be conscious of it. In his *Transcendental* deduction, Kant famously argues that it is the categories—the logical functions of judgment—which bring various representations under a common one. The categories are the *principles of synthesis* by which all contents of consciousness are combined into one awareness.

In Kant's *Metaphysical Deduction* of the categories, an analysis of the *a priori* content of the faculty of Understanding, Kant deduces 12 categories from the 12 functions of judgment.[24] For Kant, the attribution of the concept to the object is reducible to the act of judgment, for judgment is the attribution of the universal to the singular. Only in judgments are representations subsumed under concepts. It is in a judgment that different particulars are ordered under a common one and the unity of action that orders different particulars under a common one is a *function*. Since judgment is just the application of a concept, each distinct form of judgment contains its own distinct concept.

[23] Kant (1998), B106/A80.

[24] Kant (1998), A70/B95.

As is well known, for Kant concepts without intuitions are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind. In other words, concepts *as* concepts cannot generate their own particulars in which they are instantiated. For this reason, a second faculty, Sensibility, is required in virtue of which particulars are given to consciousness.[25]

The *negative* judgment is one of the 12 forms of judgment under the heading of Quality. Since each judgment unifies representations by a function, in the negative judgment, 'S is not P', the category of negation is the function of unity. Because negation is a category of the Understanding, and categories are not self-particularizing, negation cannot instantiate itself. Negation cannot be instantiated without the particulars given to it via the faculty of Sensibility. Without the material given in Sensibility, there is nothing to negate. Negation is only ever the negation of something. As Kant writes:

> Now that in the empirical intuition which corresponds to the sensation is reality (*realitas phaenomenon*): that which corresponds to its absence is negation=0.[26]

For example, the experience of cold assumes the sensation of heat. The experience of cold is a *negation* of the sensation of heat, the experience of which already implicitly employs the category of reality. While the experience of the cold is an intensive magnitude, for the "real in appearance always has a magnitude," the quality of the experience of the cold is nonetheless a kind of *privation* of the real sensation. Although sensation is a necessary condition for negation, the sensation would not have the quality of a privation without the *a priori* category of negation.

In the *Transcendental Deduction*, Kant applies the categories to experience, and demonstrates *that* the categories, as functions of unity, make empirical awareness possible by combining representations given in the faculty of Sensibility into one consciousness.[27] Because categories are the principles of unity by which the various empirical particulars are combined into one consciousness, and negation is one of the categories, negation is one of the categories by which experience is made possible.[28]

As a category, negation is no longer immediately applied to things as they exist independent of our knowing. Rather, negation is one of the necessary features that constitute consciousness itself—it conditions the givenness of an object to us. Simply put: empirical particulars given to consciousness are structured by the *a priori* category of negation. Thus, the negativity of the object as it appears in empirical consciousness reflects the negativity of the subjectivity that originally imputes

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[25] In Kant's terms, Sensibility is the capacity to receive representations in virtue of being affected by objects. *Qua* receptive, Sensibility is a passive faculty in which representations are given.

[26] Kant (1998), A169/B210, 291.

[27] See Kant (1998), §20, B143.

[28] The categories of quality, like all categories, has its own schema, the principle of which is "in all appearances the real, which is an object of the sensation, has intensive magnitude." See *Anticipations of Perception* in Kant (1998), B208.

that negation. Kant's me-ontological revolution subjectivizes negation by transforming it into one of the necessary conditions that makes the consciousness of objects possible.

Famously, although Kant's critique imbues categories with the power to make experience possible, as a result they have no valid application beyond possible experience. In other words, because every object one encounters is necessarily mediated by the categorial structure of subjectivity, one cannot in principle experience or know an object as it is *in itself*, that is, *independently* of the mediating activity of subjectivity. For this reason, there cannot be any cognition [*Erkenntnis*] that transcends the possible object of experience. Hence, all knowledge only ever has *phenomena*, what is *for us*, as its object. What exists by itself—the *noumena*—transcends our cognitive powers.[29] Reason errs when it attempts to apply its categories beyond the domain of possible experience.

Plato too acknowledged an essential connection between negation and the concept of appearance. In particular, Plato emphasized the role of negation in the concept of *becoming*. In book five of the *Republic*, Plato draws a distinction among three levels of knowledge. Knowing has *what is* as its object, opinion has *what is and is not* as its object, and ignorance has *what is not* as its object.[30] Opinion, which takes sensory particulars as its object, are sometimes understood as imitations of the truth, and thus as falsehoods. Nonetheless they have *being* as imitations. They are *false things*. They are that which *appears* to be true, but are not true.[31] As such, they both are and are not. Particulars both are and are not, and they are accessible by means of sensory perception. Although both Plato and Kant take non-being to be constitutive of experience, in *Republic* the non-being of becoming precludes it from being an object of knowledge. For Kant, the non-being that constitutes experience does not undermines it as an object of knowledge. While the *Republic* posits the object of knowledge beyond perceptual experience and thereby beyond non-being, Kant posits experience as the object of knowledge—an object thoroughly constituted by negativity.

As we noted earlier, the *Critique of Pure Reason* draws a limit to what one can know by means of reason—that limit is marked by the difference between phenomena and noumena. Because all limits are negations, the critique of reason must invoke negation in order to limit the valid use of reason to the phenomena alone.

An evaluation of the function of negation in cognition and the critique of pure reason would be grossly incomplete without considering Kant's *principle of*

[29] See Kant (1998), B295/A236.

[30] For this hierarchy see Plato (1997b), *V*, 477–479, 1104–1106.

[31] Note that in the *Parmenides* Plato also refutes the very common concept of participation present in other Platonic dialogues in which the Forms are conceived as the paradigms that are imitated by the sensory particulars. Plato (1997a), 132d–a, 366–367.

thoroughgoing determination [*Grundsatze der durchgängigen Bestimmung*].[32] The view that all things are determinate is expressed in the proposition that "everything that exists is thoroughly determined."[33] For Kant, this is justified by appeal to the non-formal principle that in respect to every concept of a thing, "among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it."[34] According to this principle, each concept of a thing is completely determined by comparison with the whole of possibility, "the sum total of all predicates of things in general," from which one restricts the possibilities which might apply to it.

The procedure by which any particular concept is thoroughly determined works by means of a disjunctive syllogism.[35] For example, suppose the whole of possibility to be constituted by two possibilities: P and Q. The subject, s, would be thoroughly determined via *negation*: either P or Q is predicated of s. P is *not* predicated of s. Thus, Q is predicated of *s*: *s* is Q. Thus, the possibility of the concept of each thing (as completely determined) is grounded in the predicates it acquires from the totality of possible determinations. *S* becomes determinate because the possible predicates that apply to it are limited, and determinations always involve positing a limit. In the case of s, the determination is *complete* because *all* the predicates that apply to *s* are attributed to it.

Because 'x is phenomenal' and 'x is noumenal' are distinct predicates, both are members of the sum of all possible predicates. Thus, in order to thoroughly determine the concept of anything one must determine whether that thing is phenomenal or noumenal. For example, consider the concept of a body. Does the concept of a body signify a phenomenal or a noumenal object? Either the concept of the body signifies a phenomenal or noumenal object. It does *not* signify a noumenal object. Thus, it signifies a phenomenal object. Of course, the concept of the body (or anything for that matter) cannot be fully determined by considering this predicate-pair *alone*. Nonetheless—in order to fully determine the concept of anything, not only must the distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal be considered, but one must be *negated* and the other affirmed.

What does *the principle of thoroughgoing determination* teach us about negations? Since it is only in virtue of the negation that a thing is distinguished from the

[32] See Kant (1998), A572/B600.

[33] Kant (1998, 554).

[34] Kant (1998, 554).

[35] Kant (1998, 556).

sum of all possible predicates, "all true negations are then nothing but limits."[36] The negations that constitute the thoroughgoing determination of a thing negate the indeterminacy of the thing in relation to the sum of all possible predicates, and thereby posit the thing as *this* or *that* determinate thing. Because negations must presuppose the givenness of some predicate, which it negates, "all concepts of negation are derivative."[37] As derivative, negations are grounded in *affirmations* (or predicates) that do not themselves already presuppose negation.[38] As is evident, the critique of pure reason must invoke negation not only to limit the valid use of reason to the phenomena alone, but negation is also necessary for the thorough-going determination of the concept of the knowable. To limit what is knowable to the domain of phenomena requires a disjunctive syllogism whereby one applies negation to the sum of all possible predicates.[39]

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[36] Kant (1998), A576/B606. Insofar as the sum of all possible predicates is conceived as the all of reality, Kant also notes that negations are "the sole predicates through which everything else is to be distinguished from the most real being." Negation's functions of limitation and relation can also be clearly illustrated in the case of the infinite judgment. For example, consider the infinite judgment "humans are non-plants." In this judgment, the concept of the human is placed in the category of 'non-plant.' Because 'non-plant' excludes plants from the concept of the human, Kant posits the category of limitation (the unity of reality and negation) as the logical function in the infinite judgment. However, what does "non-plant" predicate of the human? The negation places 'human' in relation to 'non-plant' but fails to provide cognition of any determinate being called 'non-plant.' 'Non-plant' does not give us any cognition of a non-being. See *CPR*, A 572/B 600. Rather, according to Kant, 'non-plant' is indefinite, for it does not specify any determinate object in the class of non-plants. Rather, it leaves it completely undetermined what kind of non-plant is affirmed of the human. There are many different predicates that fall within the class of 'non-plant' and 'non-plant' does not specify any of them. Thus, the predicate 'non-plant' is *infinite* in the sense of *a*peiron—it is an indefinite predicate. Insofar as it excludes predicates, the infinite judgment imposes a limit upon the subject, however what is affirmed of the subject itself remains undetermined. The negation is determinate, but the affirmation to which it corresponds remains indeterminate. For more on the infinite judgment, see CPR, A70/B94. That infinite judgments form their own class of judgments is a matter of dispute. Although it arguably has a distinguished pedigree harkening back to Maimonides, Hegel famously denies that infinite judgments really count as a legitimate form of judgment. For more on the infinite judgment, see Kant (1998), A70/B94.

[37] Kant (1998), A575, B603. For example, in order for the category of negation to apply to experience, the category of reality must first apply to sensation and thereby produce an experience of reality with an intensive magnitude. There must already be reality in the sensation as a condition for negation, otherwise there would be no object for negation to negate.

[38] Kant does not seem to hold that every determinate category must already presuppose negation. Although Kant does not hold this, one can make a good case for it. In order to state the various predicates that constitute the sum of all possible predicates, one must arguably implicitly invokes negation, for each predicate is different from the others, and thus *not* the others. However, supposes that one can state the sum of all possible predicates without already appealing to negation.

[39] From a purely logical point of view, Kant's philosophy argues that negations are relational determinations. See Kant (1998), A572/B600. According to Kant, logical negation is an operation in a judgment that relates concepts to each other. Subjects are related to their complete set of predicates in virtue of negation. To return to our example, Q is predicated of *s* in virtue of the negation of P. S relates to P by excluding it, and relates to Q by having it as its predicate.

The distinction between phenomena and noumena at the heart of the critique illuminates that 'nothing' is said in many ways. Because noumena can never appear as an object of cognition, the noumena is a concept that is not instantiated—noumena are concepts of which there cannot be an object. Thus, the concept of non-being equally applies to noumena as well as to phenomena. However, the way that non-being applies is *not* the same in each case. Naturally, the absence of noumenal objects in experience is not an intensive magnitude, while the qualitative category of negation, insofar as it is applied in the experience of privation, is an intensive magnitude. Hence, 'nothing' is not univocal. In order to clarify the various ways that nothing is said, and to avoid equivocation between these various senses of nothing, Kant introduces the Table of Nothing (Table 1.1) in the final section of the *Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection* in the *Transcendental Analytic*:

Kant gives an argument for employing the categories as the organizing principle of his Table of Nothing:

> Since the categories are the only concepts that relate to objects in general, the distinction of whether an object is something or nothing must proceed in accordance with the order and guidance of the categories.[40]

Every act of conceptual division, e.g. between α and γ, requires that there be a divisible concept, θ, that is divisible into those separable determinations. Kant's categories are the highest genera in Aristotle's sense: they are the most universal concepts, such that taken together all objects fall under them. Or, in Kant's words: "categories are the only concepts that relate to objects in general." Certainly, categories are *not the only* predicates, but they are certainly the most universal, and no object exceeds their reach. Aristotle famously said that being is said in many ways,[41] and the categories *exhaustively* articulate the ways that one can speak about being *qua being*.

Table 1.1 Kant's Table of Nothing

Nothing, as		
1. Empty concept without object, *ens rationis.*		
2. Empty object of a concept, *nihil privativum.*		3. Empty intuition without an object, *ens imaginarium.*
	4. Empty object without concept, *nihil negativum.*	

Kant (1998, 383)

[40] Kant (1998), A 290/B347.

[41] See Aristotle (2002), Book Beta.

Although the categories only apply to phenomena, not to what exists in itself (as in Aristotle), for Kant 'to be an object' is said in many ways, and his categories *exhaustively* articulate the different ways that one can speak about objects *qua objects*.

Whereas the concept of something is that in virtue of which anything is a thing, nothing is *the negation of something*. Because the table of categories exhaustively determines the various ways that *being qua being* is said, and nothing as such is the lack of being, the *negation of the categories* ought to exhaustively specify the articulation of *non-being qua non-being*. Thus, 'x is a non-being' signifies the non-being of quality, quantity, relation or modality. In short: the table of nothing, determines whether and in what sense '*x* nothing' and thereby exhaustively articulates *non-being qua non-being*.

Noumena, the experiences of privation, space, time, and logically contradictory concepts are all nothing. Among other things, without the table of nothing, we risk equivocating on the aesthetic form of experience and that which transcends it. Thus, with Kant we must affirm that enumerating the categories of non-being does "seem requisite for the completeness of the system."[42]

On the one hand, the nothingness of quantity is defined as the "empty concept without an object." As noted above, the noumenon exemplifies the empty concept that has no corresponding object. It is a quantitative nothing because there cannot be any particulars that instantiate the noumenal object in experience. In other words, the noumenon is one in kind, not one in number. On the other hand, nothingness of quality is the "empty object of a concept." In this case, the object itself is empty, e.g. darkness is the absence of light or cold the absence of heat. In qualitative negation, one experiences the absence of a real object—the absence of heat or light.

In addition to these mathematical categories of non-being, there are dynamic categories that are concerned with the relations of objects to each other and to the Understanding that thinks them.[43] The nothingness of modality is defined as the "empty intuition without an object." Modality concerns the relation of objects to each other, and can be well-exemplified in the forms of intuition: space and time. All objects are related to each other through the *a priori* forms of space and time. However, neither space nor time are objects. Accordingly, each is a *relational* nothingness: forms of connection between objects that are themselves empty of any empirical intuition. Qualitative and modal nothingness reveal that nothingness is realized in both the form and the content of phenomenal experience.

Finally, Kant introduces modal nothingness, namely the "empty object without a concept." This kind of nothingness is best contrasted with quantitative nothingness. Noumena, one must remember, are *logically possible* concepts. However, they are nomologically impossible, for they violate the necessary and universal conditions of possible experience. An "empty object without a concept" is a logical impossibility. For instance, the round square is nothing because it is self-contradictory, and thereby

[42] Kant (1998), A290/B347.

[43] See Kant (1998), B110.

logically impossible. The round square cannot be true, it cannot correspond to any object, because it is violates the normative principles of logic.

In his discussion of the *transcendental ideal*, Kant introduces the concept of *transcendental negation*, which signifies 'non-being in itself.' The Noumenon—the being in itself—is a concept without an object, and reason violates the normative principles governing the use of categories whenever it posits the noumenon as an object. Just as one can problematically affirm the sum of all possible predicates as a being-in-itself (namely God), one can also *negate* every possible predicate, and thereby posit a *being*-in-itself that is constituted by non-being.[44] In transcendental negation one represents the "removal of everything represented."[45] Transcendental negation would be the *most negative being*; it represents the opposite of God, who is represented as the *ens realissimum*.[46] As we noted at the outset of our discussion, Plato famously acknowledged that every attempt to deny that nothingness has being inevitably imbues nothingness with being. Can Kant shave Plato's beard?

With the table of nothing in hand, it is not difficult to show why reason is unjustified in any effort to posit the existence of an object constituted by pure nothingness. Transcendental nothing—"non-being in itself"—perfectly exemplifies an "empty object without a concept." Transcendental negation is the negation of every predicate, but it *is* the absence of everything represented. For this reason, transcendental negation, although it is the negation of all predicates, must simultaneously affirm the predicate 'is the absence of everything represented.' Thus, transcendental nothing appears to be inherently contradictory and therefore logically impossible. Indeed, for Kant there cannot be any object that is constituted by the absence of all predicates. Via the critique of pure reason, Kant affirms the traditional Aristotelian view that there *is* no being that is the contrary of all being.[47] While God can never appear in experience, God nonetheless remains a logically possible object. The negation of God, however, is not even a logically possible object. The me-ontological revolution initiated by Kant shaves Plato's beard—blocking not only reason's assent to God, but also its descent into the depths of hell.

Because the problem of negativity in post-Kantian philosophy is deeply inspired by Kant's philosophy, *The Being of Negation in Post Kantian Philosophy* begins by exploring the problem of negation in Kant and his critics, such as Maimon as well as Fichte's Idealist development of the Kantian philosophy. The section, "Negation in Kant, Maimon, and Fichte," gives special attention to the Table of Nothing, a significantly neglected theme in Kantian scholarship.

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[44] For a discussion of the problem of onto-theology in Kant, see Moss (2018, 11–12).

[45] Kant (1998, A572/B600).

[46] Kant (1998, 556–57)

[47] Aristotle also affirms this thesis. See Aristotle (2002), Book Lambda. For Aristotle, there is nothing contrary to being.

3 The Origin of Negation in German Idealism

3.1 Fichte

Because negation is one of Kant's categories, in order to examine the problem of negation in the German Idealism it is of paramount importance to consider Fichte's critique of Kant's account of the categories. Fichte not only critiques Kant's metaphysical deduction of the categories but he also attempts to provide an absolute foundation for them.[48] Fichte critiques Kant's method as an *unscientific* procedure, since Kant advances the categories as *brute contingent facts* from which the transcendental deduction proceeds.[49] As Kant himself admits:

> For the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgments or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.[50]

Because Kant thinks one cannot give an account of the plurality of the forms of judgment, neither can an account be given of the *plurality* of the functions of judgment. Thus, the deduction is grounded in the mere *stipulation* that the 12 forms of judgment and their correlative functions *truly* reflects the *a priori* forms of formal judgment and that it *exhaustively explicates* the varieties of that *a priori* form. Because the necessity of these forms of judgment and their correlative functions are not established by any rational ground, Kant's deduction depends upon a *contingent stipulation*. In order to be scientific, the categories must themselves be *justified*. Thus, Kant's table of categories must be grounded in a more fundamental principle. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* looks to secure that single fundamental scientific principle upon which the scientific deduction and the necessity of Kant's categories depends.[51]

Transcendental inquiry investigates the subject of its own knowing. Accordingly, the I must not only be able to think the manifold given in sensible intuition by means of categories, but the I must also be able to think the I that conceives the manifold. Because categories only apply *to possible objects of experience*, categories cannot mediate between the I and its knowledge of itself, for categories only apply to possible objects of experience—spatial and temporal phenomena. Since categories only apply to possible objects of sensible intuition, and the transcendental subject *itself* is not an intuitive object, categories cannot apply to the self-knowledge of the transcendental subject. Thus, Fichte argues that the self-apprehension of the I *cannot be mediated* by the categories, but must be *immediate*. Indeed, if the most

[48] See Bruno (2018, 67–84).

[49] Bruno (2018, 69).

[50] Kant (1998), B145–B146.

[51] As Fichte states, "Nowhere did Kant consider the foundation of all philosophy." Fichte (1982, 46).

fundamental form of self- knowledge were mediated by categories, then it would not account for the categories, but it would *presuppose* them from the outset, which would beg the question. Thus, Fichte argues that transcendental analysis has its principle in an *immediate intellectual act* that takes itself as its own object. Since immediate self-knowledge has no intermediaries, it is thereby *a simple* identity of subject and object. As Hegel writes:

> In the transcendental intuition all opposition is suspended, all distinction between the universe as constructed by and for the intelligence, and the universe as an organization intuited as objective and appearing independent, is nullified.[52]

By Fichte's reasoning, it is only from *immediate* self-knowledge that transcendental philosophy can proceed, without which no mediated knowledge would be possible—whether that be mediated *a priori* or *a posteriori* knowledge.

Negation is one of the categories. Thus, negation must ultimately have its ground in something that is non-categorial. However, negation itself poses special obstacles. As we noted earlier, negation appears to be fundamental to any determinate object. To be determinate is to be *this* object, and *not* some *other* object. Because negation is endemic to determinacy, any attempt to explain negation by appealing to any determinate being would presuppose negation. Thus, one cannot explain negation by appealing to anything determinate. If one cannot account for negation by appealing to anything determinate, how in principle can one account for negation? Simply put: 'something' cannot explain negation. Although Kant positioned negation as something derivative, the derivative status of negation itself appears paradoxical. Although negation requires a predicate to negate, every determinate predicate already presupposes negation, without which the predicate cannot be articulated. Whatever the first principle of knowing may be, it cannot be differentiated or contain any distinctions whatever without already invoking negativity.

Because negation (and determinacy more generally) cannot be accounted for by positing a determinate principle, Fichte posits the first principle of the self as an absolute thesis in which 'nothing is affirmed of the self':

> The first and foremost judgment of this type is 'I am', in which nothing whatever is affirmed of the self.[53]

If the first principle affirmed anything of the self, then the first principle would already imply some determinate and differentiated structure. Since the principle must account for the very structure of determinacy, it must be simple; it cannot presuppose any distinction whatever. This is consistent with the way Fichte defines a thetic judgment:

> A thetic judgment, however, would be one in which something is asserted, not to be like anything else or opposed to anything else, but simply to be identical with itself: thus it could presuppose no ground of conjunction or distinction at all.[54]

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[52] Hegel (1977b, 111).

[53] Fichte (1982, 46).

[54] Fichte (1982, 114) (See Paragraph 3, Section 7).

As Fichte makes absolutely clear, the thetic judgment is not opposed to anything else, nor does it have any distinctions within it. The Absolute Thesis, the 'I am,' is the first principle of Fichte's system of philosophy and exemplifies the form of thetic judgment, for it is devoid of all distinctions. Given that negation cannot be explained by means of a determinate principle, it appears that only an *in*determinate principle—a principle without any determination or predicative structure, could account for negation. In sum: only what is absolutely simple and without difference can explain the fact of difference.

Only once we acknowledge that negation cannot be accounted for by any determinate principle can we articulate the problem of the origin negation in German Idealism. As Fichte writes in a letter to Reinhold from 1795:

> Wenn das Ich ursprünglich nur sich selbst sezt, wie kommt es denn dazu, noch etwas anderes zu setzen, als ihm entgegengesezt? aus sich selbst herauszugehen?[55]

Given that the first principle is totally simple and devoid of all negation, the possibility of negation become deeply mysterious. In order for the first principle to produce new knowledge, it must connect the indeterminate with the determinate—neither of which is identical to the other. In order to connect the indeterminate to the determinate, the first principle must be *ampliative*—it must be synthetic. However, according to Fichte, all synthetic judgments depend upon the third principle of the *Science of Knowledge*.[56] Synthetic determinations already presuppose a plurality to be synthesized. Since they presuppose a plurality, no synthetic principle can be fundamental. Indeed, since the first principle is merely self-identical, and cannot be synthetic, it cannot produce anything other than what is already contained within it. Given that only self-identity is contained in the first principle, from pure self-identity one cannot deduce difference or negation. Thus, we come to an impasse: negation cannot be accounted for by appealing to the determinate or the indeterminate. As a result, the question, 'what is the origin of negation?', is fundamentally *aporetic.*

Because the indeterminate is itself without any limit by which it would be distinguished from another, within the German Idealist tradition the first principle of knowledge is conceived as *in*finite. If the first principle were limited, then it would already be determined, and would pre-suppose negativity. Accordingly, the question concerning the origin of negation can be re-formulated: if the first principle is infinite, how is finitude possible? Or better: how can the infinite first principle generate or produce finite knowing?

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[55] Cited in Schwab (2017, 69).

[56] "The celebrated question which Kant placed at the head of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? is now answered in the most universal and satisfactory manner. In the third principle we have established a *synthesis between the two opposites*, self and not-self, by *postulating them each to be divisible*; there can be no further question as to the possibility of this, nor can any ground for it be given; it is absolutely possible, and we are entitled to it without further grounds of any kind. All other syntheses, if they are to be valid, must be rooted in this one, and must have been established in and along with it. And once this has been demonstrated, we have the most convincing proof that they are valid as well." Fichte (1982), Section 5 of Part III.

Jacobi further develops the *aporia* of negation into a full-fledged objection to Idealism and a robust argument for a form of realism coloured by fideism. In his prefatory note to the first edition of *David Hume on Faith*, Jacobi lays down his assumptions about the structure of reason.[57] Jacobi's later accusation that Fichte's philosophy leads to nihilism is grounded on important classical assumptions about reason. If we abstract from all *contents* thought *by* reason, the content of reason that remains is the *self-identity* of what is thought. Reason by itself can judge whether the content that is thought is *consistent* with the principle of identity and non-contradiction by comparing it to the *a priori* form of self-identity. From these assumptions, Jacobi is right that reason alone is a power of 'formulating the principle of identity' and 'judging in accordance with it.'

Jacobi levels the charge of nihilism against the speculative Idealism of Fichte because Fichte, according to Jacobi, posits the I as the principle of philosophy. Fichte postulates that the I is the principle from which all content of experience and existence for us must be derived. The thinking subjectivity must abstract away from *all content of what is thought* and deduce experience and existence for us from *the empty* knowing of the I.

For Jacobi, since one cannot deduce *the existence* of any finite, determinate being from the mere identity of the I in the thetic expression, I=I, Fichte's philosophy must deny the *existence of all finite being*. Fichte's thought is a form of *nihilism*, a philosophy of *nothing* in which the world *disappears*. The world cannot be deduced from the formal self-identity of thinking. *Nothing* further is thought in the self-identity of I=I except the I.[58] After having abstracted all existence away, one cannot *regain* existence again out of the empty identity of the thinking. Accordingly, Jacobi endorses *realism* as a way to avoid nihilism. Note that Jacobi's critique is not in any way weakened or undermined if existence is conceived in explicitly Fichtean terms (rather than on overtly 'dogmatic terms'). For the force of the critique lies in *the inability to derive difference from pure identity*, so that even if the only difference that exists is 'for consciousness,' that existence for consciousness cannot itself be accounted for. To put the problem in terms of Kant's concept of intellectual intuition, without re-thinking the first principle as a *concept that produces its own intuitive realization*, the Idealist cannot account for the existence of the world.

Thus, all knowledge of all finite and differentiated contents, or of all finite *particulars*, must be given *independently of reason*. In order to discover these contents, the philosopher must appeal to *the Given* in some form or another. If faith is the acceptance of a truth that is not inferred from rational principles,[59] or if 'every

[57] '[My philosophy] restricts reason, considered by itself, to the mere faculty of perceiving relations clearly, i.e. to the power of formulating the principle of identity and judging in conformity with it. . .' Jacobi (2016, 255–256).

[58] Fichte's philosophy begins from the self-intuiting of the I, and this requires abstracting away all other contents of the mind. Fichte himself claims that the original principle concerns the form of thinking, not its content. See Fichte (1982, 94–95/ I, 93).

[59] Jacobi (2016, 80).

cognition that does not originate in rational sources is faith,[60]' then the fact that there are particulars or that there is a content for reason to know must be given by faith. For Jacobi, the existence of *finite* entities upon which we reflect depends upon faith.[61]

Jacobi argues that the self-identical form of reason is an *abstraction* from given content. We only arrive at science by means of abstracting away content from what is given. Accordingly, the bare self-identity of reflection by which it judges contents given to it from the outside is not one of two principles, but it is wholly *derivative*. Since the contents given to reflection and abstraction are only given in faith, the *whole of philosophy is contingent upon faith*. Jacobi writes:

> For man knows only in that he comprehends, only in that, by changing the real thing into mere shape, he turns the shape into the thing, and the thing into nothing.[62]

The early German Romantics too were overawed by this problem of the origin of negation. Like his idealist counterparts, Schlegel asks:

> Why has the infinite gone out of itself and made itself finite?[63]

Indeed, for Schlegel, by 1796 the unknowability of the Absolute had already become a self-evident truth:

> Knowing (erkennen) already indicates some conditioned knowledge (*bedingtes Wissen*). The unknowability of the Absolute is therefore an identical triviality. [...] The Absolute is itself indemonstrable.[64]

Schlegel and Novalis both recognized that every attempt to conceive the Absolute unconditioned ground of negation only serves to re-introduce a series of conditions into the Absolute that is already saturated with negativity and relativity. Within the German Idealist tradition, the problem of the origin of negation is not a problem unique to Fichte and the Early German Romantics. Rather, we see the problem raised by Schelling and Hegel too.

3.2 Schelling

In his *Philosophical Letters* Schelling argues that the problem of the origin of finitude is the main problem of all philosophy. In the same letter Schelling puts the problem otherwise:

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[60] Jacobi (2016, 255).

[61] Since the *a priori* form of reason is never sufficient to derive the content of reason, the content of reason must be arrived at *a posteriori*.

[62] Jacobi (2016, 509).

[63] See Frank (2004), Ch. 12, 207 KA XII: 39.

[64] See Frank (2004, 179–80), KA XV III: 511, Nr. 64; (f 51, Nr. 71). Novalis' *Blütenstaub* too echoes Schlegel's wonder: 'Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte und finden immer nur Dinge.' See Novalis (1992, 1).

> But I believe that the very transition from the non-finite to the finite is the problem of all philosophy, not only of one particular system.[65]

From his *Philosophical Letters* (1797) to *Presentation of My System* (1801) and *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), Schelling further argues that one *cannot* answer this question. For instance, in *Philosophical Letters* he proclaims that

> No system can fill the gap between the non-finite and the finite.[66]

In *Philosophie und Religion* Schelling describes the arising of finitude as a 'leap' [*Sprung*]:

> Mit einem Wort, vom Absoluten zum Wirklichen giebt es keinen stetigen Übergang, der Ursprung der Sinnenwelt ist nur al sein vollkommenes Abbrechen von der Absolutheit, durch einen Sprung, denkbar.[67]

In his *Presentation of My System*, Schelling will even proclaim that the fundamental *blunder* of philosophy is the assumption that it can in principle be answered:

> The most basic mistake of all philosophy is to {4:120} assume that absolute identity has actually stepped beyond itself and to attempt to make intelligible how this emergence occurs. Absolute identity has surely never ceased being identity, and everything that *is* is considered in itself—not just the appearance of absolute identity, but {—} *identity itself*. Further, since it is the nature of philosophy to consider things as they are in themselves (§ 1), i.e., insofar as they are infinite and are absolute identity itself (§§ 14, 12), true philosophy consists in the demonstration that absolute identity (the infinite) has not stepped beyond itself and that everything that is, insofar as it is, is infinity itself—a proposition that Spinoza alone of all previous philosophers acknowledged, even if he did not fully carry out its demonstration, nor express it clearly enough to avoid being misunderstood ever after.[68]

Despite his various critiques of Spinoza, Schelling sees a kindred spirit in Spinoza, for despite the fact that Spinoza grounds all existence in one absolute Substance (rather than in the act of freedom as in Fichte), Spinoza never attempts to deduce the attributes of thought and extension from the concept of substance alone. Schelling clearly sees the problem of the origin of negation not only as an epistemic problem but also as a *metaphysical* problem when he proclaims that this question problematizes the very existence of the *world*:

> The man task of all philosophy consists in solving the problem of the existence of the world. All philosophers have worked at this solution […] He who wants to conjure up the spirit of philosophy must conjure it up here.[69]

Whatever negations exist, they cannot be accounted for by appeal to anything determinate, for this would only pre-suppose the negative. Rather, only what is beyond all determination could account for the very existence of the negative.

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[65] Schelling (1980, 177).

[66] Schelling (1980, 177).

[67] Schelling (2013, 34).

[68] See Schelling (2001, 353) (Explanation to Corollary 14).

[69] See Schelling's *Seventh Letter*. Schelling (1980, 177).