

GERMAN IDEALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE:
KANT, FICHTE, SCHELLING, AND HEGEL

Studies in German Idealism

Series Editor:

Reinier Munk, *VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Advisory Editorial Board:

Frederick Beiser, *Syracuse University, U.S.A.*

Daniel Dahlstrom, *Boston University, U.S.A.*

George di Giovanni, *McGill University, Montreal, Canada*

Paul Guyer, *University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.*

Detlev Pätzold, *University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

Andrea Poma, *University of Torino, Italy*

VOLUME 8

For other titles published in this series, go to www.springer.com/series/6545

GERMAN IDEALISM
AND THE PROBLEM
OF KNOWLEDGE:
KANT, FICHTE, SCHELLING,
AND HEGEL

by

NECTARIOS G. LIMNATIS

 Springer

Nectarios G. Limnatis
Hofstra University
Department of Philosophy
Hempstead NY 11549-1000
USA

ISBN 978-1-4020-8799-8

e-ISBN 978-1-4020-8800-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008931590

© 2008 Springer Science+Business Media B.V.

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work.

Printed on acid-free paper

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

springer.com

For Monika

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1 EPISTEMOLOGY OR METAPHYSICS? THE KANTIAN BACKGROUND	13
I. Scientific Metaphysics?	13
II. Transcendentalism Versus Realism?	20
III. The Ontological Facet: The Transcendental Self and the Thing-in-itself	28
IV. From the Ontological to the Logical: Understanding, Reason, and Totality	49
V. The Logical Facet: Kant's Relation to Formal Logic and the Problem of Contradiction	61
2 FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO METAPHYSICS: FICHTE AND SCHELLING	73
I. Fichte: The Thing-in-Itself and the Dialectical Leap	73
A. The Notion of a Philosophical Science and its Relation to Logic	75
B. The Transcendental Self as (F)act.	83
C. Fichte's New Dialectic and the Grasp of the Problem of Contradiction	96
D. The Thing-in-itself and the Horizons of Knowledge	109
II. Schelling: Epistemology and the Resurrection of Metaphysics	126
A. Philosophy as Scientific System in the Early Schelling	129

B. Identity, Logic and Contradiction in the Early Schelling	134
C. The Twofold Nature of Schelling's Transcendental Philosophy	138
D. The Resurrection of Metaphysics and the Problem of Dialectic	152
3 FROM METAPHYSICS TO EPISTEMOLOGY I: FROM THE <i>PHENOMENOLOGY</i> TO THE <i>LOGIC</i> OR HEGEL'S CLAIM FOR ABSOLUTE KNOWING AND ITS MEANING	179
I. Idealism, Reason, and Contradiction in the Early Hegel	179
II. Hegel's <i>Phenomenology</i> . The Coming-to-be of the Self and the Question of Intersubjectivity	191
A. The Dialectic of Sense-Certainty	191
B. Perception as Humanized Sense	200
C. The Understanding as Conceptualizing Ability	205
III. The Transition to Self-Consciousness and Idealism	213
A. Activity and Intersubjectivity	220
B. Excursus in Genetic Epistemology: Piaget, Vygotsky and Hegel on Thought, Language and Culture	229
C. Reason and the Category Formation in the <i>Phenomenology</i>	246
4 FROM METAPHYSICS TO EPISTEMOLOGY II: FROM LOGIC TO REALITY	255
I. The Idea of an Epistemological Reading of Hegel's <i>Logic</i>	255
A. The <i>Logic</i> as a Continuation of the <i>Phenomenology</i>	255
B. Reason, Understanding, and Reality	282
C. Hegel's Critique of Formal Logic and the Problem of Contradiction	304
1. Does Hegel Pose a Challenge?	304
2. Dialectic and Formalism	311
3. The Logic of Thought and the Problem of Contradiction	323

II. Toward an Epistemological Totality	341
A. The Principle of Hegel's Relation to the Sciences	341
B. The Circles Within the Circle	347
C. Objectivity and Method	357
CONCLUSION	369
BIBLIOGRAPHY	373
AUTHOR INDEX	405
SUBJECT INDEX	411

QUOTATION METHOD AND ABBREVIATIONS

Kant

Kant's works are cited in the text from the edition Immanuel Kant, *Werke in 12 Bänden*, hrsg. v. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1968). References to the German text pertain to the standard A and B pagination, except from the "*New Elucidation ...*" which is cited by page from vol. I, pp. 401–509. English translations (see bibliography) have been modified where necessary. I have used the following abbreviations:

- NE = *Neue Erhellung der ersten Grundsätze metaphysischer Erkenntnis (Principiorum Primorum Congitionis Methaphysicae Nova Dilucidatio)* (Vol. I, pp. 402–509).
- ATT = *Versuch den Begriff der negative Größen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen* (Vol. II, pp. 775–820).
- CPR = *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Vols. III–IV).
- PFM = *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (Vol. V, pp. 109–264).
- JL = *Logik* (Vol. VI, pp. 417–582).
- WP = *Welches sind die Wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?* (Vol. VI, pp. 583–676).
- MA = *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* (Vol. IX, pp. 7–135).
- CJ = *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Vol. X).
- TP1 = *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–70*, translated and edited by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- TP2 = *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, translated by Henry Allison, Michael Friedman, Gary Hatfield, and Peter

- Heath; ed. by Henry Allison and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- LL = *Lectures on Logic*, translated and edited by J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Fichte

Fichte's works are cited in the text from the edition *Fichtes Werke in 11 Bd.*, hrsg. v. I.H. Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971). Pages from the corresponding English translations are also indicated unless these reproduce the original German pagination. Translations have been modified where necessary. I have used the following abbreviations:

- UBW = *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre oder der sogenannten Philosophie* (1794, 1798²), (Vol. 1, pp. 29–81).
- GGW = *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794, 1802²), (Vol. 1, pp. 83–328).
- GEW = *Grundriss des Eigentümlichen der Wissenschaftslehre, in Rücksicht auf das theoretische Vermögen* (1795, 1802), (Vol. 1, pp. 329–411).
- EEW = *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1797), (Vol. 1, pp. 417–49).
- ZEW = *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre für Leser, die schon ein philosophisches System haben* (1797), (Vol. 1, pp. 451–518).
- BBW = *Bericht über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre und die bisherigen Schicksale derselben* (1806), (Vol. VIII, pp. 361–407).
- EVW = *Einleitungsvorlesungen in die Wissenschaftslehre* (1813), (Vol. IX, pp. 1–102).
- UVL = *Über das Verhältniß der Logik zur Philosophie oder transscendentale Logik* (1812), (Vol. IX, pp. 103–400).
- TB = *Die Tatsachen des Bewußtseins* (1813), (Vol. IX, pp. 401–574).
- RA = *Review of Aenesidemus* (1792), in Giovanni, G. di, Harris H.S. *Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (New York: SUNY, 1985), pp. 136–58.
- FIS = *First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge*, In J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge with the First and Second Introductions*, edited and translated by P. Heath and J. Lachs. Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1–28.

- SIS = *Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge*, *ibid.*, pp. 29–86.
- FES = *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, *ibid.*, pp. 87–286.
- CCW = *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre or, of So-called “Philosophy”*. In: *Fichte. Early Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by D. Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 94–135.
- ODC = *Outline of the distinctive character of the Wissenschaftslehre with respect to the Theoretical Faculty*, *ibid.*, pp. 233–306.

Schelling

Schelling's works are cited in the text from the standard edition F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke in 14 Bänden*, hrsg. v. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta, 1856–61). I have used the available English translations (see bibliography) which reproduce the original German pagination. The only exception is A. Bowie's translation of *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*. Pages from this translation are therefore indicated in my text as well. English translations have been modified where necessary. I have used the following abbreviations:

- UM = *Ueber die Möglichkeit einer Form des Philosophie überhaupt* (Vol. 1: 85–148).
- IP = *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (Vol. 1: 149–244).
- PB = *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* (Vol. 1: 281–342).
- AE = *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre* (Vol. 1: 343–462).
- IPN = *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (Vol. 2: 1–344).
- STI = *System des Transzendentalen Idealismus* (Vol. 3: 327–634).
- DMS = *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (Vol. 4: 105–212).
- FD = *Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie* (Vol. 4: 333–510).
- DWV = *Aus: Darstellung der Wahren Verhältnisses der Naturphilosophie in der verbesserten Fichteschen Lehre* (Vol. 7: 50–65).

- AEN = *Aphorismen zur Einleitung in die Naturphilosophie* (7: 140–97).
 PU = *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (Vol. 7:331–416).
 W = *Die Weltalter. Erstes Buch* (Vol. 8: 195–344).
 UZ = *Ueber den Zusammenhang der Natur mit der Geisterwelt* (Vol. 9: 1–110).
 GNP = *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (Vol. 10: 1–200).

Hegel

German citations of Hegel are cited in the text from the edition Hegel G.W.F. *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Redaktion Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). Where available, references to English translations (modified when necessary) are also provided in the text as English texts do not reproduce the German pagination. I have used the following abbreviations:

- DZ = *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie* (Vol. 2: 8–138).
 VSP = *Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie. Darstellung seiner verschiedenen Modifikationen und Vergleichung des neuesten mit dem Alten* (Vol. 2: 213–76).
 GW = *Glauben und Wissen* (Vol. 2: 287–434).
 WDA = *Wer denkt abstrakt?* (Vol. 2: 575–81).
 PG = *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Vol. 3).
 WL1 = *Wissenschaft der Logik, I* (Vol. 5)
 WL2 = *Wissenschaft der Logik II* (Vol. 5).
 R = *Philosophie des Rechts* (Vol. 7).
 ENZ1 = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* (Vol. 8).
 ENZ2 = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II* (Vol. 9).
 ENZ3 = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (Vol. 10).
 RI = *Rezension: Der Idealrealismus. Erster Teil. Von A.L.J. Ohlert* (Vol. 11: 467–86).
 VGP1 = *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I* (Vol. 18).
 VGP2 = *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II* (Vol. 19).
 VGP3 = *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III* (Vol. 20).

- A: = *Who thinks abstractly?* in Kaufmann W. *Hegel. Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), pp. 460–65.
- Diff: = *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).
- EL: = *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).
- ETR: = *Early Theological Writings*. Trans. T.M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).
- HP1-3: = *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 Vols. Trans. E.S. Haldane., F.H. Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).
- LT: = *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. C. Butler and C. Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- PN: = *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. and trans. M.J. Petry. 3 Vols. (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).
- PM: = *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace, together with the Zuzatse in Baumann's text (1845) trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- PR: = *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).
- PS: = *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- RSP: = *On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris, in Giovanni G. di, Harris H.S. *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of German Idealism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).
- SL: = *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

INTRODUCTION

The movement of German idealism culminates in the revelation of the reflective boundaries of theoretical knowledge. The history of the most important intellectual developments thereafter could be described, following a recent remark of Jürgen Habermas, as a history of the de-transcendentalization of the cognizing subject.¹ In this context, the epistemological interpretation proposed in this book must be specifically understood. Examining the problem of knowledge in the development of German idealism, it aims not at an epistemology of the Cartesian type, and even less at a formal logical analysis of knowledge which lacks the reflective element of the devices it employs as “the search for the immutable structures within which knowledge, life, and culture must be contained.”² These “structures” do not only condition the process of knowledge, they are themselves conditioned. There is thus an unsurpassable circle in this process, a circle which German idealism brings to the surface and profoundly scrutinizes.

Therefore, the task is to reflectively account for the historical horizons in which cognition arises (being ultimately thereupon dependent), instead of searching for an ultimate Archimedean point for its deduction. Rather than searching for inexplicably transcendental concepts, this argument points to their determination from within a given *Lebenswelt*. It does not renounce but rather redefines objectivity, by seeing the subject as a coming-to-know-itself totality.³

1 J. Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), p. 186.

2 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 162.

3 See in Habermas: “Dieses Subjekt wird als Ein und Alles, als Totalität gedacht, die “nichts außer sich haben kann.” J. Habermas, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung*, p. 222.

Such an epistemology, by incorporating the reflective element, is different from traditional positivistic epistemology.

This is not to say that philosophical consideration of cognition has been made impossible, or that philosophy becomes solely and exclusively social theory.⁴ For any engagement in social *theory* cannot but be intellectual in nature. It must rest on the categorical presuppositions that are revealed by reflection, and form the basis of cognition. At the same time, the presuppositions (the categorical background) are determined by what they determine (the given Life-world), so that the movement of knowledge is reciprocal: from the object to thought, and from thought to the object. *It is the former part of this movement that is so emphatically underlined by Hegel in his critique of Kant, and so thoughtlessly neglected in subsequent Hegelian scholarship.*

Resting on the powerfulness and finality of Hegel's system, the neglect of the methodological side of cognition in post-Hegelian research is not without reason. Foucault's famous aphorism in the *Archeology of Knowledge* will be repeated on a number of occasions in the present treatise: Hegel's grasp is so strong and all-encompassing that the great dialectician will be waiting at the end of the road of philosophy, no matter which road one follows. However, philosophy here is understood as *philosophia prima*, as the search of the primordial *αρχαί του όντος*. In such case, "philosophy as a discipline capable of giving us the 'right method of seeking truth' depends upon finding some permanent neutral framework of all possible inquiry."⁵ But this is exactly the boundary of cognition which German idealism reaches by showing that neutrality is unattainable and that the logical/epistemological inevitably merges with the metaphysical.

It is not my goal in this book to propose a radically different view on the above issue, and I am uncertain whether two centuries of philosophizing after Hegel were able to produce a substantially different paradigm that surpasses his all-encompassing grasp. What I will try to do is to distinguish the relative and historical from the metaphysical/ontological, which is absolute and ahistorical. On the essential aspect, the dialectic of rationality, I argue with Hegel.

4 Cf. in Habermas: "Die radikale Erkenntniskritik nur als Gesellschaftstheorie möglich ist." Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 9.

5 R. Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

But instead of trying to move *beyond* Hegel, I rather attempt to assess the dialectic of rationality *after* Hegel.

The development of German idealism has shown that the pursuit of unqualified cognitive certainty leads to metaphysics. Cognitive claims must rest on some rules, which either have to be scrutinized and put in the context of their historical development and relativized, or remain unexamined and postulated as metaphysical principles. This book follows the first path. It makes no demand for unconditional knowledge or any metaphysical or ontological claims. To the contrary, the terms “metaphysics” and “ontology” will be used interchangeably in the proposed investigation. Whether knowledge is knowledge of external reality, God, metaphysical principles, or any other *final* piece of truth makes no difference for my discussion, for the claim of a *final* piece of truth would revive the traditional philosophical pursuit. In other words, I argue that the epistemological (cognitive) is neither neutral nor ahistorical (along with Hegel) nor oriented toward ultimate answers *a la philosophie traditionnelle* (contra Hegel).⁶ If the latter were the case, then the circle would repeat itself, and Hegel would indeed be waiting at the end of the road of philosophy. Such is the way in which the metaphysical will be distinguished from the epistemological (cognitive) in the present work.

Admitting the dead-end of traditional epistemology, philosophy then reorients itself toward thinking *from within* its given historical horizon. Habermas has called this movement “post-metaphysical thinking.” Endorsing such a view, I will try to avoid relapsing into sociopolitical considerations, as post-Hegelian and Marxist scholarship has done. For my goal is to scrutinize the *presuppositions* of engagement in these considerations from a historical angle.

6 The following will be repeatedly and extensively argued in this work: Although Hegel is known for emphatically and innovatively reconsidering the *path* of philosophy by relating the absolute to its otherness (respectively, God to the world, infinity to finitude, etc), he does not reconsider the traditional *goal* of philosophy, the pursuit of some final piece of truth. It is useful to have in mind that it is Schelling who first revived metaphysics, despite Kant’s devastating criticism, and that even Fichte’s late writings have a distinct theosophical character. The panlogistic Hegel criticizes the *method* utilized by Schelling, but *not the project itself*.

While philosophy traditionally has been associated with metaphysics and unconditionally valid answers to the problems which it addresses, post-metaphysical philosophy must redefine itself. Is it a social theory? Is it a mere cultural assessment? My answer to these questions is positive with respect to the traditional philosophical endeavors, the pursuit of unqualified cognition, and the explanation of the world in its final *αρχαί*. Yet, this response is not meant to descend into the relativism that, for instance, Rorty seems to suggest. Philosophy interprets praxis and history, and can do so rigorously and effectively. Such understanding makes philosophical investigation relevant to any other field of human inquiry, be it social or natural science. The task of philosophy is reflection or meta-reflection on the findings of science, yet the meta-reflective and the metaphysical *are not necessarily one and the same*. Thus, philosophy in the current treatise will be viewed as a metalogical withdrawal, a generalization of the historical moment which (generalization) is relativistic with respect to the endeavors of traditional First Philosophy, and still certain in its findings from within the historical context. In sum, the proposed work is underlined by a skepticism toward the possibility of obtaining unconditional “truths” along with the conviction of the certainty that historical praxis unveils.

This could be called dialectical phenomenology, but it takes place mostly in the context of Hegel’s assault against transcendentalism. The notion of phenomenology as it is advanced, for instance, by Husserl does not account for the internal unity of knowledge and the manifold. Neither does this approach account for the internally dialectical nature of knowledge, its historical horizon, or, most importantly, its contradictions. Hegel has made these issues the center of his philosophy. At the same time, it must be noted that there is a great difference between being as it historically unfolds, and being as it is in-itself. Hegel is not interested in this difference. As it will be argued in this book, Hegel is able to overcome the Kantian emphasis on this issue solely on the basis of identification of being and thought. However, for the post-metaphysical position that I will be defending, Kant’s thing-in-itself is paramount and unsurpassable.

Metaphysical philosophy is of a bygone dimension. True, no one forbids that the actualization of the propensity of reason toward “completeness of its conclusions” (in Kant’s expression), is applied in metaphysical and ontological explorations in exercising the *θαυμάζειν* which Aristotle had identified with the start of

philosophy. Philosophy in this case is not allied with *επιστήμη*, but rather presents itself as a *μύθος*. It is the alliance with science that makes the claims of philosophy valid, yet this validity does not and cannot take on an ultimate, supra-historical authority.

Having set my presuppositions, I will now sketch the structure of this book. One of the underlying motives of my investigation is to figure out “what is living and what is dead” in the philosophical movement that culminates in Hegel. Philosophy, in Hegel’s famous words, is “its era grasped in thought.” In the context of the present work, this idea points to Hegel’s indebtedness to the philosophical discussion of his time. Philosophical discourse has a dialogical nature, common roots, and common origins, and therefore can be traced as an inter-related synthesis of the evolution of the human spirit, in its onto- and phylogenesis. This is how the evolution of German idealism will be examined in the proposed investigation. Such treatment does not exclude but includes the independence of each particular project.⁷

7 Cf. R.-P. Horstmann “The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling,” in K. Ameriks, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 117–140. Horstmann writes: “It is seriously misleading, however, to look at the various philosophical theories presented by these German idealists in this way. There is no ‘from ... to ...’ if by this is meant some kind of organic process of complementation. Rather, each of the German idealists pursued a very individual project that was guided by very special assumptions concerning what philosophy is all about” (p. 118). Horstmann’s concerns are understandable. Philosophical discussion is richer than what later reconstructions show by not taking into consideration the particular concerns and projects of each of the individual thinkers involved. However, the stress of difference over unity is one-sided. If there was dialogue, commonly shared problems, and discussion (Horstmann admits all that), there must be some rationally perceived logical sequence in the development of the discourse that can be reconstructed. Not accidentally, in this article Horstmann has no other way to proceed than to discuss Fichte and Schelling in direct relationship to Kant. Moreover, that Horstmann demonstrates such “from ... to” configurations in his major work represents, in my opinion, one of the most interesting interpretations of German idealism. See R.-P. Horstmann, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft. Eine Untersuchung zu Zielen und Motiven des Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Alton Hein, 1991).

The issue of post-metaphysical philosophy is directly, yet ambiguously, put forth by Kant. In the first chapter, I examine a number of Kantian dichotomies which in a very definite sense predestine the unfolding of the discourse in German idealism. First of all, Kant is an epistemological optimist and simultaneously an ontological-metaphysical skeptic. He decisively holds both positions, without realizing that unqualified epistemic and logical claims must eventually account for their metaphysical background, the boundary of their justification. When it comes to such an account, Kant simply arrays the transcendental self and the categories, yet is unable to offer an explanation of their derivation, of the correspondence between the categories and intuitions, as well as of the logic of his transcendental deduction. And from there, the initial dichotomy between epistemological optimism and metaphysical skepticism reappears as a series of further dichotomies, which are discussed in the chapter: those between the transcendental and the empirical, between the thing-in-itself and cognitive certainty, between the ontological and the logical, and between the logical and the dialectical.

The second chapter examines the radical transformation of Kantian philosophy by Fichte and Schelling. When Fichte enters the discussion, Kant is already being torn apart by Jacobi and the skeptics. Though Fichte is a convinced Kantian and inherits the dilemmas of dualism, he finds a way to advance the claim of certainty by diminishing the role of the thing-in-itself and by deriving all knowledge from a single principle. By the same token, Fichte opens the way to modern dialectic. I will explicitly argue that Fichte's contribution to the development of the dialectical discourse is groundbreaking, that the phenomenological *démarche* of consciousness and the dialectic of the categories is already unveiled (although in an embryonic form) in Fichte's writings well before Hegel.⁸ Yet Fichte's methodological rupture concerning the issue

8 Paul Franks recently argued that there are two "methods" in the post-Kantian discussion, that of construction (which he ascribes to Fichte) and that of dialectic (employed by Schelling and Hegel). See Franks, P., *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005),

of logic has a dramatic payoff: his *epistemological* monism constitutes a profound advance over Kant;⁹ that said, Fichte will still have to account for the *foundations* of the new logic itself. However, instead of explaining the initial principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, he simply postulates it as “fact of empirical consciousness.” His epistemological monism thereby remains captive to, and is effectively an amplification of, the same *ontological* dualism which entangled Kant. In this context, Fichte’s continued demand for unqualified certainty only prepares the way to the identification of the epistemological and the ontological/metaphysical in Schelling and Hegel.

The second part of the second chapter is devoted to Schelling. Schelling begins as Fichte’s disciple, yet by discerning Fichte’s dichotomy, he comes to realize for the first time that *unqualified epistemic claims must be metaphysically grounded*. The signs of the later split between the two thinkers are evident in Schelling’s earliest works. The influence of the Romantics, Jacobi, Spinoza, and even Plato (as the latest research suggests) is decisive. Eventually, in order to overcome Fichte’s dualism, Schelling finds refuge in the philosophy of nature and “retrieves the Cusan notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, a move that would form the basis of his reply to the Kantian interdiction against pursuing theoretical knowledge beyond the realm of the finite.”¹⁰ Schelling’s step also amounts to the restoration of pre-Kantian metaphysics, a particularity which is overtly acknowledged by the philosopher in the

Ch. 6. It remains unclear why the one is opposed to the other, why Fichte’s position is not dialectical, why Fichte is essentially juxtaposed to Schelling and Hegel, etc. Construction, even if this is really Fichte’s method, is definitely a dialectical process. On the other hand, dialectical exposition is also a construction.

9 I think that Franks is right when he writes that “Fichte’s account is in better shape than Kant’s because of Fichte’s Holistic Monism” (Franks, *All or Nothing*, p. 364). But Fichte’s monism is only *epistemological*, and sets aside the relation between epistemology and metaphysics. However, in the subsequent discussion Schelling will first realize that epistemological claims cannot be upheld unconditionally unless they rest on metaphysical premises.

10 P. Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 57–8.

works that follow the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*.¹¹ At the same time, Schelling's methodological contribution is not regressive. To the contrary, it spreads the dialectic into the objective realm and universalizes it. To be sure, this claim is hinted at rather than actually articulated by the philosopher himself. His awe in front of the revelation of the boundary between the logical and the metaphysical/religious confines him, and instead of the elaboration of dialectic, it gradually leads him to irrationalism.

I will parenthetically note here that Schelling's intellectual progression coincides with Fichte's progression in the late 1790s, and that Hegel's progression coincides with Schelling's progression in the early 1800s. It is, therefore, an open question "who exercises influence on whom" among the three post-Kantian philosophical giants. It is a fact that a number of ideas of Fichte's versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* after 1797 can be found already in Schelling's earlier essays. Similarly, several commentators argue that Hegel's influence on Schelling was significant early on and had a decisive impact on Schelling's break with Fichte, or the reverse: that Hegel's advances were largely borrowed from and resting on Schelling's ideas. These questions will be only partially dealt with in the present study.

Schelling's revival of nature, the universal dialectic, and the resurrection of metaphysics are key notions for understanding the framework of the methodological pursuits of Hegel. The great dialectician is the object of the third and fourth chapters of this book. In chapter 3, I start by arguing that Hegel is from the very beginning a metaphysical philosopher (§1), and as such

11 According to Franks, Schelling's difference with Fichte is that Schelling sees the absolute as the *culmination* of the system, not its beginning (see Franks P., *All or Nothing*, pp. 141, 329). First, it must be noted that Fichte, at least until the early 1800s, is not interested in *the* absolute but in absolute (i.e., unqualified) cognition. And Schelling, who joins epistemology and metaphysics, maintains that the absolute (as absolute identity) can be grasped intuitively from the very start (like "a shot from a pistol," as Hegel writes with irony in the *Phenomenology*). In my view, it is only Hegel who will see the absolute as the *culmination* of the system.

he decisively attempts to penetrate what he believes to be the nature of the absolute. The contrast with Kant is striking. At the same time, Hegel claims to have brought an end to transcendentalism. I examine this claim in detail (§2) with regard to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and charge Hegel with ambiguous intentions. While demonstrating the specificity of the rational, Hegel surrenders the real. He is not looking for the rationality of the real, but the reality of the rational; and when the rational is found in the real (and the historical), it is thus not enough to satisfy his objectives. These objectives are metaphysical and crucial for his phenomenological strategy. I am deeply critical of Hegel's claim of absolute knowing, and knowledge of the absolute. Hegel argues for absolute knowing (*absolutes Wissen*) even when he presents it as necessarily connected to, and expressed exclusively through, relative knowing. My criticism will touch the "edges" of his system, the relation of mind to experience, his attack on transcendentalism, and his expansion of his system toward absolute knowing. The first two of Hegel's claims are unfinished; the third is impossible.

Despite Hegel's ambiguous appeal to reality, his insights on the dialectical nature, social-historical mediation, and intersubjective character of cognition are later confirmed in scientific research. In order to make this claim, I will invoke the findings of modern genetic epistemology and interpret the ideal in an "upward" trajectory as a modus of the real (§3). This will not bring me back to Spinozism, for I will set aside metaphysical claims and, in Chapter 4, come to construe the *Science of Logic* as a genetic theory of systematic knowledge and as circular epistemology (§1). The Hegelian theory of knowledge is primarily, although not exclusively, a categorical theory. This is suggested, for example, by Klaus Hartmann's influential interpretation.¹² However, in my elucidation I will separate the categorical from

12 K. Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in A. MacIntyre, ed., *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 101–124; Hartmann K., ed., *Die Ontologische Option: Studien zu Hegels Propädeutik, Schellings Hegel-Kritik, und Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), part I.

the ontological-metaphysical, whereas Hartmann does not. In fact, he vaguely defines category as “the claim that being matches what thought thinks of it.” Within such an interpretation, not only does the ground of appearance of the category remain unclear, so does the extent of its justification. One should exercise similar caution toward the “ontology of social being” that Lukács advocates. It seems to me that Lukács is right on target when talking about *social* ontology. However, the ontological as *λόγος περί του όντος*, necessarily conveys a finality in the depiction of being in its ultimate and unsurpassable principles. Rather, in fact, any possible integration of knowledge of reality in a totality amounts to its formulation from within the given historical moment and within the given rationality, by no means speaking of any final description. If what Lukács advocates is an ontology of *social* being, then its relativism is evident and the thing-in-itself remains unshakable.

My interpretation of the *Logic* is partly against the grain of Hegel’s intentions. Hegel claims that the *Logic* “describes the situation in the Godhead before the creation of nature.” At the same time, his argument advances the demand of the dispersal of the ideal in the real. The real then must be seen not as being in its ultimate structure, but the object of scientific knowledge as it is logically portrayed in thought. The dialectical portrayal, Hegel’s epistemology, demands that thought is intimately connected with its object which must be circularly grasped as praxis, and in terms of its hitherto historical evolution. Historicism, praxis, circularity, and systematicity are some of the conditions of the dialectical narrative, which results in the portrayal of an inwardly articulated totality. First, the totality which Hegel champions must be seen as existing in an evolutionary trajectory. Second, totality can be properly portrayed only in its maturity *and* only after thought has reached its own maturity for such a portrayal. Respectively, dialectical presentation becomes possible only after cognition sublates the exoteric intellectual (*verständlich*) portrayal by a rational (*vernünftig*) portrayal. Once such a level is reached, the *logical* categorical portrayal of the scientific object can unveil contradiction as an essential characteristic of that object. It is astounding how much the issue of contradiction

has been neglected,¹³ and how much the latest Hegelian scholarship has capitulated in the face of advancements of formal logic, diminishing Hegel's assault on the law of identity. The argument here is certainly not unilaterally against formal logic, but it drives home the idea that was carried along in the development of German idealism: that formal logic has no say in *philosophical* cognition. Rather than separating the copula as identity and as predication, separating form and content, being and becoming, the Hegelian argument aims at *uniting* them in a meta-consideration that is carried out by the faculty of reason and its device, the dialectic or dialectical logic. Reason focuses on the inner source of movement and the development of its object, which reason portrays as being in an evolutionary trajectory. I will conclude my discussion (§2) by addressing the topic of an evolving dialectical totality of reflective scientific reason. It pertains to any scientific inquiry and to the possibility of a universal science as accomplishing the Hegelian scheme of "circle of circles."

A few words need to be said about my *Auseinandersetzung* with existing research on German idealism. Marxists and Neokantians will be criticized for their inflationary understanding of the thing-in-itself, the latest Fichte research for defending Fichte's treatment of the thing-in-itself, and Hegelian research for bypassing the importance of the notion of contradiction, for diminishing the metaphysical and religious dimension of Hegel's thought, and for denying the possibility of a dialectical understanding of the so-called positive sciences.

The international bibliography on German idealism is vast, especially if one includes the works on each particular author. It seems impossible even to write a commentary on the commentaries. One has to rely on the mind's transcendental potential – and

13 For a recent exception with emphasis on practical philosophy see S. Hahn, *Contradiction in Motion: Hegel's Organic Concept of Life and Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). See also the correlation of Hegel's position with recent analytic philosophy in P. Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. Ch. 7.

remember that Newton did not have to consider every falling apple before realizing his theory of gravitation.

No intellectual labor can evolve entirely independently. As this book had been simmering for several years, I am indebted to numerous people for the scholarly influence either through the direct debates we had at various meetings and conferences or through indirect (but permanent) debates I had with them through their writings. It is impossible to list them all here. I am also grateful to numerous people for their help in carrying the project out: to Richard J. Bernstein for his patience to advise me about this project from its very inception; to Axel Honneth, Georg Mohr, and Hans Jörg Sandkühler for hosting me at the Universities of Frankfurt and Bremen in 2001–02, during which time an important part my research was carried out; to Monika Ekiert, Carol Porr, and Michael Jonik for editing the manuscript; to Springer's two anonymous reviewers for their detailed reading of the manuscript and astonishingly positive feedback; to Springer's editors for their patience to work with me in order to bring the manuscript to a finished form. Above all, I am indebted to Tom Rockmore for his overall intellectual encouragement, for believing in me even at times when I stopped believing in myself. Tom is not only a profound scholar and an astonishing erudite, he is also as helpful and supportive as one can be. Needless to mention, the many weaknesses of this work are entirely the author's responsibility.

CHAPTER ONE

EPISTEMOLOGY OR METAPHYSICS? THE KANTIAN BACKGROUND

I. Scientific Metaphysics?

In all spheres of human inquiry, few fields are more admired and at the same time more challenged than philosophy. From the time of its inception, this so-called love of wisdom has sought the ultimate answers in any sphere of knowledge, from the key principles of the universe to the innermost secrets of the human soul. The ambitious endeavors of philosophy connote a certain arrogance, which has been revealed at an ever-increasing degree along with the evolution of history and the differentiation of human knowledge. The gradual accumulation of knowledge has led particular fields to be emancipated from philosophy's embrace. This emancipation then created an analogously increasing mistrust toward philosophy, and the feeling that – not only is each particular field of knowledge self-sufficient – but that philosophy itself is characterized by vanity, futility, and worthlessness. From being the *quintessence* of human knowledge, philosophy gradually became a phantasmagoria, a pale and unconvincing enterprise contrasting sharply with the precision and apodictic nature of other sciences. According to this view, even if the human spirit is characterized by wonder and an urge for the unreachable, and if this urge is expressed in the philosophical gaze toward the unconditioned, philosophy (which has survived the increasing attacks against it) needs to be separated from other fields of knowledge. Unlike philosophy, these other fields can be traced rigorously and efficiently.

However, philosophers would hardly accept such a charge against them. Hence, dating back to Francis Bacon, Descartes, and many others, there were numerous attempts to make philosophy scientific, and philosophical systems to an ever-increasing degree started imitating the procedural characteristics of modern science. Kant was not to avoid this discourse. His system represents one of the greatest attempts to return philosophy to a place of respect

and trustworthiness that the emergence of modern science had taken away. Of course, Kant was neither the first nor the last to attempt this restoration. Such an ambition is characteristic of much of contemporary philosophical discourse.

Kant begins his first *Critique* with the acknowledgment that philosophy (which, he traditionally identifies with metaphysics) is under serious challenge for not being able to ground its claims effectively. "Time was when metaphysics was entitled the Queen of all sciences; and if the will be taken for the deed, the preeminent importance of her accepted tasks gives her every right to this title of honor" (CPR, AVII). This is no longer the case, and the doubt about the effectiveness and rigorousness of philosophical claims is not without grounds. It is philosophy itself that is to blame for such a doubt, for it has been "dogmatic" and has proceeded "without any previous examination of the capacity or incapacity of reason for so great an undertaking" (CPR, B7/A3). The dominance of dogmatism also made previous philosophy "despotic" (CPR, AX). Its claims were imposed rather than critically examined and properly substantiated. The quandary is that, unlike other fields of knowledge, "metaphysics ... has not yet had the good fortune to enter upon the secure path of a science" (CPR, B XIV). If metaphysics could enter such a path, it would again become the queen of human inquiries. It is, therefore, philosophical (self)criticism that can restore the credibility of philosophy in a way that is indeed superior to that of other sciences. Such is Kant's starting point. He wants to examine whether the sought substantiation of philosophical claims is achievable, and to offer an answer to the question as to whether something like metaphysics is possible at all (PFM, A4, A32, A38; TP2, 53, 69, 70). In sum, along with accepting the aforesaid criticism against philosophy, Kant positions himself optimistically.

In undertaking another attempt to restore philosophy to its throne, Kant is passionately convinced of his certitude. Comparing science to metaphysics, he constantly reiterates his diagnosis: the phrase that metaphysics has not yet entered the "secure path of science" is repeated in the beginning of the first *Critique* on numerous occasions (CPR, BXIX, XXIV, XXX, XXXVII, etc.), and all other post-critical works of the philosopher are also filled with such claims. Therefore, Kant not only pursues

for the science of reason (i.e., philosophy) a “sovereign role” in relation to science,¹ but he also pursues a *scientific* status for philosophy. He wants a science that stems from philosophy, *scientific philosophy*, not a philosophy that is opposed to science. As he puts it, “the critique of reason, in the end, necessarily leads to scientific knowledge” (CPR, B22). Claiming to have found the way to obtain proper, reliable, and positive knowledge, Kant promises to “guard against all errors” (CPR, AXII) and confidently names his transcendental philosophy “the idea of a *pure Science*” (CPR, B27).

How then can metaphysics be possible? Ontologically, Kant shifts philosophy in the direction of the subject, and attempts to unveil the *a priori* content of human reason. Reliance on experience is always limited and does not suffice to satisfy the quest of metaphysics, for this quest has to do with the infinite and the beyond. What one needs is to shift the way of investigation. One needs to examine the possibility of *a priori* cognition (CPR, BXX).

Kant’s turn to *a priori* cognition along with the introduction of the thing-in-itself settles the ontological question. There remains the methodological question, which is equally important for my discussion. Although the typical methodological procedure (e.g., the geometrical method of Descartes, the inductive-mathematical method of Newton, etc.) is not what Kant employs, the restoration of philosophy to its throne as the queen of sciences is to be fulfilled in the standard scientific sense of logical strictness, apodictic nature, and, above all, systemicity. Completeness, exhaustiveness, certainty, and clarity (*Vollständigkeit, Ausführlichkeit, Gewißheit, Deutlichkeit* – CPR, A XIV-XVI) are some of the characteristics upon which proper philosophical cognition should be grounded. Philosophy has to become science in *all* its constitutive aspects. “Metaphysics must be a science not only as a whole but also in all its parts, otherwise it is nothing at all” (PFM, A200; TP2, 159).

Kant’s approach conveys a rather imitative attitude toward other sciences. Indicative of such an attitude is also the fact that the

1 J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J.J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 3.

examples of strict apodictic fields of inquiry Kant makes use of are Mathematics and Theoretical Physics.² The latter two, having followed the secure path of science, are “the two sciences in which theoretical knowledge is determined *a priori*” (CPR, BX). From the outset it must be mentioned that this imitation concerns the method rather than the tasks. Only under this condition do pure physics and pure mathematics serve as examples for Kant’s venture. The propositions of these sciences are synthetic rather than analytic; they *are* known *a priori* and they demonstrate the existence of an *a priori* structure of intuition. The question is *how* to demonstrate such structure in philosophy and thus to elevate philosophy to the rank of strict and apodictic science. Once this is accomplished, then a properly understood metaphysics will remunerate physics and mathematics by construing their foundations. In the language of the first *Critique*, philosophy will be able to explain how pure mathematics is possible and how pure natural science is possible.

However, the above does not answer the question of the chasm between the objectives of metaphysics and those of other sciences. Although Kant acknowledges this disparity, his assertive tone leads to the emergence of a fundamentally important ambiguity. On the one hand, he wants to be scientific, apodictic, and raise philosophy to the stature of other sciences. On the other hand, his critique is still oriented toward solving *metaphysical questions*. Central inquiries of the first *Critique*, “the unavoidable tasks of pure reason” (CPR, B, 7) are God, freedom and immortality. The possibility of any kind of scientific treatment of these questions (especially God and immortality) seems highly problematic. Kant himself lets them open to thought, but not to knowledge. He examines metaphysics only according to “how it is actually given in the natural disposition of human reason,” not as a summary of the governing principles of the world in itself. Thus, Kant admits that he studies this discipline “according to its subjective possibility” (PFM, A183; TP2, 150). He maintains that the critique of the principles of reason is the only way to make science out of metaphysics and that “through other ways and by other means it is impossible” (PFM, A189; TP2, 154). At

2 See also J. Habermas, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–5.

the same time, he maintains that he presents a scientific treatment of these questions and a final response to them.

Furthermore, not only does Kant deny the possibility of the old, now moribund, metaphysics – thus reducing metaphysics to the *logical* investigation of concepts it *a priori* involves (in that sense, Hegel will later note that it is Kant who first reduced metaphysics to logic) – he also reintroduces a new understanding of philosophy as *metaphysics*.³ In Kant’s own definition, “pure rational cognition from mere *concepts* is called philosophy or metaphysics” (MA, AVII; TP2, 185). In the last pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant even proposes a plan for a rebirth of metaphysics⁴ that is made up of four quite traditional parts: ontology, natural philosophy (physiology), cosmology, and theology. It could be said that the philosopher sacrifices traditional *οντολογία*, the ultimate explanation of being, in order to save metaphysics (if by the latter one understands the search for some initial *αρχαί*)⁵ by locating the subject matter of metaphysics not in the object but inside the mind of the subjective agent.

The echoes of Kant’s twofold position are reflected in current debates as well. The widely spread twentieth century rejection of metaphysics⁶ can be seen as a confirmation of the tendency

3 See Robert Pippin’s discussion of the epistemological and metaphysical form in Kant’s arguments in his, *Kant’s Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 17ff.

4 Ötfried Höffe has successfully termed Kant’s doctrine “Post-metaphysical Metaphysics.” See Ö. Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (München: C.H. Beck, 2003), part IV.

5 I must once again caution about the treatment of these terms. As I have already stated, I treat their difference as one of degree, not of kind. The use of these terms is different in various authors and schools. The bibliography on German idealism is not unambiguous either. R. Kroner, for instance, claims that *philosophia transcendentalis* is the original translation of *οντολογία*. See R. Kroner *Von Kant bis Hegel*, 1. Bd. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921), p. 55.

6 See, for example, A. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dove, 1946), pp. 33–45. Beyond demonstrating the proximity on the issue of metaphysics, it must be clear that my argument is not aimed at identifying Kant’s transcendentalism with any form of Neopositivism.