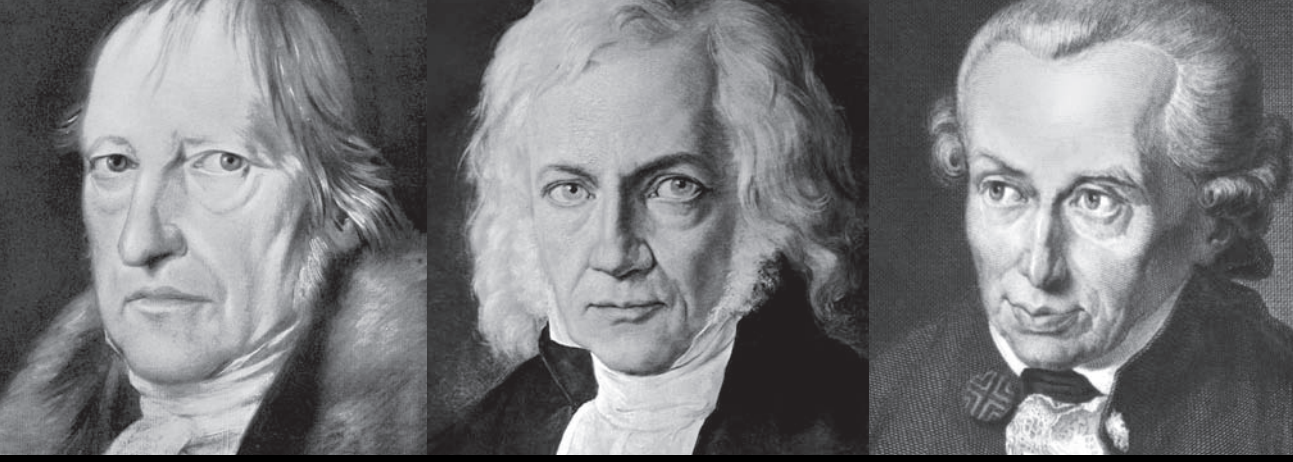

# Kantian Reason *and* Hegelian Spirit

## *The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*

GARY DORRIEN

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# Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit

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# Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit

## *The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*

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*For Cindy, Nelleke, Mike, Xan, Kevin, and Hannah, with affection and treasured memories.*

# Contents

# Preface and Acknowledgments

Until now, I lacked an answer for one of the nicest questions: "Which book of yours means the most to you?" Usually I stammered the truth – "I have no idea." Otherwise I settled for an evasion – "The next one." At last I have a real answer, because this book makes an argument about the thinkers and ideas that underlie modern religious thought as a whole.

My work ranges across social ethics and politics, on the one hand, and modern religious philosophy and theology, on the other. I am equally committed to these subject areas, having never tried to settle on one of them or even ranked one higher than the other. There is a disciplinary link between the fields of ethics and theology – theological ethics – but that is not where most of my work takes place. On the ethical side, I work mostly at the intersections of social ethics, social theory, and politics, and on the theological side, I work mostly in the branch of historical theology that deals with modern religious and philosophical thought.

I started this book with the idea of something analogous to my three volumes on *The Making of American Liberal Theology,* but soon I realized that I had too much at stake in this project to give it the encyclopedic treatment. Instead of tracking, in a multi-volume format, the history and variations of modern German and British theology, I went straight for an argument about the importance of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in the founding of modern theology.

This decision reflects something about how I learned modern religious and philosophical thought, something about how I teach it, and something about my constructive perspective. In college, I cut my teeth intellectually on G. W. F. Hegel and Paul Tillich. Long before I had an inkling of a future in the academy or anything pertaining to religion, I was drawn to Hegel's theory of self-knowing Spirit arising through the realization of consciousness, an idea that, importantly to me, held a similar lure for Martin Luther King, Jr. But one day I realized that it was pointless to grapple any further with modern philosophers and theologians until I took on Immanuel Kant's critiques of reason. Kant is the single unavoidable thinker in modern philosophy, and one of the founders of modern religious thought along with Hegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Today, in the classroom, I find it impossible to teach almost any subject in religious thought or social ethics without spending at least two weeks on what the subject in question owes to Kant and Hegel. This interpretive and pedagogical standpoint underlies the normative argument that I make in this book – that progressive theology at its best is always buoyed with idealistic conviction and armed with a realistic brake on it.

Karl Barth enjoyed regaling his students with the story of how Hegel and Schleiermacher came up at the same time, Hegel eclipsed Schleiermacher when they lived, and Schleiermacher overtook Hegel, at least in theology, after they were gone. Usually Barth cautioned his students about their acquired liberalism, telling them that they lived in Schleiermacher's age and under his influence, whether or not they realized it. Sometimes he urged them to imagine what theology might have been like had Schleiermacher never existed. But I will argue that even Barthian theology is unimaginable without Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

This book is like my previous one for Wiley-Blackwell, *Social Ethics in the Making,* in that I held my students at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University chiefly in mind as I wrote it, especially my doctoral students. For me, it is always a high priority to help students grasp the story of the field they are entering. My understanding of it has been greatly enriched by working with three recently graduated doctoral students (Ian Doescher, Eboni Marshall Turman, and Christine Pae), and a special group of graduate students with whom I have worked closely (Nixon Cleophat, Preston Davis, Peter Herman, Dwayne Meadows, and Elijah Prewitt-Davis), and my current group of doctoral students: Lisa Anderson, Nkosi Anderson, Malinda Berry, Chloe Breyer, Babydoll Kennedy, Jeremy Kirk, David Orr, Tracy Riggle, Dan Rohrer, Gabriel Salguero, Charlene Sinclair, Joe Strife, Rima Vesely-Flad, Colleen Wessel-McCoy, Demian Wheeler, and Todd Willison. Blessings and thanks to all.

All my colleagues at Union and Columbia are superb colleagues and some are special friends; in the latter category I am especially grateful to James Cone, Roger Haight, Esther Hamori, Kelby Harrison, Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., Brigitte Kahl, Paul Knitter, Serene Jones, Barbara Lundblad, Daisy Machado, John McGuckin, Christopher Morse, Aliou Niang, Su Yon Pak, Jan Rehmann, Mark C. Taylor, John Thatamanil, and Janet Walton. Many thanks to my editors at Blackwell for their skillful work, especially project manager and copy-editor Graeme Leonard and publisher Rebecca Harkin. And thanks to Diana Witt for another superb index.

# 1

# Introduction

## *Kantian Concepts, Liberal Theology, and Post-Kantian Idealism*

This is a book about the role of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in founding modern theology. More specifically, it is a book about the impact of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism in creating what came to be called "liberal" theology in Germany and "modernist" theology in Great Britain. My descriptive argument is implied in this description, which folds together with my normative argument: Modern religious thought originated with idealistic convictions about the spiritual ground and unifying reality of freedom, and there is no vital progressive theology that does not speak with idealistic conviction, notwithstanding the ironies and problems of doing so.

Liberal theology was born in largely illiberal contexts in eighteenth-century Germany and England, a fact that helps to explain why much of it was far from liberal. Most of the great thinkers in this story were Germans, the key founding thinkers were Germans, and there was a vital intellectual movement of liberal theology in Germany for a century before a similar movement existed in Britain. Thus, the German story dominates this book. British theology comes into the picture mostly as it engages German idealism, as do the book's principal other non-German thinkers, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, although the British story begins with a figure that preceded Kant by a century, John Locke. For better and for worse, German thinkers dominated modern theology right up to the point that liberal theology in Germany crashed and burned, after which the field was still dominated by the intellectual legacies of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and the Ritschlian School.

The idea of a distinctly modern approach to Christian theology built upon early Enlightenment attempts in Britain and Germany to blend Enlightenment reason with a Christian worldview. I will argue, however, that early Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism did not privilege the questions of subjectivity, historical relativity, and freedom, and thus did not develop a liberal approach to theology. It took Kant's three critiques of reason and his writings on religion and ethics to launch a fully modern

*Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology*, First Edition. Gary Dorrien.

departure in religious thought, through which Kant became the quintessential modern philosopher and inspired rival streams of theology and idealism.

I will argue that Kant's influence in modern religious thought is unsurpassed by any thinker, that his use of metaphysical reason is usually misconstrued, that he was a subjective idealist who mediated between extreme subjective idealism and objective idealism, that his recognition of universal forms of experience paved the way to post-Kantian objective idealism, that his moral faith mattered more to him than anything except his idea of freedom to which it was linked, and that the key to his system – terrible ironies notwithstanding – was the emancipating and unifying reality of freedom. I will argue that Kant's transcendental idealism laid the groundwork for all post-Kantian versions and that the post-Kantian idealisms of Hegel, Schleiermacher, Friedrich W. J. Schelling, and, very differently, Kierkegaard, surpassed Kant in creatively construing religious experience and the divine. I will argue that the dominant forms of liberal theology flowed out of German idealism and tried to calibrate the right kind of idealism to distinct positions about the way that any religion is true. And I will argue that even the important critiques of religious idealism proffered by Kierkegaard, William James, G. E. Moore, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth demonstrated its adaptability and continued importance.

Philosophers loom large in this story. Kant defined himself against René Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, G. W. Leibniz and Christian Wolff, the leaders of the German Enlightenment, and John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume, the luminaries of British empiricism. By the late 1780s, everyone had to deal with Kant and the beginnings of post-Kantian idealism. Samuel Taylor Coleridge plays a major role in this book for doing so, as Coleridge brought post-Kantian idealism to England. Kierkegaard plays a similar role in the book's scheme by prefiguring the twentieth-century reaction against religious idealism from a standpoint that assumed it. Alfred North Whitehead plays a key role in this book's account of the beginning of process theology in England. None of these thinkers was a theologian.

One should not make too much of the lack of theologians. Schleiermacher and Barth, the major Protestant theologians of the modern era, are central figures in this book's narrative. The book also features theologians Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Ernst Troeltsch, Hastings Rashdall, William Temple, and Paul Tillich. But it matters that non-theologians played such important roles in founding and shaping modern theology.

Until the eighteenth century, Christian theology operated exclusively within houses of biblical and ecclesiastical authority. External authorities established and compelled what had to be believed on specific points of doctrine if one was to claim the Christian name. In theory, the Anglican tradition cracked open the rule of external authority by making reason an authority second to scripture and (in Richard Hooker's formulation) ahead of church tradition. But Anglican theology up to and through the Enlightenment was cautious about what it meant to recognize the authority of reason. The English tradition, though producing a major forerunner of modern theology, John Locke, did not produce any important founders. An ethos of provincialism and the oppressive weight of the state church slowed the development of liberalizing trends in British theology. Plus, the greatest British philosopher, David Hume, was someone that religious thinkers had to get around, not someone who helped them get

somewhere. The modern departure in religious thought had to wait for the later Enlightenment, biblical criticism, the liberalizing of German universities, Kant, an upsurge of Romantic and Absolute idealism, and Schleiermacher's determination to liberalize Christian theology within the context of the Christian church and tradition.

The founding and early development of liberal theology was sufficiently rich in Germany and Britain that this book restricts itself to accounting for it, always in a manner that focuses on the importance of German idealism. I do not pursue the founding of liberal religious thought in other national contexts, aside from occasional references that illuminate what happened in Germany and Britain. I do not take the story of liberal theology beyond the responses of Barth and Tillich to it; otherwise I would have another multi-volume project on my hands. For the same reason, plus two more, I do not describe the attempts to develop a Roman Catholic version of liberal theology that occurred during the historical frame of this account. Roman Catholic Modernism was mostly a French phenomenon, and the Vatican crushed it in the early twentieth century. The development of a Catholic tradition of liberal theology had to wait until Vatican Council II.

For over a century the only distinctly modern approach to theology was the liberal one; thus, when analyzing trends in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theology, I shall use these terms interchangeably, always with the caveat that neither term had a stable meaning until the twentieth century. "Liberal theology" is more complex and slippery than most of the literature about it, and the same thing is true of German idealism. In the former case, an over-identification of liberal theology with late nineteenth-century Progressivist idealism, or a too-simple rendering of a Kant-to-Harnack tradition, made liberal theology too easily debunked by its neo-orthodox detractors, who convinced the rest of the field to define liberalism as they did. In the case of German idealism, complexity was undeniable, but much of the literature gets around it by treating idealism as only one thing or by simplistically rendering Kant as a subjective idealist.

For historical understanding and constructive purposes, it is better not to evade the historical and theoretical complexities. Liberal theology cannot be understood without coming to grips with post-Kantian idealism and its influence in the Kierkegaardian and Barthian reactions to it. More importantly, it cannot be revitalized lacking a robust sense of the divine presence in movements that lift up the poor and oppressed and that contribute to the flourishing of all people and creation.

## Imagining Modern Theology

Modern theology began when theologians looked beyond the Bible and Christian tradition for answers to their questions and acknowledged that the mythical aspects of Christian scripture and tradition are mythical. How should theology deal with modern challenges to belief that overthrow the external authority of Christian scripture and tradition? What kind of Christian belief is possible after modern science and Enlightenment criticism desacralized the world? How should Christian theology deal with the mythical aspects of Christianity and the results of biblical criticism? These questions were peculiar to religious thinkers of the modern era; Thomas

Aquinas and John Calvin did not ask themselves how to do theology without an infallible external authority or whether Christian myth should be demythologized.[1]

Eventually there were distinctly modern theologies that were not liberal; Kierkegaard was the key precursor of that possibility. The founding of modern theology, however, was a decidedly liberal enterprise. The roots of liberalism lie deep in the history of Western thought, especially in the Pauline theme of spiritual freedom, the fifth-century Pelagian emphasis on free will, the limitations on sovereign authority in the Magna Carta Libertatum of 1215, and the Renaissance humanist stress on free expression, all of which resonate in the modern Western appeal to the rights of freedom. As a political philosophy, liberalism originated in the seventeenth century, asserting that individuals have natural rights to freedom that are universal. As an economic theory it originated in the eighteenth century, asserting the priority of free trade and self-regulating markets. As a cultural/philosophical movement it arose in the eighteenth century as a rationalist critique of tradition and authority-based belief. As a theological tradition it originated in the eighteenth century in tandem with modern humanism, biblical criticism, and Enlightenment philosophy.

Historically and theoretically, the cornerstone of liberalism is the assertion of the supreme value and universal rights of the individual. The liberal tradition of Benedict de Spinoza, John Locke, Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson taught that the universal goal of human beings is to realize their freedom and that state power is justified only to the extent that it enables and protects individual liberty. From the beginning this tradition had an ambiguous, often tortured relationship to its own rhetoric of freedom, for liberalism arose as an ideological justification of capitalism *and* as the recognition that tolerance was the only humane alternative to the religious wars of the seventeenth century. In both cases liberal ideology deemed that vast categories of human beings were disqualified from basic human rights. Liberalism valorized the rights-bearing individual to underwrite the transition to a political economy based on self-interested market exchanges, which benefited the capitalist bourgeoisie. The liberal state tolerated plural religious traditions, which led to the separation of church and state, which led, eventually, to the principle of tolerance for other kinds of beliefs and practices. The state, under liberalism, became an ostensibly neutral guarantor of the rights of individuals and communities to pursue diverse conceptions of the good life, which did not stop liberals from denying the rights of human beings who were not white, male, and owners of property like themselves.

The founding of modern theology is an aspect of this story. Liberal theology, in my definition, was and is a three-layered phenomenon. Firstly it is the idea that all claims to truth, in theology and other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by appeal to external authority. From a liberal standpoint, Christian scripture or ecclesiastical doctrine may still be authoritative for theology and faith, but its authority operates within Christian experience, not as an outside word that establishes or compels truth claims about particular matters of fact.[2]

Secondly, liberal theology argues for the viability and necessity of an alternative to orthodox over-belief and secular disbelief. In Germany, the liberal movement called itself "mediating theology" because it took so seriously the challenge of a rising culture of aggressive deism and atheism. Liberal religious thinkers, unavoidably, had to

battle with conservatives for the right to liberalize Christian doctrine. But usually they worried more about the critical challenges to belief from outsiders. The agenda of modern theology was to develop a credible form of Christianity before the "cultured despisers of religion" routed Christian faith from intellectual and cultural respectability. This agenda was expressed in the title of the founding work of modern theology, Schleiermacher's *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers)*. Here, Britain was ahead of the curve, as there was an ample tradition of aggressive British deism and skepticism by the time that Schleiermacher wrote. British critics ransacked the Bible for unbelievable things; in Germany, a deceased anonymous deist (Hermann Samuel Reimarus) caused a stir in the mid-1770s by portraying Jesus as a misguided political messiah lacking any idea of being divine; Schleiermacher, surrounded by cultured scoffers in Berlin, contended that true religion and the divinity of Jesus were fully credible on modern terms.[3]

The third layer consists of specific things that go with overthrowing the principle of external authority and adopting a mediating perspective between authority religion and disbelief. The liberal tradition reconceptualizes the meaning of Christianity in the light of modern knowledge and values. It is reformist in spirit and substance, not revolutionary. It is open to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially historical criticism and the natural sciences. It conceives Christianity as an ethical way of life, it advocates moral concepts of atonement or reconciliation, and it is committed to making progressive religion credible and socially relevant.

This definition is calibrated to describe the entire tradition of liberal theology from Kant and Schleiermacher to the present day. A great deal of the literature in this field defines liberal theology by features that were distinctive to its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Ritschlian School theology ruled the field and powerful movements for social Christianity existed in England, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States. For most of the twentieth century, the standard definition of liberal theology equated it with Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf von Harnack, and Social Gospel progressivism. Some critics, following Karl Barth, treated Schleiermacher and Hegel as founders of a bad tradition of theology that led straight to Ritschl and Harnack. Other critics, following Paul Tillich and an older usage, identified liberal theology wholly with the bourgeois culture-religion of the Ritschlian School. In both cases, liberal theology was defined, polemically, as Christ-of-culture optimism and modernism – a usage that was adopted by all manner of dialectical, neo-orthodox, Niebuhrian, Anglo-Catholic, Roman Catholic, and conservative evangelical critics. It became so pervasive that even liberal theologians who rejected Progressive era liberalism swallowed the regnant definition. For example, Daniel Day Williams, an American process theologian, offered this definition of liberal theology in 1949: "By 'liberal theology' I mean the movement in modern Protestantism which during the nineteenth century tried to bring Christian thought into organic unity with the evolutionary world view, the movements for social reconstruction, and the expectations of 'a better world' which dominated the general mind. It is that form of Christian faith in which a prophetic-progressive philosophy of history culminates in the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth."[4]

Here, as was typical by 1949, liberal theology was equated with the evolutionary ideology, cultural optimism, and social idealism of its Social Gospel heyday. It was

identified with factors that were peculiar to its dominant moment, 1890 to 1914. A century of pre-Ritschlian liberal theology centered on Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel fell out of this definition; more importantly for twentieth-century critics of liberalism, liberal theology only existed after World War I among tiny bands of idealistic progressives and Christ-of-culture modernists who refused to get their clocks fixed. That did not describe Williams or any of the liberals that influenced him, notably Alfred North Whitehead and Henry Nelson Wieman, yet Williams recycled the very definition of his tradition that marginalized him and it.

The standard definition was wrong at both ends. It ignored that the liberal tradition had its richest intellectual flowering before Ritschlian theology existed and it denigrated an ongoing tradition that is still creatively refashioning itself a century after World War I. Moreover, the fact that British liberal theology was called "Modernism" is a tribute to the fateful, soon crushed, but creative attempts by Alfred F. Loisy, Maurice Blondel, Lucien Laberthonniere, Friedrich von Hügel, and George Tyrell to imagine a Roman Catholic form of modern theology. The party vehicle of Anglican liberal theology, the Modern Churchmen's Union, embraced the term "Modernism" during the very period that the Vatican abolished liberal wellsprings in the Catholic Church. Although Anglican liberals tended to come from the church's liberal Protestant wing, they respected what their Roman Catholic counterparts had tried to do.[5]

The father of liberal theology, Schleiermacher, did not call himself a liberal, and the icons of liberal theology stood for various things that were far from liberal. These facts considerably complicate the idea, which I endorse, of a liberal tradition that began in the eighteenth century and that remains an important approach today. The key to the ascendancy of liberal theology in the nineteenth century is that it outgrew its origins as an ideology of freethinking criticism to become a theology grounded in, and at home with, the Christian church.

## Kantian Liberalism and Mediating Theology

Johann S. Semler, a biblical scholar at the University of Halle, was the first person to embrace the name "*liberalis theologia*," in the late 1760s. Semler was a "neologian," the name by which the founders of German historical criticism identified themselves. They included Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Johann Jakob Griesbach, J. G. Herder, Johann David Michaelis, F. V. Reinhard, and J. J. Spalding. Before liberal theology existed, there was a basis for it in the work of these pioneering biblical and historical scholars.[6]

The neologians claimed to study the Bible from a scientific standpoint stripped of dogmatic presuppositions. They revolutionized biblical scholarship by deciphering the historical development of the biblical text, rejecting the taxonomical and naturalistic interpretations of rationalist criticism. They took a third way between orthodox supernaturalism and deist criticism, charging that both were ideological, superficial, and lacking in critical rigor. Revelation confirms the truths of reason, they argued. The Old Testament contains myths like other scriptures, not all parts of the Bible are equally inspired, and the gospels were written out of distinct historical contexts that shaped what Christianity became. Semler, responding to a public outcry over Reimarus' interpretation of the gospels (which was published by G. E. Lessing), charged that

Reimarus offered sloppy scholarship and warmed-over deist tropes. There is such a thing as a rational Christianity that sticks to facts and does not indulge in special pleading of any kind, Semler urged. This was the kind of Christianity that suited the modern age. Under Semler's leadership, Halle became the center of critical theology in the 1750s and sustained this leadership position into the 1780s, when a declining Semler backed away from defending academic freedom. By the 1780s, the neologians had embraced *liberalis theologia* as the best name for their party, now under the intellectual leadership of a commanding thinker, Immanuel Kant.[7]

The expressed aim of the original liberal theologians was to win doctrinal freedom in the church by diminishing the power of the regnant Lutheran orthodoxy. "Liberal theology" was the moniker of an agenda, achieving doctrinal freedom, and a group, the Kantian theologians. Before 1789 it was possible to fight for intellectual freedom in the German church without getting political. Kant was cagey in dealing with the politics, as were the neologians. All had to deal with the tyranny of the princes, and most were grateful to King Friedrich II (Frederick the Great) for tolerating, to a point, opinionated intellectuals. But Friedrich II died in 1786, and three years later the French Revolution broke out. Keeping religion and politics separate became impossible, especially for republican types like Kant, especially under a king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, that Kant loathed. In 1792 Kant published a book about religion, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason;* two years later the king censored Kant for disseminating wrong views about religion.

Kant submitted to silencing, waited for Friedrich Wilhelm II to die in 1797, and resumed writing about religion. *Liberalis theologia* became known, above all, for the belief that religious and political freedom go together, though Kant's first three biographers, all theologians that knew him personally, played down his republican radicalism. The public identity of liberal theology was solidified in Germany during the fall of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic invasions, an upsurge of German nationalism, and the rise of a so-called "Restorationist" government, which in fact established a new political order under the trappings of the old one. The "Restoration" of 1815 had little to do with the absolutism of eighteenth-century princes and everything to do with the rise of state absolutism.

In this historical and political context, cautious reformers like Schleiermacher and Hegel were sometimes called liberals, but ownership of the term was usually reserved for pushy types like biblical scholar Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette and philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries. Old-style rationalists such as Carl Gottlieb Bretschneider, Wilhelm Traugott Krug and H. G. Tzschirner also held out for freethinking religious liberalism. Hans-Joachim Birkner and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, countering the myth of a homogeneous German liberal tradition, rightly stress that the self-identifying liberals of Hegel's time fought as hard for human rights, freedom of opinion, and freedom of the press as they fought for their right to academic freedom in interpreting Christianity. The willingness of liberals to cause trouble on these topics was a cautionary specter to Schleiermacher, and, to Hegel in his later life, an odious one.[8]

Formally, Schleiermacher and Hegel were both liberals in religion and politics. But Schleiermacher was a moderate reformer in politics, Hegel grew cynical and conservative about politics in his later life, and in their time, "liberal theology" meant freethinking religious thought removed from the ongoing life of the Christian church.

This radical idea of liberal theology, a Kantian notion, was a non-starter for Schleiermacher. He was an every-week preacher who sharply separated his philosophy from his theology. Though Schleiermacher was a Romantic and a post-Kantian, his crowning work was a liberal dogmatics – an oxymoron to freethinking liberals. Schleiermacher saw no reason to renounce the church's tradition of dogmatic theology; what was needed was a thoroughly modern refashioning of it. Good theology held no bias against the church or its dogmatic tradition. It was completely at home in Christian communities that broke free from the old houses of authority, as long as they held out for the right to do so.

The association of liberal theology with freethinking Kantianism was sufficiently strong that even most of Schleiermacher's disciples did not call themselves liberal theologians after Schleiermacher was gone. "Mediating theology," a form of church theology holding a secure place in the academy, suited them perfectly. Only as the legacy of Schleiermacher expanded through his disciples (Carl Ullmann, C. I. Nitzsch, August Twesten, Willibald Beyschlag), and a leading Pietist (Friedrich August Tholuck), and two blenders of Schleiermacher and Hegel (Richard Rothe and Isaak August Dorner) did "liberal theology" begin to be used in a broader sense than the usual one of freethinking or scientific criticism, and even then, the name belonged mostly to freethinkers and culture-religionists.[9]

Advocates of freethinking liberal theology did not surrender the category without a fight. In the 1840s they called themselves "friends of light," espousing a radical democratic ideology often linked with democratic nationalism. Mediating theologians like Rothe and Dorner replied that they, too, believed in intellectual freedom, human rights, and liberal theology. They opposed the mid-century alliance between confessional orthodoxy and the German police state. They wanted a liberalized, united state church that held together Germany's disparate populations in a common religious culture. Germany could not be a successful empire if it lacked a unifying religion, they warned. Liberal theology as represented by later mediating theology and the movement that overtook it, Ritschlian theology, underwrote the civil religion of an expanding German empire – culture Protestantism. In that form it achieved its greatest influence and power, on degraded terms.[10]

The Ritschlian movement led by Ritschl, Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, and (before and after he morphed away) Ernst Troeltsch got some important things right; otherwise it would have lacked the power to overtake a distinguished intellectual tradition. It made an advance in modern theology by accentuating the social and historical character of religion. It was the vehicle that lifted Kant to a prominent place in church-based modern theology. It produced unsurpassed historical scholarship on Christianity, in the works of Harnack. Its Troeltschian offshoot established the history of religions approach to religion, a major achievement. But the Ritschlian School also set up German liberal theology for a mighty fall, at the very moment when Britain belatedly acquired a liberal movement.

Ironically, even the Ritschlians usually did not call themselves liberals, although they were eventually blamed for ruining liberal theology. In Ritschl's time, bourgeois optimists like Otto Pfleiderer claimed the liberal name, asserting their belief in the progress of modern culture. Pfleiderer, a religious philosopher and professor of theology at the University of Berlin, wrote influential works on the philosophy and

history of religion, conceiving his perspective as a straightforward outgrowth of Kantian, Schleiermacherian, and Hegelian idealism. At Berlin, he was the only member of the theological faculty to vote against Harnack's invitation to teach there. German theology had no need of a Ritschlian corrective, Pfleiderer believed; thus, Berlin had no need of Harnack, no matter how many shelves of books he had already written.[11]

To Pfleiderer, the line of Enlightened progress in theology ran from Kant to Fichte to Schleiermacher to Hegel to himself. He lauded Kant for overthrowing the principle of external authority in religion and for deriving the content of religious consciousness – the moral faith of practical reason – directly from the individual's inner moral experience. Kant showed that believing in God is a necessary demand of one's moral self-consciousness, which belongs to practical reason, not to the sensibility of theoretical reason. Pfleiderer lauded Fichte for replacing Kant's postulated distant God with the active presence of the divine spirit in the heart – the spiritual ground of ethical idealism. He lauded Schleiermacher for correcting Kant's excessive individualism and for introducing into theology "the fundamental thought of idealism, that the mind is able to recognize as truth only that in which it finds its own nature again."[12]

Schleiermacher, Pfleiderer explained, reunited the bond between the knowing subject and historical Christianity that Kant severed. On the other hand, Schleiermacher reopened the door to supernaturalism by lifting Jesus above the plane of ordinary human existence. Schleiermacher had the right idea – historical development – but he did not carry it out. Pfleiderer lauded Hegel as the genius that carried it out. In Hegelian idealism, Kant's subjective idealism was applied to the historical life of humanity. Hegel brilliantly conceived history as a developmental process of divine unfolding in which no point was entirely without truth and no point was the whole truth. To Pfleiderer, that was the high point of religious thought thus far, but Hegel was too one-sidedly intellectualist in conceiving religion as a thing of the thinking spirit. A thought obtains religious significance only by exciting feeling and will, Pfleiderer urged. The ideal was to combine Hegel's religion of reason with the religion of the heart as expounded by Fichte and Schleiermacher.

Pfleiderer agreed with Hume that the old rationalist idea of "natural religion" was a fantasy of rationalists – an idea about an essence of religion that never existed. The old rationalists imagined that historical religions were deformations of the original "natural" religion, which espoused rational universal truths unfettered by provincial myths, superstitions, and dogmas. But even if the old rationalists were wrong about natural religion, Pfleiderer urged, that did not mean that their latter-day successors were right in claiming that the essence of religion is irrational. This was where historical consciousness made a huge advance on the Enlightenment. The crucial difference between eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century historical consciousness was that nineteenth- century liberals understood that every living thing unfolds its essential nature "only in the whole course of its life." To understand an oak, Pfleiderer explained, one studies full-grown trees as well as acorns. To understand the essence of human beings, one does not focus solely on infants, "nor will he choose as his models the savages who are to be found in the crude state of nature."[13]

What mattered about any subject or thing was its development. German idealism and historical criticism had an evolutionary mindset before anyone heard of Charles Darwin. After Darwin, Pfleiderer's generation made evolution the master category

of thought. Pfleiderer urged that everything depended on giving priority to "what the human race has developed itself into in the course of thousands of years." Religious life and thought are not different than other fields; what matters is to advance to the highest attainable forms of moral and intellectual culture. Christianity, Pfleiderer assured, is the most developed religion. To keep development going, however, modern Christianity as a whole needed to take instruction from German religious philosophy, and to win the cultured despisers back to Christianity, German Christianity needed to become more German. Pfleiderer was nearly as popular in England as in Germany, because he wrote winsomely in both languages, but his English audience had to swallow a good deal of Teutonic-centrism.[14]

The Ritschlians agreed with Pfleiderer-style liberals about development and German intellectual superiority, but their historicism was more thoroughgoing, their theology was more deeply rooted in gospel Christianity, and they were more critical of bourgeois progressivism. They believed that these differences shielded them from going overboard with cultural conceits and German nationalism. If cultural Protestants like Pfleiderer and Arthur Bonus were liberals, the Ritschlians were inclined to let them have the term. Ritschlians prized their differences with the Pfleiderer liberals, a point of pride that seemed ridiculous to a succeeding generation after Barth's Ritschlian teachers enlisted Christianity in the cause of German militarism. Birkner and Graf, explaining the upshot a bit too sharply, contend that "German liberal theology" was a construction of the Barthian anti-liberals of the 1920s; the Barthian reaction lumped Schleiermacher and Hegel with Ritschl and Harnack to put an end to a century of heresies.[15]

That, indeed, is how the idea of a homogenous liberal tradition was constructed, but homogeneity always falls apart whenever one looks closely at things assembled under a category such as "liberal," "rationalist," "Enlightenment," or "Barthian." There never was a homogeneous tradition of liberal theology in Germany. Nonetheless, there were core affinities that passed from Kant and Schleiermacher to Ritschl and Harnack. All theologians in this stream sought to make Christianity modern by accepting biblical criticism and the modern scientific worldview, and by fitting Christian theology to the right kind of idealism. And the liberal tradition in Germany, by whatever name, never recovered from its complicity in the Ritschlian disaster of 1914.

Meanwhile British theology took a slower and less dramatic road to making Christianity modern. Here the Anglican difference played a key role, as the Church of England, despite allowing greater doctrinal latitude than the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, proved to be more repressive over time. More important was the dramatic difference in academic institutions. By the mid-nineteenth century Germany had twenty-one universities, while England had four (Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, and London). In Germany, princes took for granted that they needed their own universities to produce clerics and administrators that managed their domains. German university instruction featured lectures; the professors that delivered them were expected to be published experts in their fields; and they were usually not required to subscribe to doctrinal standards.

In England none of these scholarship-enhancing conditions existed. Britain had a Broad Church tradition in the mid-nineteenth century that claimed the spirit of Coleridge, but it was a modest affair, and in 1860 a group of Broad Church liberals

led by Henry Bristow Wilson and Benjamin Jowett published a movement manifesto, *Essays and Reviews,* that backfired spectacularly, setting off a national furor that killed the question of liberalization for another generation. Britain had no liberalizing movement until Hastings Rashdall and a handful of Ritschlians launched parallel movements in the Anglican and non-conforming Protestant churches at the end of the nineteenth century.[16]

By then the Victorian era was ending, the British empire was fading, and the British and German empires were on a collision course. After the war, there was no reaction against British modernism for enabling the nation's fall into disaster, so the liberalizing movement carried on as before – revising Christian doctrines in the face of modern criticism, seeking to reconcile religion and science, and appropriating post-Kantian idealism. British theology refashioned mid-nineteenth-century German debates over the Christian basis of Hegel's system and the compatibility of Hegelian idealism with personal Christian theism. The British tradition modernized sufficiently that its greatest figure, William Temple, opposed the existence of an organized liberal faction; Temple wanted modernization to proceed without having to fight about it.

This was a plausible strategy for as long as post-Kantian idealism and historicism remained on the upswing in British thought. It took the Great Depression and World War II for British theology to join the reaction against the nineteenth century. Temple and Charles E. Raven, the leading British religious thinkers of the 1940s, watched the field turn against their concerns with religious philosophy, consciousness, science, and theories of emergence. Britain opted for home-brewed forms of neo-orthodoxy. A half-century later, British theology picked up where Temple and Raven had left off, rethinking the relationships between religion and science and theorizing the implications of historical and cultural relativism for disestablished Christianities.

## Kantian and Hegelian Ordering

This book emphasizes the Kantian basis of modern theology, showing that every major option from Schleiermacher and Hegel, to Kierkegaard and David Friedrich Strauss, to Ritschl and Troeltsch, to Rashdall and Temple, to Tillich and Barth got its bearings by figuring its relationship to Kantian and post-Kantian ideas. It explains the origin and theoretical basis of Whitehead's process-relational thought, but not the development of the Whiteheadian school, which was a US American phenomenon.

There is a certain asymmetry between the discussions of German and British theology that reflects what happened. All the German thinkers discussed in this book are major figures in modern philosophy or theology, while several of the British thinkers are little known outside England. Had I restricted this book to the German story, there would have been room for longer accounts of mid-nineteenth-century Mediating Theology than I provide in chapters 3 and 5. But the Mediating theologians are secondary figures in the history of theology, and here they are crowded out by my discussions of Kierkegaard, how post-Kantian idealism played out in Britain, and the Barthian revolt against liberal theology.

My argument ties Hegel and the other post-Kantians to Kant, stressing the Kantian basis of Hegel's theory of the categories and the transcendental aspects of Kant's

idealism that undergird all post-Kantian idealisms, including Kierkgaard's. Equally important, I make a case for the stronger role of Hegelian idealism in founding schools of German and British religious thought, evoking the Kierkegaardian and Marxist reactions, and helping modern theology cope with Darwinian evolution and the Nietzschean critique of theology.

The latter issue, in particular, raises contested topics in contemporary philosophy and theology. Against much of the recent scholarship on Hegel that tries to rehabilitate Hegel for philosophy departments by lopping off his metaphysical and religious commitments, I feature these aspects of Hegel's thought. But I do not do so by adopting the "system" view of Hegel's philosophy or the "right-Hegelian" tradition usually assigned to theological interpreters of Hegel. I argue for the primacy of negation in Hegel's dialectic, a dynamic panentheist reading of his religious thought, and an integral, religion-friendly view of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Schelling and Hegel, by privileging becoming over being, broke open the deadliest assumption of Western thought about the nature of (divine) reality.

Similar issues are at play in interpreting Kierkegaard, where too many academics have tried to strip their ostensible subject of the religious passions that fueled his life and thought. Postmodern renderings of Kierkegaard have rightly played up the instability, indirect communication, and heterogeneity of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, helping to deliver Kierkegaard scholarship from the blunt readings of theological types that preferred Kierkegaard's edifying mode. However, Kierkegaard was obsessed with Christianity, he certainly believed that he was stating truths amid his ironic spinning, and he also wrote works of very direct communication featuring religious beliefs. Here, as with Hegel, my aim is to hold in view a complex thinker in his wholeness, which cannot be done without taking seriously the integral role of religion in his thought.

I have a special interest in getting Hegel right because I believe that his idea of God as relational Spirit was an important anticipatory response to the critiques of onto-theology that fuel postmodern criticism. Friedrich Nietzsche rejected the God of Christian theism as an enemy of freedom and subjectivity. Martin Heidegger, contending that Western theism wrongly took being for God, sought to liberate being from the metaphysical God. Emanuel Levinas, contending that Western onto-theology wrongly took God for being, sought to dissociate God from being, conceiving God as the "other" of being. Hegel brilliantly prefigured and undercut these critiques, offering a concept of God as spiraling relationality that embraces all otherness and difference. My discussion of Tillich in chapter 8 highlights the ways in which his debts to Hegel and Schelling allowed him to take Nietzschean/Marxist/Freudian criticism seriously without losing his religious wellspring.[17]

God's infinite subjectivity, in Hegel's idea, was an infinite inter-subjectivity of holding differences together in a play of creative relationships not dissolving into sameness. Before Hegel and Schleiermacher, any theology that smacked of Spinoza was condemned as pantheistic atheism. Schelling and Hegel, reworking Spinoza's concept of substance, theorized absolute idealism as a theory of the dynamic inter-subjective in itself. Hegel, more than Schelling and Schleiermacher, put panentheism into play in modern theology by conceiving it as irreducibly dynamic and relational. God is the inter-subjective whole of wholes, not the Wholly Other. In my view, Hegel's logical mill wrongly left no room for apophatic theology, the intuition of God as the holy

unknowable mystery of the world. But Hegel's fluid, spiraling, relational panentheism changed the debate in theology about how God might relate to the world. Hegel paved the way for Troeltsch, Temple, Whitehead, Tillich, and numerous Hegelians by offering an alternative to pantheism *and* the static being-God rejected by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Levinas.[18]

The influence of Kant and Hegel in religious thought shows through not only in the schools of theology that explicitly claimed Kant, Hegel, and Schleiermacher, but in the field-upending reaction against all of them, the Barthian revolt. In his early career Barth drew deeply on Kierkegaard. Throughout his career Barth took fundamental aspects of Kant's dualism so much for granted that he rarely bothered to discuss them. He gave greater attention to Hegel, with whom he had fundamental disagreements, except for the large matters of doctrinal ambition and logic on which he closely resembled Hegel. He took core aspects of his theology from his teacher, Herrmann, and refashioned them. And he kept returning to Schleiermacher because Schleiermacher was his great foil, the one who defined Barth negatively by approaching dogmatics in exactly the wrong way – unless, perhaps, Schleiermacher was best understood as a theologian of the Holy Spirit. The liberal tradition lost its ownership of modern theology after Barth turned against his teachers, and modern theology immediately became more interesting and profound.

I shall emphasize the implication of liberal theology in nationalism, imperialism, and white supremacism, but not because I am out to discredit liberal theology or its appeal to ideals. Liberal theology, by virtue of being liberal and Christian, might have been expected not to denigrate the humanity of non-Caucasian human beings or to rationalize imperialism. Both practices violated the Christian norm that all people are children of God bearing God's image and spirit, and the Enlightenment norm that all people must be treated as ends-in-themselves, not as means to an end. But Christianity had a thin history of advocating social justice of any kind, and liberalism had no history that was not infected with the personal and social inheritance of slavery, nationalism, white supremacism, empire, misogyny, and class oppression. To believe in progress required overlooking a great many exceptions. For beneficiaries of the expanding English and German empires, the facile solution to the contradiction was that the world would improve with the cultural and commercial advance of one's nation, in which a strong military had a vital role to play. This was a sustaining faith, long on pretensions paralleled in every empire, until both nations were pulled down by war and imperial debacles.

Religious idealism was not much of a brake on all that. But we tend to hold idealists to a higher standard than self-professed realists, skeptics, conservatives, materialists, and nihilists because the idealists stubbornly insist on the necessity of holding an ideal, even if it is unattainable. We expect philosophical idealism to lead to social idealism, even after we understand that often it does not. In the Kantian revolution that launched modern theology, powers of mind were said to be fundamental to human life and experience. The seemingly unstoppable march of materialistic empiricism was stopped in its tracks. Enlightenment, at least as conceived by Kant and the post-Kantians, dethroned the things of sense, offering a new way to color the world religiously without bowing to antiquated dogmas. And it did so while taking seriously the reality of radical evil. Enlightenment reason, seemingly no friend to religion, inspired a modern departure in

religious thought by mapping the epistemological and spiritual ground of freedom and imagining a cosmopolitan commonwealth of freedom.

## Ideal and Normative, Subjective and Objective

Any attempt to show the impact of German and British idealism on theology must take up notoriously complex and disputed questions about how to interpret German idealism. Much of the complexity and disagreement owes much to the fact that philosophical "idealism" has two significantly different meanings that German and British idealists often mixed together. In philosophy, the "ideal" can refer to spiritual or mental ideality as contrasted with the material or physical, or it can refer to a normative ideal as contrasted with the substantive. Idealism in the first sense, subjective idealism, is the idea that there is no reality without self-conscious subjectivity. The classic form is Berkeley's doctrine that only the ideas of individual minds are real. Idealism in the second sense, objective idealism, is the idea that everything is a manifestation of the ideal, an unfolding of reason. Plato and Leibniz taught that all reality conforms to the archetypes of some intelligible structure. One can easily affirm the equal and independent reality of the spiritual and material on objective idealistic grounds, but strongly subjective forms of idealism are more expansive and exclusive. As Frederick Beiser observes, subjective idealism stretches the concept of the mental to do the work of the ideal or the rational, making it the world's entire reality. The logic of subjective idealism, left unchecked, drives toward the triumph of subjectivism.[19]

This issue permeates the questions of how Kant's system and the legacy of post-Kantian idealism should be understood. Transcendental realism is the idea that truth consists in the conformity of concepts to objects. Kant's transcendental idealism, though not lacking realistic aspects, rested on the opposite idea, that truth consists in the conformity of objects to concepts. The field of Kant studies is a battleground over the nature and extent of Kant's conceptualism, which plays out as a debate over subjective versus objective idealism. Subjective and objective idealisms are both idealistic in claiming that reality depends upon the ideal or the rational. Subjective idealism, however, binds the forms of experience to the transcendental subject. In subjective idealism, the transcendental subject is the precondition of the forms of experience, and the ideal or the rational is subjective or spiritual. Objective idealism, on the contrary, detaches the forms of experience from the transcendental subject. Here the forms of experience apply to the realm of being as such, and the ideal or the rational is archetypal and structural.

This distinction correlates with the two chief traditions of interpreting Kant. Many leading scholars, notably H. A. Prichard, P. F. Strawson, Jonathan Bennett, and Robert Paul Wolff contend that Kant was a subjective idealist. Advocates of this view emphasize Kant's affinities with Descartes, Hume, and, especially, Berkeley, arguing that Kant's transcendental idealism was the key to his system: We have no direct knowledge of reality; immediate objects of perception are the ideas of a perceiving subject; all that we know are our own representations, the appearances of things; the reality of an independent world must be inferred from our representations. This school of interpretation maintains that Kantianism is coherent only as a thoroughgoing

form of subjective idealism contending that we cannot know anything beyond experience. On this reading, which dates back to the earliest reviews of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant's transcendental idealism was a rationalistic refashioning of Berkeley's idealism that lopped off Berkeley's empiricism and misguidedly appealed to the thing-in-itself.[20]

The rival tradition of interpretation contends that Kant was insistently anti-subjective and that the key to his system was his determination to overcome the skepticism of Descartes, Hume, and Berkeley. Even if the thing-in-itself was a mistake, the objectivist aspects of Kant's thought must be taken seriously. Kant's "subjectivism" was actually a form of objective idealism in which the ideas of the knowing subject were *determined* by the intersubjective world of the concepts of the understanding. In this reading, the ideas of the individual mind are not primary in Kant's system; rather, as Kant argued in the Transcendental Deduction of the first *Critique,* the *a priori* concepts of the understanding constitute an intersubjective order that is the necessary condition of any ideas that the individual mind may have. Contrary to the subjectivist interpretation, Kant's doctrine of the categories of understanding is epistemological, not psychological. The forms of understanding are conditions of the possibility of experience, not objects within experience. As the conditions by which something might be identified as subjective or objective, the forms of understanding are not subjective or objective. Leading exponents of this interpretation include the neo-Kantian Marburg School (Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, Ernst Cassirer) and, more recently, Karl Ameriks, Graham Bird, Henry Allison, and Arthur Collins. In this reading, Kant's transcendental idealism was much closer to Schelling and Hegel than to Berkeley and Hume.[21]

Both of these interpretive traditions have impressive prooftexts from the first *Critique* and other works of Kant. Both are predisposed to make Kant's position logically consistent, even if that requires playing down or eliminating some aspect of Kant's thought that he emphasized. A third major tradition of interpretation, taking hold of the contradictions between the subjectivist and anti-subjectivist readings, has long maintained that Kant mixed these two doctrines. In some cases, scholars have espoused "patchwork" theories, claiming that the first *Critique* incoherently patched together conflicting doctrines from different stages of Kant's development. Hans Vaihinger and Norman Kemp Smith wrote the classic works of patchwork theory.[22] More recently, Ralph Walker, Sebastian Gardner, and Frederick Beiser have argued that the mixture view is right, but not as a patchwork. Persistently, from the first *Critique* onward, Kant sought to steer a middle path between subjective and objective idealism, which left him with somewhat ambiguous doctrines about ideas and transcendental idealism. In this reading, Kant's critical idealism is best understood as a form of subjective idealism that struggled against subjectivist captivity.[23]

My reading of Kant is closest to Beiser's mixed-theory interpretation, although I have differences with Beiser on related issues, and I will argue that Kant never straightened out key sections of the first *Critique.* The patchwork theory, though wrong about Kant's essential coherence, rightly stressed that Kant assembled much of the first *Critique* by collecting it. Moreover, in the first edition of the first *Critique,* Kant expounded a problematic doctrine of the transcendental object, which he eliminated in the most relevant sections of the second editions, but not elsewhere – probably because he couldn't face up to rewriting certain sections.

The basis of Kant's position was subjective idealism, since Kant contended that the forms of experience derive from the transcendental subject. But Kant warded off extreme subjectivism by insisting that the matter of experience is given, and he provided the starting point of post-Kantian objective idealism by contending that the very possibility of self-consciousness depends on universal forms of experience. To render Kant as a thoroughgoing subjective or objective idealist is to misconstrue his position and the mediating spirit behind it.

Kant's discussions of transcendental idealism in the first *Critique* expounded his subjective idealist starting point, but he also made statements in the first and third *Critiques* about the universal forms of experience that qualified his subjectivism. The latter forms became the basis of post-Kantian objective idealism, though in a tangled process. The differences between subjective and objective idealism were not elaborated until Hegel tried to explain them in 1801, and even Hegel did not straighten out the matter, as his rendering was peculiar to his emerging position. By then, "absolute idealism" was in play as a name for the view that everything is ideal as an aspect or appearance of the absolute idea. Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schlegel, in the late 1790s, described their idealism as "absolute," a name that Schelling and Hegel took up in the journal they co-edited for two years (1802–1803), *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*.[24]

There was no bright-line difference between objective and absolute idealism, but for those that preferred the latter name, it signified that good idealism transcended subjectivity versus objectivity. Absolute idealism was about the "unconditioned" or the "in-itself." Here again, "idealism" could mean two different things. Everything is a manifestation of the idea or reason, such that ideal status refers to that which is inside the absolute. Or, all oppositions between the subjective and objective, or the ideal and the real, have an ideal existence, not a real one, in which case ideal status refers to that which is outside the absolute. The point of absolute idealism was to overcome Kantian dualism, yet even here, "idealism" was never just one thing. The fact that idealism is never just one thing compounds its complexity and elusiveness. Sometimes German and British idealists stressed this point, often they ignored it, sometimes they straddled it confusedly, and the most noted critics of idealism, such as F. H. Jacobi and G. E. Moore, tended to purchase intelligibility and polemical advantage by treating their subject as just one thing.[25]

Kant revolutionized philosophy by asking two questions: How should one explain the possibility of knowledge? And how should one account for the reality of the external world? His dilemma, which has perplexed philosophers ever since, was that solving either of these problems undermines the answer that one needs to solve the other one. To solve the first question, one has to demonstrate some kind of identity between subject and object, for if the subject and object are completely distinct from each other, they cannot interact to produce knowledge. But to explain the reality of the external world, one has to establish some kind of dualism between subject and object; otherwise objects are not really independent of our subjectivity. Kant's rich, twisting, turgid, and conflicted wrestling with this problem yielded what Beiser aptly calls "a synthesis of subjectivism and objectivism in transcendental idealism" and a wide array of competing interpretations of what he said, yielding similar readings about the post-Kantian alternatives that succeeded him.[26]

For two centuries, Hegelian interpretations dominated scholarly discussion of the meaning of German idealism. In this rendering, Kant took up the Cartesian notions that only self-knowledge is certain and that the immediate objects of knowledge are ideas, which raised the question of radical subjectivism: Does the knowing subject have immediate knowledge only of its own ideas? Kant, in this account, set German idealism on the path of saying "yes," but balked at going through with it. Fichte and Schelling made creative attempts to push farther, conceptualizing Kant's transcendental self as the source of experience in form and content, but they got only so far. Hegel saw the matter through by expanding the unbroken circle of consciousness to embrace everyone, construing the absolute as an infinite mind. Hegelianism solved the clash of idealisms by taking absolute idealism as far as possible: Everything is an appearance of the idea, the structure of reality in general. Josiah Royce, the greatest Anglo-American interpreter of German idealism, taught that this was the meaning of German idealism. For better or worse, Hegel's absolute idealism culminated the tradition launched by Kant.[27]

Royce was emphatically an advocate of "better." His Hegelian understanding of history led straight to his lucid rendering of the Hegelian meaning of German idealism. Other leading interpreters of the "Kant to Hegel" story took a similar line, whether or not they were Hegelians. Karl Rosenkranz, a theologian of the original Hegelian school, interpreted German idealism from this standpoint, as did Richard Kroner and Nicolai Hartmann, though Kroner and Hartmann were sympathetic to Hegel only in a broad fashion, not as school Hegelians.[28]

More importantly, the Royce/Kroner version of what happened and what it meant was taken for granted by all manner of idealists, realists, pragmatists, phenomenologists, existentialists, Marxists, positivists, and analytic philosophers. William James assumed Royce's account of German idealism when James famously described idealism as a doctrine of "absolute all-withness" that related all things to each other "by throwing 'categories' over them like a net." Philosophical idealism was a rescue operation for an idealist problem, James contended. It detached experience from reason and truth in order to make a case for a "unifying higher agency" that united the world. James, at least, sympathized with ethical idealism; outright anti-idealists liked Royce's account because it gave ballast to their dismissal of idealism as subjectivism run wild, the swallowing of everything by ego. For many critics, taking Hegelianism seriously absolved them from having to bother any further with idealist philosophy.[29]

Recent interpreters of German idealism, including some who have influenced me, have sought to renew interest in their subject by diminishing Hegel's place within it. I am more sympathetic with the Hegelian reading of the idealist tradition. In my view, Kant's critical idealism led to post-Kantian objective idealism, the conversion of Kant's transcendental self into a metaphysical principle, which led to Hegel's idea of a universal self or Spirit. I do not share Beiser's interest in "exorcising the spirit" from philosophical idealism or his related tendency to downgrade Hegel's importance. But I share Beiser's view that the German idealist story is not about the triumph of subjectivism. Kant, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Hegel, and even the later Fichte resisted the aggressive logic of subjective idealism. German idealism, by taking so seriously the problems of subjectivity and freedom, could not avoid the problem of subjectivism. But it would not have been such a rich, powerful, complex, conflicted, and even

tortured tradition had it simply opted for an ego trapped inside the circle of consciousness, and its rhetoric of freedom would have been meaningless had it done so.

Kant's transcendental idealism was subjectivist in attaching all appearances to a transcendental subject. But Kant's idealism was objectivist in conceiving the intersubjective forms of experience as *necessary conditions* of ideas, not as ideas. Moreover, post-Kantian idealists construed the absolute in transcendental terms as the condition of the possibility of experience. It was not subjective or objective, because subjectivity and objectivity fall within experience. The logic of the absolute, as a concept, militates against rendering it as either subjective or objective; otherwise it cannot be unlimited.[30]

On the mediating ambiguity of Kant's transcendentalism and the German idealist struggle against subjectivism, I am indebted to Beiser. On the primacy of freedom in Kant's thought and the primacy of negation in Hegel's dialectic, I am indebted to Dieter Henrich, under whom I studied Kant and Hegel at Harvard in the mid-1970s. Henrich launched the revisionist wave of scholarship in this area, stressing the "keystone of freedom" in Kant's thought, the importance of Schelling and Hölderlin in the development of German idealism, and the role of negation in Hegel's thought. Beiser and others build on Henrich's pathbreaking scholarship, and that of Manfred Frank, when they emphasize the importance of the Romantics to German idealism and resist the theory of Hegelian culmination. To some extent this book takes a similar tack by treating Schelling as an important religious thinker on his own, explaining Hölderlin's role in the early development of absolute idealism, and stressing Fichte's role in launching post-Kantian criticism. I will argue that Schelling was, for a time, the most brilliant and original of the post-Kantian idealists, however much he truncated his own legacy by radically changing course three times, lapsing into silence in the middle, and allowing Hegel to overtake him.[31]

I have much at stake in my arguments about how German and British idealism should be understood. But my overriding concern is the importance of German and British idealism in modern theology and the Barthian reaction against it. If I were not principally concerned with theology, I would have given greater attention to Friedrich Schlegel and F. H. Bradley. But Schlegel had little impact on religious thought, and British theologians viewed Bradley's impersonal idealism as something to overcome. Moreover, the dominant story about Hegel's culminating importance had a large impact.

Whether or not Hegel culminated German idealism, a great many religious thinkers in Germany and Britain were quite sure that he did. In his lifetime, Hegel had a strong following of theologians and religious philosophers. After he died it acquired cultic overtones. Hegelians of that generation had read Fichte and Schelling; most of them knew Schelling personally. They knew that Hegel had not originated some of the Hegelian ideas for which he was famous – dialectic, self-positing spirit, the absolute as the identity of identity and nonidentity, alienation. That didn't matter. Hegel was the genius that synthesized the riches of German idealism. More importantly, for religious thinkers who lived intellectually in the modern world but for whom giving up on metaphysical reason was unacceptable, no one came close to Hegel as an intellectual guide and savior. Above all, I will argue, Hegel's brilliant obsession with the emergence of social subjectivity – the collective self-transformations of Spirit – yielded the richest intellectual legacy of any modern Western thinker.