



Rethinking German Idealism

S. J. McGrath & Joseph Carew



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Editors

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ISBN 978-1-137-53513-9 ISBN 978-1-137-53514-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-53514-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016939278

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Printed on acid-free paper

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Introduction: What Remains of German Idealism?

Joseph Carew and S.J. McGrath

The ‘death’ of German Idealism has been decried innumerable times since its revolutionary inception, whether by the nineteenth-century critique of Western metaphysics, phenomenology, the various strands of contemporary French philosophy, or the founding figures of analytic philosophy. Even more recently, some strands of speculative realism and new materialism have sought to leave its so-called ‘excesses’ behind. The figures that here strike an accord are as diverse as the movements themselves: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Russell, Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, Maldiney, Harman, and Meillassoux, to name just a few.

Yet in the face of 200 years of sustained, extremely rigorous attempts to leave behind its legacy, German Idealism has resisted its philosophical death sentence: no attempt to situate it in the abyssal forgetfulness of a forever lost past, to render it into a mere artifact for the historically

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curious, has been able to succeed. The very fact that it continues to be an inescapable point of reference—a *negative* point of reference is, after all, a point of reference all the same—suggests, to put the matter provocatively by risking a bold claim, that the specter haunting the Western philosophical scene is not capitalism,¹ nor that of the Cartesian subject,² as has been claimed, but that of German Idealism. It persists in our thinking like a symptom we cannot get rid of, since every time we distance ourselves from it, it comes back with force—or we are forced to go back to it. For this exact reason it is timely to ask in a reflective tone: ‘What remains of German Idealism?’ In what ways do its fundamental concepts and texts still speak to us in a philosophically relevant sense such that this perpetual resurgence of, or return to, its major representatives could be judged as something positive rather than a mere setback in the advance of philosophical knowledge? Are there as yet unexcavated resources present in this tradition that could be used, resources that we may have previously overlooked when its death bell was so prematurely tolled? It is precisely this set of questions that this volume seeks to explore by presenting new, challenging reworkings of its now canonical thinkers, reworkings that have been, in many ways, only made possible by the myriad of recently developed conceptual tools now at our disposal.

For despite the fact that the tradition of German Idealism is undoubtedly a historical event whose heyday is a thing of the irretrievable past—a heyday that could never reoccur with the might it once had (if it ever will at all)—there has been an extraordinary, unpredictable increase in groundbreaking secondary literature over the course of the past decades that, criticizing and in some cases building upon the literature of the earlier twentieth and nineteenth century, radically puts into question our established notions of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Thanks to this ever-growing body of work, it no longer goes without saying, for instance, that transcendental idealism inconsistently presupposes, and hence founders because of, a ‘Platonic’ two-world hypothesis. Nor can we outright assume that the Fichtean subject falls succumb to a rampant

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Communist Manifesto,’ in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 473.

² Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), 1.

subjectivism in which all reality is a mere posit of an absolutely free ego. In terms of absolute idealism, the idea that Hegel conceives of all features of reality as manifestations of a completely and utterly self-mediating Notion—that logic and its universal and necessary dialectical moves are responsible for even the most minute details of everything that did, does, or will exist—has been contested. As for Schelling, scholars have accumulated enough textual evidence to make highly implausible the claim that he is a Protean thinker who simply changed his mind each time he put himself to the task of transposing his thoughts to paper (a trait that, supposedly, made him a bad philosopher who never had the patience to develop a philosophy really worthy of our admiration insofar as philosophy ought to strive after *a* system, *the* system). Even the picture of Hegel in which he created a strictly *a priori* system in his maturity post-Jena and then just worked out its various parts based on this initial deduced plan can no longer be defended. We have now taken full cognizance, among other things, of the various shifts in conceptual emphases and the reworking of material in light of new scientific findings throughout the three versions of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which prove that his system was, up until his death, in a state a dynamic becoming with respect to both exposition and our knowledge of the real. All of this to just highlight how there is now *more and more* need to rethink German Idealism outside of inherited wisdom, as this new body of secondary literature has shown us and passionately has done in its own way. In many cases, this wisdom just can no longer to be trusted.

Consequently, this not only opens up, but also requires us to cultivate a space for creativity in interpretation in order to do justice to these philosophers. And such creativity has found an outlet not just in academic experts. It has also found it in living philosophers. Indeed, an ever-increasing number of contemporary philosophers from both the continental and analytic traditions—ranging in diversity from Brandom and McDowell to Butler and Malabou, but also including individuals such as Habermas, Priest and Gabriel—have published on it and have explicitly, in some instances, returned to its milieu in order to find inspiration or analogues for their own thought. This is to say nothing of even older philosophers who evidently learned much from what it had to offer, such as Heidegger and Tillich. If the tradition still speaks to us, the sheer

multitude of these philosophers with such diverging interests attests to the fact it doesn't do so in a one-sided manner, that is, from the formal standpoint of a certain, limited domain of enquiry. From philosophy of language to theories of recognition, politics to metaphysics and religion, its concepts have much to offer us—and in each case we encounter a new rethinking of German Idealism, a rethinking that cashes it out in terms that make it resonate with us in a profound fashion.

And last but certainly not least, these two efforts have also been immensely aided by the ongoing work of the new historical-critical German editions of the oeuvre of these philosophers. These have not only helped us gain invaluable precision concerning the internal genesis of individual philosophers' positions,³ but have also made publicly available texts that were, in many cases, previously unpublished,⁴ lost,⁵ and even

³ For instance, we once relied on Karl Rosenkranz' dating of Hegel's Jena writings. Although the first person with access to Hegel's literary estate, he grossly miscalculated them. It was not until the work of the *Gesammelte Werke* that Hegel's handwriting, alongside its changes over the years, was put to intense statistical analysis, thereby allowing these texts—so important to the development of the mature system—to be finally properly dated. For a summary of this situation, see George di Giovanni, introduction to *Science of Logic*, by G.W.F. Hegel, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiv–xv.

⁴ The editors of Fichte's *Gesamtausgabe* have made publicly available multiple versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and various other post-Jena lecture series that were not only never published in Fichte's lifetime, but also never appeared in his posthumously edited works: *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's sämtliche Werke*, 11 vols, ed. I.H. Fichte (Berlin: Veit, 1845–1846). The fact that the former contains 49 volumes is ample evidence of the sheer amount of Fichte now available compared to in the past.

⁵ After Hegel's death, his former students came together with the rather noble thought of assembling various transcripts of the lecture series he gave and to which they had access, hoping to bring to the light of a general public the 'system' that were convinced was completed for years and presented orally in the lecture hall. However, the methodologies through which they assembled these transcripts into standalone monographs, with the aid of Hegel's own manuscripts for his lectures, is dubious at best. They paid little to no attention to changes between different lecture courses, combining them as they saw fit to guarantee the logical progression of the dialectical movement as they interpreted it. But without the original source material, it was impossible to test the suspicion that they may have falsified Hegel's own views. Indeed, it was all we had to go on to have any understanding of his views. Now, however, many manuscripts and transcripts—even ones not available to his students—have been found. When one compares these manuscripts and transcripts with the lectures published by his students, the differences between them are in no case simply philological niceties. For instance, for a succinct account of how this information may drastically challenge our historical picture of Hegel in the case of aesthetics, see Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, 'Introduction: The Shape and Influence of Hegel's Aesthetics,' in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art: The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin Lectures*, by G.W.F. Hegel, trans. Robert Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

unknown.⁶ In light of this new evidence and texts, we have no option but to rethink German Idealism.

Given these three above-mentioned conceptual tools, we can say without doubt that we are still discovering, *in both a hermeneutical and literal sense*, new aspects of the tradition, new resources to make use of. The tradition itself is, as it were, still in a state of development, constantly requiring to be rethought as a variety of recently uncovered texts, innovative interpretative camps, and contemporary philosophical commitments and methodologies force us to approach the German Idealist heritage in a different light than we once did. In short, it is an exciting time to be a German Idealist scholar or student. But what does this volume hope to add to this ever-growing body of secondary literature, philosophical re-appropriation, and historical-critical editions? Both the secondary literature of recent decades on German Idealism and the philosophical re-appropriations of this tradition raise, in their own manner, the question of what remains of German Idealism. They demand of us that we rethink, often radically, its fundamental concepts and texts. This is something we wish to underline. The former powerfully shows that we have not yet fully understood its major representatives such that, if we want to better understand our own philosophical history, even our own historical origins (for philosophy and history are indubitably woven from one and the same fabric), much interpretative work remains to be done. The latter demonstrates that there are many ways in which we can use current theoretical frameworks to breathe new life into certain fundamental concepts and texts, thereby allowing them to enter into our own debates in an often-unexpected way. The German Idealists remain our contemporaries, as if they were never our ancestors, as if they were never a thing of the past. In another vein, the historical-critical editions are, quite literally, excavating the previously unknown remains of the tradition. From all corners, German Idealism is therefore being rethought.

⁶ Schelling's *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung* was first found 160 years after being transcribed in 1831/1832 and only published in 2004 by Felix Meiner, edited by Walter E. Ehrhardt. Similar stories can be told with other transcripts from lecture series, such as the *Grundlegung der positiven Philosophie. Münchner Vorlesung WS 1832/33 und SS 1833*, edited by H. Fuhrmans (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1972). These give us new insight into the development of Schelling's thinking and even previously unknown concepts.

While these are all irreducibly important senses of the word ‘remain’ (taken in both its verbal and substantive form), each of which entails their own unique form of ‘rethinking’, this volume attempts to take a different approach.⁷ It gives ‘rethinking’ a technical meaning of its own in the context it creates. It does not limit itself to presenting new interpretations of iconic figures in order to challenge our established notions of them, although this is indeed one of its primary goals. Nor does it treat the tradition like a dead object of a past now alien to us, the subject matter of a historiography in which we coldly and with disinterest investigate what was, a tendency that some of the otherwise exciting secondary literature sometimes exhibits. Although it does look back to offer a picture of the historical ‘facts’ that is as objectively sound as possible, it does so with an eye toward the ways in which these ‘facts’, once accurately reconstructed with the conceptual tools now at our disposal, may still have potential to offer us something of profound relevance to our contemporary philosophical needs. Consequently, one may say that its approach sketches a history serviceable to life that is an alternative to the ‘monumental history’ that the young Nietzsche espouses in opposition to ‘antiquarian history’.⁸ In practicing history, even history for its own sake, this volume looks for great lessons we can still learn from the fundamental concepts and texts of German Idealism, looks for what ‘remains’ alive for us in the past in order to open up new, game-changing theoretical possibilities, and thereby endeavors to rethink the tradition by opening up a space of dialogue with the aid of the ever-increasing resources on hand that force us to drastically reconsider what German Idealism is on its own self-understanding.

But in so doing, it also tries to avoid the problem faced by monumental history. For while the latter similarly looks in the past for ‘great *stimuli*’ for the present, ‘it of course incurs the danger of becoming somewhat

⁷There are other volumes that do something very similar and deserve mention. For a non-exhaustive list: see Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore, eds, *Fichte: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Controversies* (New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1994); Henri Maler, ed., *Hegel passé, Hegel à venir* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, eds, *The New Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Jason M. Wirth, *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings of Schelling* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Paul Ashton, Toulia Nicolacopoulos, and George Vassilacopoulos, eds, *The Spirit of the Age: Hegel and the Fate of Thinking* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008).

⁸See Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,’ in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 67ff.

distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention [... T]he past itself suffers harm: whole segments of it are forgotten, despised, and flow away in an uninterrupted colourless flood, and only individual embellished facts rise out of it like islands'.⁹ In this way, the volume also distinguishes itself from the above-mentioned contemporary 'retrospections' upon German Idealism because it does not, strictly speaking, try to 'reactualize'¹⁰ or 'translate'¹¹ Kant, Fichte, Hegel or Schelling. While many of these now popular re-appropriations of German Idealism have a propensity to use the present as the criteria through which we can pick out what in the past is to be saved, or at least interesting enough to deserve conceptual re-rendering, which makes them very close to the 'monumental history' described by Nietzsche, this volume prefers to let our philosophers speak directly to us and then decide, on the basis of the historical reconstruction of their discourse—a historical reconstruction that is indeed inflected by problems that are our own because it is with passion and interest that our gaze is directed at them—in what ways their philosophies remain contemporary to our own in an untimely manner, in face of the passage of time. The emphasis is decisively different: its method is one of an interpretation informed by a general knowledge of the philosophers analyzed that, looking toward the past from the vantage point of the present, tries to discern certain truly immanent possibilities they may contain, waiting to be discovered thanks to the conceptual tools now at our disposal, for our present.

Assembling preeminent scholars and exciting, emerging voices in Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel studies from both sides of the world whose work is innovative, bold and at times daring, this volume therefore seeks to raise the question of 'What remains of German Idealism?', to rethink

⁹ Nietzsche, 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' 70–71.

¹⁰ This is a favorite term of Slavoj Žižek, who explicitly states that, for him, 'psychoanalysis is ultimately a tool to reactualize, to render actual for today's time, the legacy of German Idealism.' ('Liberation Hurts: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek (with Eric Dean Rasmussen),' <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/desublimation>).

¹¹ Markus Gabriel, for instance, speaks of offering 'translations' of the conceptual language of German Idealism 'into our time'. See *Transcendental Ontology: Essays in German Idealism* (New York: Continuum, 2011), x, 37, 132. While speaking of philosophers in a language other than their own is a necessary component of good, accessible interpretation, how exactly such translation is done effects the end product drastically.

its tradition, heritage, and legacy, in a very specific manner. It intends to offer readers a fresh look on this time-honored tradition that draws upon the groundbreaking findings of recent scholarship, newly developed methodologies and historical-critical editions—and in some cases career-long engagements with its thinkers at the philological level required by translation—with the purpose of both giving German Idealism new life and highlighting some of the many possible ways in which it still can be useful for our contemporary philosophical needs. Because these needs and the ways to address them are many, the contributors that have been selected embody a large variety of philosophical interests (transcendental philosophy, philosophy of nature, social theory, philosophy of religion), make use of quite different methodologies (phenomenology, metaphysics, aesthetics, semantics), and often have concerns that are definitively ‘off the beaten’ tracks of German Idealist scholarship convention (the mechanisms of psychological projection, anthropocentrism, globalization and technology, decolonialism). Many of the positions advocated risk being atypical, going against the grain of hermeneutical wisdom and recent proposals for new interpretations, in order to do justice to the thinkers that they discuss. Others have the courage to risk theses that many would never dare. In each case, however, there is provocation. Yet it is this kind of audacity that the body of secondary literature, the philosophical re-appropriations, and the historical-critical editions have made possible, if not demand. We hope that by bringing together such a multitude of different rethinkings we will add something stimulating to German Idealism studies that will inspire a series of further enquiries concerning how German Idealism is still alive, how it offers as yet unrealized potentials for thinking, or ways in which it fails to do so, by using the conceptual tools we now have at our disposal. The inclusion of both established and upcoming scholars from different areas of the globe, who come from different linguistic and academic backgrounds, plays a crucial role in this. It is meant as much as possible: one, to give room to those who normally—largely because untranslated into English—often fall out of the purview of typical ‘Anglo-Saxon’ scholarship and to a new generation that all too often risks being forgotten because of the ‘big names’ whose work, albeit important and praiseworthy, can be found everywhere; and, two, to help make more vivid the various ways in which we can rethink

German Idealism by drawing attention, as much as we were able to, to the great plurality of different scholars that find something important in it.¹²

So far we have only spoken in abstract terms of rethinking German Idealism in the context of the aims of this volume. In what ways, then, do we intend to do so concretely? Let's speak first in broad strokes of the organizational principle behind the ordering of the individual essays before looking at them one by one to help orient the reading to the innovative, bold and at times daring philosophical terrain it opens up.

The series of rethinkings that follow are arranged in a loose historical trajectory that covers many, though obviously by no means all, of the major developments in German Idealism. Starting with Kant, next passing over into Schelling's early philosophy, it then covers Fichte's late *Wissenschaftslehre* or Science of Knowledge before discussing the three components of Hegel's mature system (logic, nature, spirit) and moving onto Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and revelation. A final piece reflects on German Idealism as a whole, thus serving as a conclusion. While these pieces make no claim to chart the complex causes that incite the historical development from thinker to thinker—a task that surely could not be done in a single book, or even multiple volumes—our wager is that placing these thinkers side by side in accordance with the chronological dates of the main texts that are therein discussed has direct consequences for any understanding of that historical development. Few among us today may believe that German Idealism 'begins' with Kant's transcendental philosophy, only to be 'further developed' by Fichte into a subjective idealism, which is then, at its turn, 'corrected' by the objective idealism of Schelling, after which the only theoretically consistent option left is that of Hegel's absolute idealism in light of which Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and revelation must be

¹²We are, however, aware of the fact a volume 'rethinking' a philosophical tradition could have more diversity than there is here. In particular, there is an obvious lack of women among the contributors. Due to extenuating circumstances, some who were involved or interested could not in the end contribute and given the deadlines associated with publication it proved difficult to find others on short notice. While this is absolutely no justification for the omission of women from the volume, we hope that by drawing attention to our own failure and underlining the ongoing problem of representation of women in philosophy and in German Idealism studies in particular we can, at least, help raise awareness of the problem.

seen regression into the worst kind of pre-critical dogmatic philosophizing, namely Christian apologetics. This ‘history’—developed by Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, with the last step being added by the reception the old Schelling met at Berlin when he came to take over Hegel’s former Chair—is too simple. Nonetheless, even if such a traditional narrative has been largely debunked thanks to recent scholarship, old prejudices die hard. For instance, while the early and middle Schelling have since come into prominence in English literature as decisive alternatives to Hegel’s project and as having a noteworthy philosophy of nature, the late *Philosophy of Revelation* is, in many ways, still underappreciated as a philosophical text. So important in its own time, it has yet to even be translated.¹³ And if it is spoken of at all, its fundamental thematic—the historical consciousness of God in mythology and revelation—is usually downplayed or outright ignored. Similarly Fichte, particularly the post-Jena Fichte, is taken little notice of, although that is beginning to change. Here too we still lack important translations. It is difficult to not see in this textual state of affairs vestiges of the traditional, Hegelian narrative that declares these philosophers as less worthy of our attention. But as the pieces here assembled show, once we let these philosophers speak for themselves, and then set them side by side in accordance with their chronological order, we can demonstrate, once and for all, not only that we must decisively leave behind such narratives in which the tribunal of history has wrongly decided on the superiority of a given thinker or thinkers over others and opt instead for a history of philosophy more in tune to the positions of each. Just as importantly, the reconstructions supplied by the pieces that follow point to the ways in which the texts that they discuss may unexpectedly prove to be of much relevance today, rather than merely exhibiting the internal consistency that one admires in a production of reason. In this way, we hope that the series of rethinkings we have collected together will motivate new studies of these thinkers and their writings, which one may have, without knowing, dismissed thanks to inherited prejudices, by showing the power of each.

¹³A translation of the Paulus transcript of the inaugural lectures is, however, in preparation by Michael Vater and Joseph Carew.

In ‘Kant’s Philosophy of Projection: The Camera Obscura of the *Inaugural Dissertation*’, Constantin Rauer seeks to answer the question of what remains of Kant. While many have approached this problem in terms of Kant’s mature critical philosophy, Rauer instead draws upon an overlooked parallel that exists between the three kinds of possible errors in logical judgment outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the three kinds of projection outlined in the *Inaugural Dissertation*. In this way, he shows how the critical philosophy itself is a continuation of an earlier confrontation with a certain kind of irrational psychological mechanism involved in speculation, which he describes in great detail. Rauer then demonstrates that this not only forces us to radically rethink the critical philosophy and in particular its critique of metaphysics, but also that it could give us a large amount of resources for making this critique even more powerful and relevant for us today. While post-Kantian idealism tried to develop new, sophisticated methods that would make speculation once again possible by showing how thought can go beyond the critical limits of knowledge without going blind, insofar as they could not have been familiar with Kant’s philosophy of projection it could be the case that they cannot respond to its theoretical worries concerning the irrationality of speculation. And since the contemporary resurgences of metaphysics in continental and analytic philosophy would likewise have to show how they do not fall succumb to projection in their own work, Rauer argues that Kant proves just as much alive as ever in his critique of pure reason.

Alexander Schnell’s essay ‘The Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in the Work of F.W.J. Schelling’ strikes a similar theme. First meditating on the contemporary revival of metaphysics in speculative realism, anthropology, and neuroscience, Schnell then suggests that, for us, all so-called ‘philosophies of the subject’ appear to lack any pertinence. We are no longer satisfied reducing things to human language, experience, or production of sense. If this is the case, can Schelling’s transcendental period even have any purchase for us today? Schnell’s perhaps initially counterintuitive thesis is that it indeed does. But how? To the extent that Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, battling against the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* in which in which all reality is a product of the ego, attempts to sketch the transcendental genesis of

genuine transcendence—of something that is, in fact, irreducibly other to the ego and its constituting powers—from within the presuppositions of transcendental philosophy itself. This is a highly innovative move within the history of the latter, which Schnell reconstructs with finesse. The idea motivating Schnell's return to the history of transcendental philosophy from within a contemporary context that disdains all 'philosophies of the subject' is that for any philosopher who desires both to be a realist in a strong sense and remain committed to a critical, non-dogmatic thinking, Schelling's success or failure at the task of explaining transcendence transcendently will help pave the way for a new philosophy that might be able to do so more persuasively.

In "Animals, Those Incessant Somnambulists": A Critique of Schelling's Anthropocentrism', Devin Zane Shaw takes up Schelling's philosophy of nature as developed in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the *Treatise On Human Freedom*. In this sense, he continues the theme broached by Schnell's paper concerning the contemporary disdain for 'philosophies of the subject', but now from the opposite angle. As Shaw notes, these two Schellingian texts, which attempt to sketch a new alternative for philosophy beyond the subjectivism of Kant and Fichte, and thus anticipate current metaphysical concerns, have been rediscovered and revitalized by contemporary scholars for the precise reason that they prioritize being over thinking, the world over humanity, in a way that is seen as a necessary corrective for our own anthropocentric cultural worldview. These scholars therefore claim that Schelling has much to offer any philosophy that wishes to think the intrinsic value of nature and the ways in which we depend on it. Shaw argues that while there may indeed a sense in which Schelling upsets this worldview in these texts by powerfully reviving the question of nature, he ultimately privileges humanity thanks to the latter's capacity for reason. Consequently, a careful reconstruction of Schelling's texts points to ways in which he is, in fact, problematic for any attempt to rethink nature. If Schelling's career is marked by an avid anthropocentrism, however, Shaw concludes by showing how his identity-philosophy, a still under-researched period of his huge corpus, might have already sketched a way out of anthropocentrism and therefore supply us with the resources that we require.

In his piece ‘The Non-Existence of the Absolute: Schelling’s *Treatise On Human Freedom*’, Cem Kömürçü shows how Schelling’s late metaphysics gives new life to the arts and in particular poetry. Famously, Schelling here offers a radically new interpretation of the classical distinction between existence and the ground of existence by shifting the emphasis from the ‘reason’ for why something is to the question of how something arises from its dark ‘origin’. In a move that anticipates Derrida and Heidegger, Schelling thereby demonstrates that rationality cannot ultimately explain why something is because the very structure of explanation presupposes that the distinction between existence and the ground of existence has already arisen, but there is nothing in the ground taken as ground that necessitates that existence arise from it. Kömürçü argues that this forces us to conclude that the Absolute is a paradoxical ‘non-ground’ that diverges into these two terms so that the ordered structure of the world becomes possible and in so diverging always serves as its implicit background, a background that is strictly speaking non-existent because it logically subsists ‘beyond’ the ordered structure of the world. As such, it can never be rationally recovered. Since the most important things in life therefore cannot be *known*, they can at best be *shown*—which is why, for Kömürçü, the *Treatise On Human Freedom* itself is largely a work of mytho-poetics and can help us to explain why poets are often so great philosophers.

The next piece by F. Scott Scribner, entitled ‘Disorientation and Inferred Autonomy: Kant and Schelling on Torture, Global Contest and Practical Messianism’, shifts from more generally speaking metaphysical concerns to political ones (although they are interrelated). Taking as its starting point two central techniques of modern scientific torture—extreme sensory deprivation and stress-positions—it seeks to show how these not only derive from globalization, but also from the conflict between faith and reason inherited by German Idealism. Kant’s account of orientation as a mediator in this conflict plays a crucial role in his discussion. While Kant uses it as a groundwork for a particular kind of rational faith within the Enlightenment framework, the Enlightenment has since been criticized both for robbing us of our orientation in the world and making modern scientific torture possible. This challenges the widespread view concerning Kant’s ongoing relevance for contemporary

political discourse in an important way. It is in this context of Kant's inability to think the potentially negative implications of his own position, however, that Scribner argues that Schelling's second draft of the *Ages of the World* takes on new meaning. Here developing a new 'system of times', Schelling tries to combat such a loss of orientation in the world by outlining a practical messianism in which we can, retrospectively, give new meaning to globalization as the technological matter from which spirit can arise. It is crucial to here note that Scribner evidently rethinks readings of Schelling as an avowedly apolitical thinker.

The political theme is then continued by Jean-Christophe Goddard, who offers an extremely innovative, anthropological interpretation of Fichte in 'The Beech and the Palm Tree: Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a Project of Decolonization'. This interpretation, though highly idiosyncratic, is the result of a whole career dedicated to Fichte studies, including commentaries and translations. Concentrating on the *Addresses to the German Nation*, typically seen as laying the conceptual foundations for German nationalism, Goddard argues that it in fact holds the key for comprehending the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a whole. By developing a complex model of decolonization, it allows us to understand various versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as unified. Interpreted thusly, the *Wissenschaftslehre*, rather than being a species of Kantian transcendentalism or German mysticism, reveals itself as an ethnopsychiatric practice (a *medicinam mentis*) that aims at the liberation of a people (the German people) from their colonizers (the French under Napoleon, who are the emblem of the inner logic of the Western reason that has already captivated the German mind). If Fichte appears to talk about epistemology or metaphysics, it is merely because the *Wissenschaftslehre* must first make use of the foreign language of the West—the language of the subjugators whose values have been internalized—to then overcome it, which demands inventing a new language outside of its fundamental dichotomies (for example, being/appearance). This is how we ought to understand Fichte's insistence on the necessarily *oral* nature of his work, its *performativity*: it is as an attempt at collective emancipation. According to Goddard, what makes Fichte so relevant for us today is thus that he shows us how we, as Westerners, could also participate in a project of decolonialization. For if Western reason has led to colonialism, then it is

only through a *Wissenschaftslehre* as an ethnopsychiatric practice that any Western peoples could effectively step outside of it.

The subsequent three articles provide rethinkings of the three major divisions of Hegel's mature system (although each text refers to the other parts). Although other German Idealists have come into their own as independent thinkers to be taken seriously, Hegel still stands strong. In 'Hegel on the Universe of Meaning: Logic, Language, and Spirit's Break from Nature', Joseph Carew, drawing on and correcting many recent 'deflationary' readings of Hegel, argues that Hegel's *Science of Logic* is a highly original theory of semantics. It describes how logic, as the pure structure of thinking, the medium of which is conceptualization, must display a deep bond with the natural languages in which concepts come to be born as ways of comprehending the world. Otherwise, language could not be capable of comprehension at all. This entails that logic, rather than being simply concerned with the principles of proof, must also explain the conditions of the possibility of the universe of meaning that we, as linguistic beings, create in order to give meaning to the world. There is no question of it being a straightforward metaphysics. But Carew then goes on to show that Hegel's *Logic* is not only of ongoing interest because it develops an highly original theory of semantics that could be put in dialogue with contemporary philosophies of language. Given that the categories of logic constitute a self-contained, self-justifying system, the very fact that we are linguistic beings means, as Carew argues, that we are driven to break from nature to bring forth a world of spirit that obeys its own norms. In this way, Hegel gives a logical account of how language metaphysically creates the very *hiatus* separating first and second nature. Yet Hegel does so in such a way that the latter is not only irreducible to the former, but that there is no longer and obscurity or mystery about this irreducibility. As such, Carew not only sketches a new option for understanding Hegelian metaphysics from within a deflationary reading of the *Logic*, but also shows how this understanding advances a fruitful defence of the humanities.

In 'Towards a New Reading of Hegelian Nature: Lack and the Problem of the Spurious Infinite', Wes Furlotte rethinks Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and its contemporary purchase. Going against its widespread, almost universal dismal due to its so-called speculative excesses, even

among Hegel scholars, Furlotte demonstrates that these traditional, highly critical readings are misleading. Focusing on Hegel's description of nature as overridden by rational self-externality and contingency, he argues that nature must *lack* the interiority and necessity that Hegel ascribes to thinking and the products of spirit. Through a detailed analysis of Hegel's theory of the animal organism, which Hegel himself describes as the pinnacle of nature, Furlotte shows how Hegelian nature could never be an organic, metaphysically harmonious whole in light of the plurality of ways in which the animal is thrown into its environment, caught up in the spurious infinite of sexual reproduction, and the never-ending cycle of violence and death. As a result, it resists full conceptual determination at every step, just like the rest of nature must by implication. In an age like ours where there is a resurgence of interest in nature as having a life other than us, Hegelian nature therefore presents contemporary metaphysics with a wealth of material to draw upon.

Next, Adrian Johnston in 'Absolutely Contingent: Slavoj Žižek and the Hegelian Contingency of Necessity' uses Žižek's rethinking of Hegel's metaphysics as a foil to broach the question of whether Hegel himself has something to offer contemporary Marxism. *Pace* traditional readings of Hegel as a philosopher of absolute necessity, Žižek adamantly stresses that any necessity that we might speak of in Hegel's system is a only retroactive rewriting of an otherwise absolutely contingent becoming. Johnston argues that although much of recent leading Hegel scholarship agrees with Žižek concerning the insurmountable role of contingency in his system, Žižek risks pushing the point too far. He risks making Hegel into a philosopher of the unpredictable event. In this regard, Hegel would be critical of Žižek. If we look at the modal categories developed in the *Science of Logic*, we see that he articulates the logico-metaphysical conditions of a contingent becoming that is always guaranteed to be minimally intelligible in advance. While this entails, just as in Žižek's rethinking of Hegel, that there is no 'end of history' because history is necessarily open, it does allow us to give 'weak predictions' of what *might* happen, which Žižek prohibits. For Johnston, it is precisely in supplying such a framework for limited prediction in which we could meaningfully look for the 'germs of communism' in the world around us that Hegel shows himself as truly relevant. This framework supplies the hope, however tenuous, required for political action.

Very fittingly, the next two pieces focus on the late Schelling and his response to Hegel's system. Although it is uncertain whether Schelling's own reading of Hegel is indeed the correct one, the force of his response to the dangers he perceives in it, and by consequence what he refers to as 'negative philosophy' as a type of philosophical thinking, demonstrates the strength and originality of his late philosophy of mythology and revelation as something to be taken absolutely seriously. It is one of the most powerful moments in German Idealist thought. In 'The Difference Between Schelling and Hegel', S.J. McGrath begins by arguing against the still prevalent criticism of the work of Schelling as negatively 'Protean' in that he is constantly changing his position. While this has been taken to mean that Schelling lacked systematic prowess, for McGrath it shows how Schelling was a great philosopher of the real taken as a hidden ground that can always displace thinking—as something that thinking has to be ready to admit it can never master—like it could according to Schelling's rendering of Hegel. McGrath brings this point home by making a crucial distinction: although Schelling refuses *system building* in light of the fact that human rationality can only ever have a partial take on the whole of what is, he is nevertheless a decisively *systematic thinker* whose particular thought products are highly consistent on their own terms. McGrath then goes on to demonstrate that it is precisely in light of this distinction that Schelling proves his importance for us. For while contemporary philosophy similarly refuses system building, as seen in the standpoints of the obscurantist and the cynic, Schelling's philosophy, particularly of the late period, does not abjure reason even when it declares its intrinsic limitations at knowing reality. Schelling thereby develops a complex form of systematicity without system—rational claims that are open to reformulation in virtue of reality and the history of thinking itself—in which a genuine scientific humility for philosophical investigation can be found, the major features of which McGrath sketches with precision with recourse to the kenotic ontology that Schelling develops at the end of his career, which he saw as the consummation of his life's work.

In 'And Hence Everything is Dionysus: Schelling and the Cabiri in Berlin', Jason M. Wirth takes up the thematic of religion in Schelling's late philosophy of mythology and religion, which is broached in

McGrath's piece, to determine whether or not the latter's interpretation of Christianity can have any lasting relevance for us. Summoned to Berlin to take over Hegel's chair, Schelling's ascent was a highly anticipated event in the German intellectual scene. But the so-called positive philosophy offered a rethinking of the Christian God as historically developing out of the metaphysical potencies of being itself, a process that explicitly linked Christianity to times prior to Incarnation in Greek religion. Schelling traded the rationalism of what he called negative philosophy for a paradoxical form of thinking in which we, as Hölderlin already suggested, must await drunkenly for the coming gods—traded traditional argumentation for a literal expansion of consciousness that entails a new, sacred manner of inhabiting the earth. Such a move was not well received in his own time, as it is well known, and Wirth concludes by provocatively arguing how it might be the case that we are only truly ready to receive it now. In an age where we are destroying the very nature that gives us life, it is necessary for us to rethink the possibly religious dimensions of the great catastrophe that we face, for in so doing we may find novel solutions to it. By articulating a philosophical religion founded upon the fecundity and inexhaustible earth of existence, Schelling's late philosophy is of paramount importance.

The concluding article of this volume 'Beyond Modernity: The Lasting Challenge of German Idealism' by Konrad Utz is a retrospective take on the German Idealist tradition as a whole with an eye toward our contemporary philosophical problems. Utz maintains that German Idealism is the pinnacle of modernity because it takes its three major features—a growing concern for the irreducibility of the finite subject, the attempt to link together individualization and universalization, and human freedom—and articulates them into a philosophical system. Its great achievement, however, is also its great failure. For in trying to articulate a philosophical system, each of its representatives has a tendency to downplay the role of the particular metaphysically, ethically, and politically by an identification of the individual with the universal. Kant vividly demonstrates the problem: in giving myself the law, I become universal reason, which excludes the particular as that which is irreducibly in-between both the individual and the universal. Reacting against the system thinking of the German Idealists, what Utz refers to as