

AT THE LIMIT OF THE CONCEPT: LOGIC AND HISTORY IN HEGEL, SCHELLING AND ADORNO

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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January 2016

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I show how the challenges of producing a philosophy of history responsive to the negativity of the world benefits from working through the difficulties of G. W. F. Hegel's systematic philosophy. By revealing the powerful and intricate ways that Hegel gives an illegitimate primacy to thought (or the concept) we can better appreciate the obstacles that face a philosophy which places new emphasis on the nonconceptual whilst recognising the genuine role of the concept. In the first half of this thesis I reconstruct the important criticisms levelled at Hegel by F. W. J. Schelling and Theodor W. Adorno. I argue that both their criticisms illuminate our understanding of the metaphysical status of Hegel's thought and expose the surreptitious means by which Hegel overextends the concept. The value of Adorno's and Schelling's reading of Hegel is also due to the fact that they do not cast aside Hegel's ambitions as mere fantasy. Rather, they provide important insight into the goals philosophy should be striving towards—even if we cannot be as confident as Hegel in their imminent achievement.

In the second half I reconstruct Schelling's and Adorno's philosophies of history in light of their criticisms of Hegel. The core problem addressed is how unwarranted optimism – entailed by the idealistic operation in Hegel's theoretical philosophy – is to be eschewed whilst also avoiding a lapse into unwarranted pessimism. I argue that, while both Schelling and Adorno make important advances in this direction, Adorno's philosophy of history is better able to make sense of both the prevalence of unfreedom in history and the ways in which we can respond to this situation.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Peter Dews for first introducing me to Schelling's philosophy and the anticipation of Marxist materialism found therein. The thesis no longer addresses materialism explicitly, but its concerns animate the whole. I am also greatly indebted to Peter's generosity with his ongoing research into Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* and have learned a great deal through our exchanges on this fascinating and immensely difficult area.

The philosophy department at Essex has provided an excellent atmosphere for philosophical exploration. The rigor, enthusiasm, and openness of faculty and graduates have been vital for the development of my research. Timo Jütten and Jörg Schaub were patient and helpful readers of many of the earlier drafts. Much of that material did not make it into the final thesis, but their feedback was invaluable for focusing my research and improving my writing. Cristóbal Garibay Petersen and Pavel Reichl gave written comments on the second chapter. I would also like to add that the four year (and counting) long debate on the nature of ontology and dialectic between Cristóbal, Pavel and I has helped me appreciate the challenge ontology poses for materialist philosophy.

The abundance of reading groups, colloquia and graduate seminars provided great venues for developing ideas and sharpening understanding. In particular I would like to thank the attendees of the German Idealism reading group: Emily Fitton, Min Seong Kim, Wayne Martin, Cristóbal Garibay Petersen and Pavel Reichl. Our long labours over Fichte and Schelling were sometimes painful, but always immensely rewarding. I learned much from Nick Walker in the weekly German class—even if this was more from Nick's vast philosophical learning than his language instruction.

The philosophical views – and their political and existential background – expressed here are inseparable from the innumerable conversations I have had over many years with Scott Lumsden. Scott's relentless challenging of all my ideas and his suspicion of the effects of the

intellectual division of labour, that almost inevitably accompanies academic study, has kept me alert to many potential dangers.

I have received support and encouragement from Heather, David and Christina, especially in the early stages. I may not have been able to continue doctoral study if it were not for Lynn's coming to my aid in turbulent circumstances. I would also like to thank my parents for their unwavering belief in me and their continuing support. Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Natalia for enduring my obsessive pursuit of philosophy over the past year.

## Abbreviations

### Works by Adorno

The first page number is from the English translation, the second from the German text (where consulted).

- DE* *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (with Max Horkheimer), ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford University Press, 2002).
- HF* Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).
- HTS* Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993).
- KC* *Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' (1959)*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Polity Press, 2001).
- LND* *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).  
*Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik: Fragmente Zur Vorlesung 1965/66, Nachgelassene Schriften*, section IV, volume 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).
- MCP* Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).
- ND* *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973).  
*Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften*, volume 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

### Works by Hegel

- EL* Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. Théodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).
- LPHI* *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)
- SL* Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Amherst, N.Y: Humanity Books, 1998).

**Works by Schelling**

- FS* Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters,” in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (Continuum, 2003), 217–84.
- GPP* Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
- HMP* *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- SW* *Sämmtliche Werke*, eds. K.F.A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart und Augsburg: J.G. Cotta Verlag, 1856-61). [reference given to the volume number first, followed by page number]

## Introduction

Hegel follows Aristotle in taking philosophy to have reached its pinnacle when thought thinks itself.<sup>1</sup> For Hegel, it is the investigation of the concept (*Begriff*) which carries this out; or, more accurately, it is the concept investigating itself.<sup>2</sup> This is what Hegel means by logic—something more akin to Kant’s transcendental logic than a study of the rules of valid argument or inference.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty that then faced Hegel is how the pure part of philosophy relates to the non-pure part, namely the natural and human world. Many lines from Hegel can be quoted which seem to make short work of this difficulty. A typical way of talking for Hegel is to say that the study of nature and spirit (*Geist*) – which forms the *Realphilosophie* – is *still* the study of thought, but thought in its externality or otherness.<sup>4</sup> But this names the problem rather than solving it. It presupposes that the concept is the ground of everything (whether an ideal or real ground is a question we will take up in the course of this study). Nevertheless, there have been many interpreters that have essentially affirmed this strategy and found new ways to present the basic claim that the process of self-differentiation or self-determination found in the concept is also found in the world.<sup>5</sup>

A worry with this strategy is that history – which is an object of Hegel’s *Realphilosophie* – is known in advance to unfold in a certain way. Marx expressed this when he highlights that dialectical logic takes its own movement (the negation of the negation) to be the ‘true and only positive,’ the ‘self-realizing act of all being.’ From this Marx then claims that Hegel only grasped the ‘abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history,’ but

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<sup>1</sup> *EL* §236a

<sup>2</sup> *EL* §28a, §41a; cf. *SL* 34, *EL* §163

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *SL* 44

<sup>4</sup> E.g. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature ; Being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), §247.

<sup>5</sup> This strategy is primarily found in a certain strand of the French reception of Hegel. Starting with Jean Hyppolite’s landmark 1952 interpretation of Hegel where he reinvents Hegel’s concept as ‘sense.’ See *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). A similar strategy can be found more recently in Catherine Malabou’s concept of ‘plasticity’ in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005).

‘not yet the real history of man.’<sup>6</sup> Manfred Frank has argued that these kinds of worries were first expressed by one of Hegel’s contemporaries, F. W. J. Schelling, and that Marx in fact drew from the latter in his criticisms of Hegel.<sup>7</sup> Schelling is peculiar in the history of philosophy for having been a rare example of someone instrumental in instigating an influential philosophical orientation, only to then be one of the foremost critics of this orientation, especially as it appeared in its most famous representative. Schelling’s youthful attempt to respond to the limits of transcendental philosophy led him to formulate an objective idealism which subsequently paved the way for Hegel’s absolute idealism. Schelling was then overshadowed and his place in the history of philosophy was seen as a stepping stone for Hegel. But not long after Schelling’s transitional role was completed, he began to question his own earlier idealism, producing increasingly pointed criticism of Hegel which reached a wide audience when he gave his inaugural lectures at Berlin in 1841-2.

One reason to look back at Schelling’s criticism of Hegel is for historical purposes: to trace the influence of his thought on subsequent criticisms of Hegel which might give us insight into the nature and value these criticisms. As important as this is, this is not my concern here. I think there are more intrinsic reasons to look back at this apparently obscure episode in the history of philosophy. I will attempt to show that Schelling’s philosophy can offer resources for contemporary philosophy, specifically where his philosophy is a competitor to Hegelian forms of the philosophy of history. One of the principle reasons why Schelling’s mature philosophy retains this relevance is because his work was more than a mere reactionary response to Hegel—Hegel’s advances are taken seriously, which Schelling subsequently recasts.

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,’ in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, trans. Martin Milligan, 2nd ed (New York: Norton, 1978), 108.

<sup>7</sup> Manfred Frank, ‘Schelling’s Critique of Hegel and the Beginnings of Marxian Dialectics’, *Idealistic Studies* 19, no. 3 (1989): 251–68.

The fact that Schelling takes Hegel's work seriously can be seen as a narcissistic reception on Schelling's part. Schelling points out that he had already set the path which Hegel merely carried on down. Nevertheless, credit is given for the way that the purely logical nature of the science of reason is drawn out in the Hegel's *Science of Logic*.<sup>8</sup> Although Schelling thinks Hegel's way of doing the purely rational part of philosophy – which Schelling also calls negative philosophy – is flawed, he thinks its greatest value lies in the fact that a philosophy which completes its analysis of the concept in pure thought will immediately call for the move beyond the thinking of thought alone, to knowledge of actual existence and freedom—which for Schelling occupies positive philosophy. But, of course, the way that a philosopher responds to this call varies. Schelling thinks that Kant and Hegel represent two distinct ways that philosophy distortedly responds to his call.

Schelling praises Kant above all for sharpening the distinction between the realms of negative and positive philosophy and – despite Kant's intentions – for showing the way for philosophy to pursue the positive.

Whilst he thought that he had brought *all* knowledge of the supersensuous to an end for all time by his critique, he really only caused negative and positive in philosophy to have to separate, but precisely because of this the positive, now emerging in its complete independence, was able to oppose itself, as positive, to the merely negative philosophy as the second side of philosophy as a whole. Kant began this process of separation and the resultant process of transfiguration of philosophy into the positive. Kant's critique contributed to this all the more because it was in no way *hostile* towards the positive. Whilst he demolishes the whole edifice of that metaphysics, he always makes his view clear that in the last analysis one must *want* what it wanted, and that its content would in fact finally be the *true* metaphysics, if it were only possible.<sup>9</sup>

With all the restrictions that Kant placed on philosophy he nevertheless affirmed the possibility for philosophy to actually go beyond its native realm—the realm of pure thought. The way that Kant actually followed up that possibility was, for Schelling, a loss of nerve.

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<sup>8</sup> *GPP* 151

<sup>9</sup> *HMP* 95

After showing that reason on its own could not get to the positive, he ended up introducing it again ‘through the back door of the practical.’<sup>10</sup> In particular, Schelling is disappointed with the restriction of the positive to a postulate, to a demand which has ‘significance for action, for the ethical life, but none for science.’<sup>11</sup>

For anyone acquainted with Hegel’s criticisms of Kant, this will seem very familiar. But Schelling thinks Hegel does no better than Kant because, although he saw the need to *know* the positive, he did not actually leave negative philosophy and go out to the positive—instead he reduced the latter to the former. It might seem that we have exhausted the options. Schelling thinks that the reason we might think this is the case is due to the ‘prejudice’ that restricts theoretical philosophy to the ‘mere science of reason.’<sup>12</sup> Both Kant and Hegel subscribe to this restriction, but then take different views on how philosophy should accommodate the positive. Schelling thinks that there is a type of theoretical philosophy which is not a mere science of reason and can pursue knowledge of the positive (this he sometimes calls ‘metaphysical empiricism’).<sup>13</sup> Whatever else this might mean, it manages to express the strange position Schelling holds between the limits set by Kant’s philosophy and the violation of those limits in Hegel’s philosophy.

This strange position could also characterise a significant part of Adorno’s philosophy. Like Schelling, Adorno has an ambivalent relation to Kant. This similarity is continued into the nature of this ambivalence itself. Adorno thinks Kant’s philosophical limitation of knowledge expressed the desire to not let the mere thinking of thought (negative philosophy in Schelling’s terms) be the last say on knowledge; but Kant had no way to properly turn his philosophy towards this end. Instead, it had to manifest in ‘contradictions’, most famously in

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<sup>10</sup> *GPP* 148

<sup>11</sup> *GPP* 191

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *GPP* 171-91

the claim that there is an unknowable thing-in-itself which ‘exist[s] outside the sphere of consciousness,’ but ‘impinge[s] on us nevertheless.’<sup>14</sup>

...on the one hand, the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains the elements of an identity philosophy since it attempts to derive authoritative, universally valid knowledge from the analysis of reason. On the other hand, however, it strives with equal vigour to bring the element of non-identity to the fore. This means that Kant is conscious of a problem that was not perceived so clearly by his successors precisely because of their greater consistency. This is the problem of knowledge as a tautology, that is to say, the problem that if everything that is known is basically nothing but a knowing reason, what we have is no real knowledge but only a kind of reflection of reason. That we are confronted here with Kant’s own philosophical decision – and not, as is frequently imputed to him, the mere vestiges of a position not properly thought through – is evident. It was demonstrated as a matter of historical fact by his impassioned resistance to the interpretations placed on his critique of reason by his first great successor, Fichte, who regarded himself, not without cause, as a consistent Kantian.<sup>15</sup>

So, even though the thing-in-itself really did create problems or inconsistencies in Kant’s philosophy, it was kept because ‘one must *want*’ to go out to what is not identical to thought without thereby sucking it into the science of reason—that is, without then making this knowledge a tautology. This is a good point to note that, while the structural place Adorno and Schelling find for the positive or the non-identical is the same, they differ radically on the exact content of this. As indicated in the previous quote from Schelling, he thinks of the positive content as supersensible—this is not the case for Adorno.<sup>16</sup> (I flag this for clarity, but will be explored in more detail in chapter 3.)

Just like Schelling, Adorno’s praise for Kant’s somewhat indirect acknowledgment of the need for a philosophy geared towards something beyond the science of reason is tempered by Adorno’s claim that Kant does not follow through on this. In fact, Adorno makes his point even stronger by saying that Kant disallows this project by affirming as theoretically necessary the ‘great chasm [that] yawns’ between human beings and the world—Adorno calls

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<sup>14</sup> *KC* 69

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> In this way I disagree with Franck Fischbach’s too quick identification of the non-identical with Schelling’s positive. See ‘Adorno and Schelling: How to ‘Turn Philosophical Thought Towards the Non-Identical,’ *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (2015): 1167–79.

this the ‘Kantian block.’<sup>17</sup> Adorno thinks that such a chasm has its basis in reality—it is objectively caused by universal exchange relations. Although there are reasons beyond the control of the philosopher which block our experience, Adorno still thinks we need to pursue knowledge of the world not already captured in the self-investigation of thinking. This is a large part of the project of *Negative Dialectics*: ‘The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal.’<sup>18</sup>

Much like his assessment of Kant, Adorno thinks Hegel’s philosophy expresses a truth which is subsequently covered over by the official or literal story of his philosophy. That we could know the world purely through reason – an identity philosophy as Adorno calls it, or negative philosophy as Schelling has it – is ultimately the objectionable part of Hegel’s philosophy for Adorno. But the megalomania of the concept nevertheless registers the hope that the current limitations on experience are not necessary and that, pace Kant, we should aim to overcome them.<sup>19</sup> This highlights the fact that Hegel does not just represent a set of philosophical views which are found to be simply false—leaving no impact upon what might be true (which, incidentally, echoes Hegel’s core conviction that the truth is not arrived at by casting off falsity as ‘dross’ which would leave us with ‘pure metal.’<sup>20</sup>). Adorno, just like Schelling, has a lot more at stake in his criticisms of Hegel than a straightforward dismissal. This much might be obvious, but what is less obvious – and hopefully has become clear through these introductory remarks – is that it is not the case of a simple appropriation of Hegel either; the kind of ‘toolbox’ approach to the history of philosophy which picks and chooses which bits it likes and leaves the rest.

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<sup>17</sup> *KC* 174

<sup>18</sup> *ND* 10

<sup>19</sup> *HTS* 41

<sup>20</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 34. Adorno quotes this approvingly (with qualifications) at *HTS* 38.

Michael Rosen points out that Adorno reads Hegel's against the grain when finding the 'truth' of Hegel's *Geist* in the 'false subject' of the system of exchange relationships.<sup>21</sup> This kind of mining for truth in a philosopher is obviously not a case of isolating a particular doctrine or argument from a work which we find agreeable. Rather, it is showing how a philosophical account registers a reality, even if this account then tries to represent it as being something purely self-contained within reason. It is all the more surprising, then, that Rosen should claim that Adorno must have 'failed to take...into account' Hegel's official story about the concept (that its dialectic unravels in a pure narcissistic dialogue with itself) when claiming that his (Adorno's) account of the concept (where the dialectic is with the nonconceptual) owns a debt to Hegel.<sup>22</sup> In order for Adorno's dialectic to owe something to Hegel it does not need to accept Hegel's account at face value. Adorno's point is that, despite Hegel's party line, the dialectic functions otherwise, even in Hegel's own thought.

Without this supposition [of identity; i.e. that what is emphatically known is the concept again], according to Hegel, philosophy would be incapable of knowing anything substantive or essential. Unless the idealistically acquired concept of dialectics harbours experiences contrary to the Hegelian emphasis, experiences impendent of the idealistic machinery, philosophy must inevitably do without substantive insight, confine itself to the methodology of science, call that philosophy, and virtually cross itself out.<sup>23</sup>

Adorno's account of dialectics is indebted to Hegel in the sense that it was Hegel's idealistically distorted dialectics which points in the direction of a dialectics not self-enclosed in pure thought. In this way Adorno both wants to recover an experience of the concept from Hegel and transform the guise it takes in Hegel idealistic dialectical logic. In this way it could be said that Adorno also holds that the concept follows a dialectical *logic*, but a logic which is

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 156-57.

<sup>22</sup> Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism*, 159-60

<sup>23</sup> ND 7-8

not limited to thought's self-dialogue.<sup>24</sup> Of course, part of what might worry commentators like Rosen is the issue of how Adorno's account of dialectics can work without Hegel's system. This is a complex and large issue, but we can indicate at least one of the ways that Adorno thought this would work: the world itself comes to form a system outside the confines of a science of reason.<sup>25</sup> Whether or not Adorno can maintain a dialectical logic – a determinate negation – without the 'idealistic machinery' (i.e. the self-dialogue of reason), it should be clear that Adorno is in principle capable of claiming a resource in Hegel while also rejecting Hegel's systematic presentation.

By presenting some of the ways that Schelling's and Adorno's own hopes for philosophy – which keeps an important place for the concept even while rejecting its restriction to pure thought, on the one hand, and digestion of all heterogeneity, on the other – are articulated through their criticisms of Hegel (with the aid of Kant) I have tried to introduce some of the key themes and problems which will animate this study. Also, this has hopefully shown why it makes sense to pursue the problems of Hegel's account of the concept through Adorno and Schelling. One reason I have brought these two critics together is because I think they are – despite their sometimes unjudicial handling – nuanced and insightful readers of Hegel (this will be shown in detail in chapters 1 and 2). More plausibility has been brought to the consideration of Adorno and Schelling in this light through drawing parallels in the alternatives they want to offer to Hegel's philosophy. Thus far I have mostly considered their alternatives in terms of how they think the concept should be *used by the philosopher*. We need to add a complication to this. For both Schelling and Adorno, a rethinking of the concept for philosophical knowledge also requires us to reconsider the way that the concept is in the world. In this way both Schelling and Adorno meet eye to eye with Hegel on at least

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<sup>24</sup> Alison Stone addresses the way in which Adorno can be considered to belong to the tradition of logic begun in Kant and which passes through Hegel. See Alison Stone, 'Adorno and Logic', in *Theodor Adorno: Key Concepts*, ed. Deborah Cook (Acumen, 2008), 47–62.

<sup>25</sup> 'Philosophy retains respect for systems to the extent to which things heterogeneous to it face it in the form of a system. The administered world moves in this direction.' (ND 20)

one central point: logic and history – the philosophical investigation of the concept and the existing concept – are inseparable. Despite the differences in the way each thinker understands this inseparability, I think this already indicates a ground for fruitful dialogue. Before outlining the arguments of each chapter I would like to say one more thing about the proximity (and distance) between Schelling and Adorno in terms of how their own projects, specifically their philosophies of history, relate to Hegel's.

Schelling's 1809 work, the so-called *Freiheitsschrift*, situates itself within a now largely forgotten intellectual debate which nevertheless was an animating force in Germany towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> Although this debate was sparked over a controversy regarding Spinoza – and, moreover, Spinoza continued to be central to German intellectual culture during this time – the philosophical issues involved have a broader significance. In short, the worry – voiced perhaps most strongly by F.H. Jacobi – was that the philosophical attempt to attain a comprehensive rational grasp of the world, including ourselves, would reduce everything to just another element enmeshed in necessary connections, thus annulling all freedom.<sup>27</sup> Jacobi not only held this to be the case with Spinoza and his followers, but with all philosophy that consistently carried out its task of total rational comprehension. The fate of philosophy, then, is the denial of freedom (nihilism) and the commitment to complete determinism (fatalism). This is what led Jacobi to claim that, if we want to avoid these consequences, then we must turn to faith.

Now, Hegel's philosophical endeavours, as much as Schelling's, can be seen as an attempt to avoid having to choose between a rational nihilism on the one hand, and an irrational

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<sup>26</sup> The lengthy introduction to the *Freiheitsschrift* consists in a detailed engagement with the pantheism debate (FS 217-36). It is also worth noting that Schelling takes this issue to antecede the debate in Germany: 'According to an ancient, but by no means silenced myth, the concept of freedom is supposed to be incongruous with any system, and every philosophy that lays claims to unity or totality should lead to the denial of freedom.' (FS 220). For a helpful overview of the pantheism debate see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), chapters one and two.

<sup>27</sup> It is not just freedom that would seem to suffer here. The general thrust of the Enlightenment to replace all authorities with that of reason has the result that religion and morality are also threatened with absorption into a rationally necessary system.

fideism on the other.<sup>28</sup> What separates the *Freiheitsschrift* from Hegel's philosophy is the way that a unity between system and human freedom is maintained. In short, whereas Hegel bases all genuine freedom in the necessary activity of the concept (most adequately displayed, for Hegel, in his *Logic*), Schelling takes human freedom to be an intelligible deed which does not follow the logical necessity of the concept. Just how Schelling makes this deed compatible with system will be addressed in chapter 4. For now, we can highlight the fact that this intelligible deed captures an important aspect of freedom which Hegel's theory of the concept cannot: that things could in principle always have been otherwise. At the time of the *Freiheitsschrift* Schelling was not yet explicitly targeting Hegel, but this earlier work is remarkably prescient. These same points would later form the core of his criticism of Hegel. For Schelling there are two main advantages of this approach compared to Hegel's. First, he thinks that this can properly capture divine freedom. That is, it can explain the creation of a world in the way that purely logical connections cannot. Second, the unpredictable dimension introduced means that there is room for the fact that history might go wrong (which, for the Schelling of the *Freiheitsschrift*, this meant a genuine confrontation with the existence of evil).<sup>29</sup>

Adorno also reacts against the optimistic account of history which results from the idealistic understanding of the concept. But the philosophical context is far removed from that of the *Freiheitsschrift*. Schelling's concern – which only intensified throughout his career – was to find ways in which philosophy could reassure itself about the meaningfulness of existence. The *Freiheitsschrift* wants to oppose the way that the worst parts of existence –

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<sup>28</sup> See Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel*, Routledge Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2005), 25-27.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Dews focuses on a different problem with Hegel from Schelling's perspective. This is the fact that Hegel's philosophy, which is supposed to provide reconciliation between all oppositions, fails to reconcile the perspective of finite human agents (embedded in activities to try to bring about the good) and the perspective of the concept (which has always already accomplished the good. See *EL* §212a). Peter Dews, 'History and Freedom in Hegel and Schelling' (unpublished manuscript, 2015).

evil – are down-played by the ‘philanthropism’ he finds in Kant and Fichte.<sup>30</sup> And, I will argue, Schelling’s efforts here are of lasting significance. However, this effort is embedded in a theodicy. Ultimately, Schelling wants to reassure us that the truly horrific aspects of existence cannot undermine the meaningfulness of the world. The main difference between Hegel and Schelling on this score – which becomes more prominent in Schelling’s later thought – is that Hegel thinks this can be logically grounded, and Schelling thinks that it cannot. Adorno certainly opposes Hegel’s way of justifying the world through logical means (i.e. through the pure concept). But he also thinks that we should avoid construing any meaning in history at all. Adorno was less concerned about the ability of philosophy to grasp the nature of the existence of freedom, than he was about the ability of philosophy to grasp the nature of the existence of unfreedom. This was clearly informed by historical events, most obviously the rise of fascism in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Part of the philosophical context was the inadequacies of Marxist philosophy of history, particularly in terms of the inability to account for the failures of humanity to liberate itself from domination. The specific set of problems Adorno was responding to, then, was quite different to Schelling’s, but hopefully we can see that these differences will encourage, rather than hinder, a dialogue over the possibilities for the philosophy of history.

In the first part of the thesis I analyse and compare Schelling’s and Adorno’s criticism of Hegel’s theoretical philosophy. In chapter 1 Schelling’s interpretation of Hegel’s systematic philosophy is contrasted with the major trends in Hegel scholarship. The issue of the metaphysical status of the *Logic* takes central place in this discussion. Although it sometimes appears that Schelling takes Hegel to be involved in transcendent or pre-critical metaphysics, I argue that the heart of Schelling’s criticism actually targets a different form of metaphysics.

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<sup>30</sup> FS 248, 262

This form of metaphysics is not as excessive or obviously objectionable as the pre-critical kind, but it is more robust than the account of Hegel's *Logic* which claims that it is an ontology (i.e. an account of the *structure* of being). Schelling's criticism picks out that part of Hegel's *Logic* which aims at proving the existence of an *activity* within pure thought. Since this is still immanent to thought, it shares the critical status with the ontological reading (i.e. both follow the lesson of Kant's critique by refusing to presuppose an object to which our knowledge would approach). But since the self-movement of the concept is supposed to establish the existence of an activity – which will ultimately take the role of God in Hegel's philosophy – the *Logic* proves to have philosophical ambitions beyond that of an ontology. In Schelling's terms, Hegel tries to get a negative philosophy to do the work of positive philosophy. I reconstruct Schelling's criticism of the beginning of the *Logic* and separate out invalid and valid parts of this criticism and argue that the later reveal the way that Hegel surreptitiously animates the concept so that it appears as though it has its own immanent activity.

In chapter 2 some of Adorno's attempts at an immanent criticism of Hegel's idealism are considered. It is easy to think that Adorno's objection to the way that idealism limits the independence of what is other than thought to be solely an objection regarding the desirability of such a position on ethical or political grounds. But Adorno also thought it important to show that such a position was flawed on theoretical grounds—that is, that Hegel's idealism can be shown to fail by its own lights. I argue that Adorno fails at this task when he directs his criticisms at the *Logic*, but that he succeeds when directed at Hegel's arguments for the totality of conceptual mediation. Hegel's arguments for the latter necessarily precede the *Logic* since the latter already starts from the standpoint of science; that is, from the standpoint where the distinction between the concept and something outside the concept has been abolished. There is no room for an immanent criticism to gain purchase in this case. But

Hegel also tried to prove the necessity of the standpoint of science, his primary strategy being to show that anything that appears to be outside the concept is actually within it. I argue that Adorno can immanently expose the flaw in this strategy. And he does so through a refashioning of Kant's account of transcendental illusion. More specifically, I reconstruct Adorno's criticism to show that he successfully uncovers illicit moves in Hegel's argument which perform a hypostatization on the concept.

In chapter 3 Schelling's and Adorno's criticism of Hegel are further defended by showing that the metaphysical character each attributes to Hegel is more sophisticated than might first appear. In particular I nuance the sense in which Schelling and Adorno – in their different ways – claim that Hegel makes the concept total. I take this clarification to provide the opportunity to show some of the crucial differences in Schelling's and Adorno's conception of what Hegel illegitimately absorbs into the concept. Both think Hegel reduces something to the identity of a self-knowing reason, but in Schelling's case this something is freedom and in Adorno's case this is the nonconceptual as such. How Schelling and Adorno then go on to formulate their own philosophies of history follows from their analysis of the flaws in Hegel's account of the concept. For Schelling this means constructing an account of history which does not reduce freedom to the movement of the concept. Adorno does not focus on providing a philosophy of history more adequate to the nonconceptual as such. This is because, in a certain sense, the nonconceptual really has been reduced to the concept in history. Thus his correction to Hegel is more focused on the proper understanding of *how* the nonconceptual has been swallowed by the concept rather than a shift to the nonconceptual as such. In short, this means rejecting the appearance of a harmonious – and therefore rational – unity of the conceptual and the nonconceptual which Hegel's argument for complete mediation tried to establish, and revealing the *antagonistic* unity of conceptual and nonconceptual.

In chapter 4 Schelling's mature philosophy of history is investigated. In particular, the philosophy of history found in the *Freiheitsschrift* and, to a lesser extent as found in the final period of Schelling's development (see below regarding the issue of Schelling's intellectual development). I argue that both manage to combat the unwarranted optimism entailed by Hegel's equation of freedom with the logically necessary movement of the concept. But that it is only in the resources of the *Freiheitsschrift* that philosophy is able to countenance the possibility of pervasive unfreedom. Unfortunately, Schelling is not able to account for this in historically effective terms without absorbing it into an account of the self-revelation of God. In this way a true move beyond the idealistic account of the self-development of the absolute has not been affected.<sup>31</sup>

In chapter 5 I argue that a philosophy of history, which achieves what the *Freiheitsschrift* could not, can be reconstructed from Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, with the aid of Adorno's mature thought—especially as found in his 1964-65 lectures on *History and Freedom* and the section of *Negative Dialectics* dedicated to dealing with Hegel's philosophy of history, 'World Spirit and Natural History.' Specifically, I argue that this account of the philosophy of history is able to avoid all forms of unwarranted optimism whilst avoiding the other extreme, unwarranted pessimism. The picture of human development that arises is not a rosy one, but it is one based on constructions which do not erroneously enlist metaphysical principles or posit patterns which are necessarily insensitive to actual events or occurrences.

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<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, some commentators believe this same problem plagues Schelling's later attempts at the philosophy of history also. Ernst Cassirer, for instance, claims that Schelling's philosophy of mythology makes an advance over objective idealism by giving mythology an objective significance beyond its rational content (i.e. in the way that Hegel interprets religion and myth as inadequate representations of the content that philosophy will grasp more adequately), but that it is ultimately 'a necessary factor in the self-development of the absolute.' Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim, vol. Two: Mythical Thought (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 8.

Before moving on to the substance of the thesis a quick note needs to be made regarding the development of Schelling's thought. Schelling's career is long and goes through many changes. There is no consensus on how to carve up Schelling's thought, and even when periods of development are attributed, the level of the continuity or discontinuity between them is an open question.<sup>32</sup> But the most common way of distinguishing Schelling's development is to identify four periods. This has been reproduced in the editor's introduction to a recent volume of essays which 'systematically traces the historical development' of Schelling's thought: 'from Transcendental Philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* of his early period (1794–1800), through his *Identitätsphilosophie* (1801–9), and then *Freiheitsschrift* and the *Weltalter* of his middle period (1809–27), and, finally, his Positive and Negative Philosophy and critique of Hegel in his late period (1827–54).'<sup>33</sup> I draw upon the middle and late period which I will occasionally refer to collectively as Schelling's 'mature' thought. This is mainly for convenience, but there are some intrinsic reasons to do so. It is with the appearance of the 1809 work, the so-called *Freiheitsschrift*, that the limits of idealism – including his own earlier objective idealism – become a central focus.<sup>34</sup> But even within this broad theme, there are important difference between the middle and late period (and, indeed, within the middle period itself), some of which are central to my arguments regarding Schelling's philosophy of history.

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<sup>32</sup> For a recent example which stresses the continuity in Schelling's development see G. Anthony Bruno, 'Freedom and Pluralism in Schelling's Critique of Fichte's Jena "Wissenschaftslehre"', *Idealistic Studies* 43, no. 1/2 (2013): 71–86.

<sup>33</sup> Lara Ostaric, ed., *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> The *Freiheitsschrift* is generally taken to mark the decisive break with Schelling's earlier idealist position. For example, see Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 87.



# PART I THE CRITICISM OF HEGEL'S IDEALISM: LOCATING THE LIMIT OF THE CONCEPT

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## 1 Schelling's criticism of Hegel: illicit animation of the concept

Three broad characterisations of the metaphysical status of Hegel's philosophy can be distinguished: (i) transcendental philosophy, (ii) ontology, (iii) transcendent (or pre-critical) metaphysics.<sup>35</sup> A first pass at defining these characterisations is provided by specifying the primary object of Hegel's philosophy: (i') conceptual conditions of cognition of objects, (ii') the determinations which are simultaneously the determinations of being and thinking, (iii') objectively existent supersensory objects (God, the soul, and the world as a whole). I argue that, although the ontological reading grasps part of Hegel's philosophy, there is a certain aspect which is not captured in these three options; this aspect is found in Hegel's attempt to rescue the ontological proofs of the existence of God (1.1). Despite initial impressions, this aspect does not belong to (iii). I argue that this is the case because of the unique way in which the *Logic* attempts to prove the existence of an *activity* (the self-determining activity of the concept), rather than a transcendent object. This type of metaphysics avoids the charge of being dogmatic or pre-critical because it does not presuppose an object – “out there,” as it were – to which we then claim that our concepts can reach out and grasp. This activity finds a closer approximation in the kind of existence which post-Kantian thought located in self-consciousness or subjectivity: an existence that only *is* in its activity of self-making.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> I discuss the various approaches to this issue primarily at 1.1.3 and 2.5.

<sup>36</sup> Richard E. Aquila makes a similar point, but about Hegel's metaphysics in general rather than the reinvention of the ontological proof of the existence of God. See 'Predication and Hegel's Metaphysics', in *Hegel*, ed. Micheal Inwood, Oxford Readings in Philosophy, 1985, 67–84.

As a midpoint between the second and third options outlined above (between ontology and transcendent metaphysics) this interpretation can be called ‘critical metaphysics.’ This way of interpreting Hegel has the virtue of being able to make two of Hegel most pronounced commitments compatible with each other: to remain within the immanence of thought (i.e. not regress behind Kant’s ban on transcendent metaphysics) and attain knowledge of God. The history of the reception of Hegel has struggled with these, apparently conflicting, commitments. It has usually been assumed that if we take immanence seriously, then Hegel cannot be a (pre-critical) metaphysician; and if we take ‘God-talk’ seriously, then Hegel must have regressed behind Kant. I hope to show that this is a false opposition.

I take this interpretation to accurately capture Hegel’s metaphysics. But I also think it is particularly suited to frame Schelling’s criticisms of Hegel. I do not say this because I think it perfectly coincides with Schelling’s interpretation of Hegel. Schelling’s interpretation does include the one I propose, but it also attributes something like transcendent metaphysics to Hegel. Where Schelling objects to Hegel’s transcendent metaphysics I defend Hegel. This is for the purpose of showing that Hegel is still guilty of a fundamental metaphysical flaw, even where we give him the benefit of the doubt and identify his position with critical metaphysics rather than transcendent metaphysics. The flaw I talk of here is the flaw of taking an analysis of the concept to yield knowledge of existence (the existence of an activity which Hegel equates to God). More specifically, it is the fallacious introduction of movement into the concept which I claim – via a reconstruction of one of Schelling’s criticisms – Hegel exploits in order to claim such knowledge (1.4).

The importance of Schelling’s mature criticism of Hegel for the reception of Hegel and the subsequent development of European philosophy, from Marx and Kierkegaard to

Heidegger and Adorno, has been well established.<sup>37</sup> But, if there is a growing consensus on the influence of Schelling's criticisms of Hegel, there appears to be less confidence in the philosophical merits of these criticisms. Indeed, some recent commentators have been quick to dismiss them (at least as regards the criticisms found in the Munich lectures).<sup>38</sup> This is understandable since Schelling is not the most judicious critic and the tone often betrays a defensiveness or even resentment. Where a more substantive engagement with Schelling's criticisms are offered, he is often charged with failing to meet fundamental standards of critical appraisal; perhaps the most severe failings identified are the misrepresentation of Hegel and the use of question-begging arguments.<sup>39</sup> I defend Schelling against both these charges. I argue that Schelling's criticisms in the Munich lectures are more nuanced than usually recognised and that they offer insight into significant flaws in Hegel's *Logic* (1.3). I also offer a qualified defence of Schelling's understanding of the theological dimensions of Hegel's work in line with my interpretation of Hegel's metaphysics (1.2). Finally, I consider Stephen Houlgate's attempt to explain the immanent logical movement of the concept in the *Logic* (1.5).

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<sup>37</sup> On the inheritance of core themes from Schelling's criticism of Hegel and Schelling's mature thought more generally see Manfred Frank, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel and the Beginnings of Marxian Dialectics," *Idealistic Studies* 19, no. 3 (1989): 251–68; Jürgen Habermas, "Dialectical Idealism in Transition to Materialism: Schelling's Idea of a Contraction of God and its Consequences for the Philosophy of History," in *The new Schelling*, ed. Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman, trans. Nick Midgley and Judith Norman (New York: Continuum, 2004). Regarding Kierkegaard see Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Regarding Heidegger (and much of European philosophy more generally) see Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993). A detailed account of Adorno's debt to Schelling's mature thought see Peter Dews, "Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics: Adorno's Relation to Schelling," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 1180–1207.

<sup>38</sup> Markus Gabriel thinks we must turn away from the 'superficial discussion' found in the more explicit criticism of Hegel in the Munich lectures and instead reconstruct Schelling's challenge to Hegel from the 'richer material' of the *Spätphilosophie. Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London: Continuum, 2009), 20. Fred Rush takes a similar tack, announcing that Schelling's criticism fails to be immanent (offering little support for this claim). "Schelling's Critique of Hegel," in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 216–37, 225.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Houlgate makes both charges in "Schelling's Critique of Hegel's 'Science of Logic,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 1 (1999): 99–128. Alan White also claims Schelling misrepresents Hegel by attributing to him a theological aim. *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), see especially 74, 145–46.

## 1.1 The ontological proof of the existence of God in Schelling and Hegel

In this section I present Schelling's and Hegel's different evaluations of the ontological proof of the existence of God (1.1.1 and 1.1.2). Both philosophers find serious metaphysical errors here, but both also believe there is something important to be salvaged. For Schelling this means grasping the fact that the ontological argument allows a much more modest conclusion than is usually thought. Whereas for Hegel the argument is to simply be cast aside *as an argument*; what is to be retained is the insight that the proofs register the fact that spirit has been *elevated to God*, even if the philosophical acumen needed to properly – i.e. rationally – grasp God is lacking. The crucial difference in evaluation, then, is that, for Schelling, the shortcomings of the ontological proof indicate the limit of science as such (i.e. the systematic study of the concept, which Schelling refers to as 'negative philosophy' or '*reinrationale Philosophie*'), whereas for Hegel, they only indicate the need for an improved science (a *Science of Logic* and the study of the concept in its externality, the *Realphilosophie*).

I consider two of the key ways in which Hegel attempts to improve his science (1.1.3). I argue that the first is primarily aimed at restoring objectivity to science (1.1.3.1), and the second at acquiring scientific knowledge of God (1.1.3.2). What this amounts to is that, in the first case, concepts grasp the essence or 'in itself' of things, and, in the second case, reason becomes aware of the immanent movement in the concept which is the free activity of the absolute idea (or God). Ultimately I argue that the latter cannot yield a proof of God on its own, but that Hegel has still claimed more than Schelling would allow.

### 1.1.1 Schelling: the overextension of negative philosophy

Schelling's 1833-34 Munich lectures, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*,<sup>40</sup> plot a path through some of the key figures of the modern period, from Descartes and later rationalists to Kant and the radical reception and transformation of Kant in German Idealism. In some respects this account is familiar. It is observed that Descartes sets the scene for modern philosophy through the new emphasis on subjective certainty. Perhaps just as often noted is the ambiguity of this achievement: on the one hand, a new freedom is found for philosophy, whilst, on the other hand, philosophy also becomes ensnared in the confines of consciousness.<sup>41</sup> What is more striking in Schelling's account is the claim that this is actually only one part of the story. The decisive point for the development of modern philosophy should be specifically located in the way that Descartes advances the ontological proof of the existence of God.<sup>42</sup> At first this seems like a strange suggestion; surely the ontological proof is a parochial issue in comparison to the modern shift to subjective certainty. But Schelling highlights the fact that the ontological proof is advanced precisely to restore to philosophy what was lost in that retreat into thought or subjectivity. Descartes is said to be motivated by the need to ensure that our representations match up to how things really are, which is satisfied by a guarantor—God.<sup>43</sup> The philosophical need for God in this context, then, is epistemological and ontological—rather than strictly theological or ethical. Schelling's evaluation of Descartes' ontological argument is subtle and sets up several distinctions important for the current study.

Schelling first points out that Descartes argument can be taken in two different ways. The first – inadequate way – is found in Kant's criticisms of it. The inadequate understanding of the proof is reconstructed by Schelling as follows: 'I find in me the idea of the perfect being, but existence is itself a perfection, therefore existence is also of its own accord included in

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<sup>40</sup> Hereafter referred to in the text as the Munich lectures.

<sup>41</sup> *HMP* 45

<sup>42</sup> *HMP* 49

<sup>43</sup> *HMP* 48

the idea of the perfect being.’<sup>44</sup> The minor premise is denied, since the attribution of existence does not make an idea any better or worse, it only says that it *is*. Schelling does not deny that this criticism is effective against *this* way of understanding the argument. But he claims that Descartes’ argument is actually different from this one. The minor premise does not specify that *existence* belongs to a perfect being, but that *necessary* existence does. But even when we do Descartes the justice of fixing the minor premise, we find that the reasoning goes awry. From the premises ‘God is the perfect being’ and ‘necessary existence belongs to the perfect being’ Descartes concludes that God necessarily exists. Schelling claims that Descartes can only reach this conclusion by misunderstanding what it means to say that necessary existence belongs to the perfect being. It should not be interpreted, as Descartes appears to do, to mean that the perfect being must exist; rather, it should be interpreted to mean that, *if* the perfect being exists, then it can only exist in the mode of necessary existence. In short, we are only justified in asserting the modality of a perfect being (what Schelling refers to as ‘*manner* of existence’) and not its quality (that it does actually exist).<sup>45</sup> Schelling claims that Descartes actually proceeds as he should on some occasions, but we are not told why there should be this inconsistency. In place of such an explanation there is a suggestion as to what might lead us to the proper understanding. The reason we would consider necessary existence a modality of the perfect being is because we find it absurd to attribute to God the opposite modality, contingency (presumably it is not absurd to say that God does not exist): it would ‘contradict the nature of the perfect being to exist just contingently’ which would be ‘precarious and for this reason doubtful in *itself*’.<sup>46</sup> It seems that what Schelling means here is that, following the conception of God as *causa sui*, God could not exist as a conditioned existence (i.e. contingently), but only as an unconditioned one.

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<sup>44</sup> HMP 50

<sup>45</sup> HMP 50-51

<sup>46</sup> HMP 50

So, the ontological argument does succeed in one sense: it tells us something about the nature or being of God.<sup>47</sup> But it fails when it is said to yield knowledge of the existence of God. In Schelling's terms, it tells us 'what' (*Was*) God is, but not 'that' (*Daß*) God is. For Schelling, philosophy which moves in the realm of the 'what' – essence (*Wesen*) or potency – is negative, and philosophy which moves in the realm of the 'that' – existence (*Existenz*) or actus – is positive.<sup>48</sup> Both parts of philosophy are essential for Schelling. The problem he diagnoses in Descartes and subsequent philosophy is the pretension that negative philosophy sometimes displays in its attempt to secure the positive exclusively by its own means.<sup>49</sup> In the case of Descartes' ontological proof of the existence of God, this transition was provided by a syllogism. But this is not the only way that negative philosophy can overstretch itself and claim to grasp the positive or the *that*. Hegel's science of reason provides a much more subtle and sophisticated understanding of God and, with this, a more sophisticated slip into the positive. In short, whereas the traditional ontological proof tries to *infer* existence from the concept, Hegel bestows a unique kind of existence *upon* the concept. The latter is achieved by claiming an inner activity or life for the concept. By showing that this is where Hegel makes the negative yield a positive, we reveal the significance of Schelling's targeting of the apparent immanent movement of the concept in the *Logic*.

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<sup>47</sup> 'God as *such* is, of course, not just the necessarily or blindly existing being (*Wesen*), He admittedly is it, but as God He is at the same time that which can negate (*aufheben*) this His own being which is dependent upon Him, can transform His necessary being into contingent being, namely into a being posited by itself [...]' (*HMP* 55). This will be important for the discussion of Schelling's positive philosophy later (see 4.1.3).

<sup>48</sup> These distinction are more clearly brought out in the Berlin lectures of 1841/42, especially the lectures 'Kant, Fichte, and a Science of Reason' (127-39) and 'The Difference between Negative and Positive Philosophy' (141-54).

<sup>49</sup> Kant is the main exception in Schelling's history of modern philosophy. Schelling claims that the significance of Kant was contrary to 'what Kant directly *wanted*', and continues to outline what this real significance was: 'Whilst he thought that he had brought *all* knowledge of the supersensuous to an end for all time by his critique, he really only caused negative and positive in philosophy to have to separate, but precisely because of this the positive, now emerging in its complete independence, was able to oppose itself, as positive, to the merely negative philosophy as the second side of philosophy as a whole. Kant began this process of separation and the resultant process of transfiguration of philosophy into the positive. Kant's critique contributed to this all the more because it was in no way *hostile* towards the positive. Whilst he demolishes the whole edifice of that metaphysics, he always makes his view clear that in the last analysis one must *want* what it wanted, and that its content would in fact finally be the *true* metaphysics, if it were only possible.' (*HMP* 95)

### 1.1.2 Hegel: the defective demonstrations of the understanding

Like Schelling, Hegel takes the uncommon view that the most significant contribution of Descartes to philosophy is his claim that the concept of God contains its own existence; this is, according to Hegel, ‘Descartes’ sublimest thought.’<sup>50</sup> Despite Hegel’s more unreserved praise he nevertheless expresses ambivalence about the ontological proof. Hegel criticises the proofs of the existence of God (in its different forms, including the ontological) for their abstract or formal method, but claims that they register a genuine elevation to God, an ‘inward journey of the spirit.’<sup>51</sup> What is more, he also aims to ‘restore the fundamental thoughts of these proofs to their worth and dignity.’<sup>52</sup> The problem with the proofs was not that they occupied themselves with the supersensible, but that they were methodologically inadequate and, as a result, falsify their object of study. These points can be seen clearly in Hegel’s criticisms of the ‘metaphysics of the understanding’ in the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.<sup>53</sup>

In these preliminaries Hegel presents three different orientations in philosophy, primarily in terms of the scope and role they give to thought—he calls them different ‘positions of thought with respect to objectivity.’ This is done to pave the way for the orientation found in his philosophy. The first position is simply titled ‘metaphysics’, but is qualified in many different ways; for clarity I borrow one of these qualifications and refer to this position as

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<sup>50</sup> *SL* 705

<sup>51</sup> *EL* §50r; cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 419.

<sup>52</sup> *SL* 708. It is interesting to point out how Hegel’s approach to the proofs of God’s existence perfectly exemplifies Adorno’s striking account of the nature of the metaphysical enterprise in the history of philosophy. In a twist on Heidegger’s claim about metaphysics representing a ‘rationalistic decline from the original understanding of being’, Adorno says: ‘On the one hand metaphysics is always, if you will, rationalistic as a *critique* of a conception of true, essential being-in-itself which does not justify itself before reason; but, on the other, it is always also an attempt to *rescue* something which the philosopher’s genius feels to be fading and vanishing. There is in fact no metaphysics, or very little, which is not an attempt to save – and to save be means of concepts – what appeared at the time to be threatened precisely by concepts, and was in the process of being disintegrated’ (*MCP* 19).

<sup>53</sup> Hegel’s dedicates a section titled ‘The First Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity: Metaphysics’ at §§26-36, but I will also draw upon relevant discussion from the rest of the preliminaries.

‘naïve metaphysics.’<sup>54</sup> Naïve metaphysics is indexed to a historical period and school of thought—namely, modern rationalism, especially as associated with Christian Wolff (Spinoza, and likely Leibniz, is given the honour of being exempted from the metaphysics criticised here).<sup>55</sup> Importantly, Hegel also notes that this is not restricted to a school or period, but is an ever present possibility. This is because the operation behind this type of metaphysics is based in the misuse of the understanding. Hegel credits Kant with the clear separation of the understanding from reason, where the former has ‘the finite and conditioned as the subject matter’ and the latter has ‘the infinite and unconditioned.’<sup>56</sup> The misuse comes when the understanding tries to get to the infinite while sticking to its own finite mode of comprehension; or, as Hegel puts it, the misuse is found in ‘the way in which the *mere understanding* views the objects of reason.’<sup>57</sup> Although we have just said that the understanding and reason have different ‘objects’ or ‘subject matters’, they still move in the same medium, namely, the determinations of thought. But they do so in different ways.<sup>58</sup> The understanding takes them up as they are found in consciousness and fixes them, whereas reason critically interrogates them and allows their limitations (their ‘one-sidedness’ or finitude) to be confronted, calling for more adequate determinations to take their place.

The uncritical or dogmatic attitude towards thought-determinations – or categories, in the more familiar Kantian language – not only means that the content of these determinations goes unquestioned. Also unquestioned is the very predicative procedure which assumes that

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<sup>54</sup> *EL* §26

<sup>55</sup> On the issue of Spinoza’s and Leibniz’s exemption from naïve metaphysics see the translators note to *EL* §51r. It is also clear that ancient metaphysics is not only innocent of the charges brought against naïve metaphysics, but is indeed of the highest proximity to Hegel’s own philosophy (*SL* 45).

<sup>56</sup> *EL* §45a.

<sup>57</sup> *EL* §27

<sup>58</sup> It may be misleading to talk as though there were two different faculties, where the latter does a better job than the former. They are more properly understood as moments of all proper thinking (*EL* §79r). The precise status of the understanding in Hegel’s system is a matter of debate. See John Burbidge “Where is the Place of the Understanding” and Stephen Houlgate’s response, “A reply to John Burbidge,” in George Di Giovanni and Hegel Society of America, eds., *Essays on Hegel’s Logic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 171-182, 183-189.

we could know about the Absolute by ‘attaching’ concepts to it.<sup>59</sup> Hegel argues that, if we keep thought-determinations in their separateness or isolation from one another in the way that the understanding does, we will forever be stuck in the finite, struggling vainly to reach the infinite from this limited point.

This clearly has implications for a philosophical comprehension of God. When the understanding strives to prove the existence of God it not only fails to reach the infinite, but also has the further consequence of depriving God of infinitude.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the older metaphysics was concerned with the cognition of whether predicates of the kind here mentioned could be attached to its objects. However, these predicates are restricted determinations of the understanding which express only a restriction, and not what is true.—We must notice particularly, at this point, that the metaphysical method was to “attach” predicates to the object of cognition, e.g., to God. This then is an external reflection about the object, since the determinations (the predicates) are found ready-made in my representation, and are attached to the object in a merely external way. Genuine cognition of an object, on the other hand, has to be *such* that the object determines itself from within itself, and does not acquire its predicates in this external way. If we proceed by way of predication, the spirit gets the feeling that the predicates cannot exhaust what they are attached to.<sup>61</sup>

Hegel’s intention, then, is not to reject the project of proving the existence of God, but merely shed an inadequate approach to speculative philosophy. He tries to correct the approach to God offered by the proofs of the understanding by advancing a model of ‘genuine cognition’ in opposition to ‘external reflection’. This model of cognition is precisely what is presented in the *Logic*— it is the exposition of the self-determining concept. Moreover, Hegel explicitly claims that the *Logic* is the exposition of God.<sup>62</sup> But at this point it might be wondered: once God has been made coextensive with the self-determining concept (and thus no longer “outside” us), in what sense are we talking about God in any recognisable sense? A closely

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<sup>59</sup> *EL* §28

<sup>60</sup> *EL* §29, 31r, 36r

<sup>61</sup> *EL* §28a. The translators distinguish between *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* through hyphenation: *gegenstand* is rendered as ‘ob-ject’ and *Objekt* as ‘object.’

<sup>62</sup> *SL* 50; cf. *EL* §85; G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, trans. Peter C Hodgson, The Hegel Lectures Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 99.

related question is: since the determinations of the concept in the *Logic* do not establish the existence of particular things (i.e. entities or objects), in what way could the *Logic* prove the existence of anything, let alone God? The answer to both these questions hinges on how we understand the significance of ‘self-determination’ in Hegel’s system. Not only does this inform our answer to these questions, but also informs how we understand the metaphysical character of Hegel’s philosophy more generally.

### 1.1.3. Metaphysical status of self-determination in the *Logic*

Three ways in which self-determination is significant for Hegel’s philosophy can be specified. First, Hegel believes it secures the critical status of his enterprise because it allows him to produce a metaphysical deduction of the categories without any presuppositions. This point is attractive to readers of Hegel who want to stress Hegel’s Kantian heritage and save Hegel from metaphysical excess.<sup>63</sup> Restricted to this methodological significance, self-determination becomes a harmless refinement of transcendental philosophy. Second, Hegel further claims that the self-determination of thought in his science of reason means that thought is no longer contaminated by subjective interference and is thus now ‘objective.’ This point is attractive to readers of Hegel that want to stress that the categories are no longer limited to conditions of intelligibility, but actually tell us the way things really are in themselves.<sup>64</sup> Third, self-determination is understood as a self-propelling power or activity in

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<sup>63</sup> Many commentators have argued convincingly that the transcendental reading, while amenable to some contemporary persuasions, fails to be Hegelian (see, for example, Ludwig Siep, “Hegel’s Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Inquiry* 34, no. 1 (1991): 63–76). I take an indirect approach to questioning the transcendental reading in the next chapter (2.5). Instead of showing how it conflicts with Hegel’s explicit claims to the ontological status of the *Logic* (of which there are many; e.g. *SL* 27, 39, 63; *EL* §24), I show how it ends up collapsing into the ontological reading under the weight of trying to establish the specifically *Hegelian* nature of the transcendental philosophy they advance—namely, by taking seriously Hegel’s core motivation of overcoming Kant’s dualism.

<sup>64</sup> I refer to these readers as promoting an ‘ontological’ interpretation of the *Logic*. There are still important differences between the different ontological readings of Hegel—differences I do not want to diminish.

its own right. I argue that this activity is supposed to have an independent existence, and that the *Logic* attempts to prove this existence. This is Hegel's modification of the ontological proof. I now elaborate on the second and third ways to understand the significance of self-determination.

### 1.1.3.1 Self-determination qua objectivity of the categories

Use of the term objectivity is very precarious, especially in this context. Fortunately, there is a helpful clarification of this in the second addition to §41 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.<sup>65</sup> An account of three different ways objectivity can be understood is presented. First there is the common sense use of the term – as we find it in ‘ordinary language’ – which refers to what is ‘externally present’ and ‘come[s] to us from outside through perception.’ The second is attributed to Kant's reversal of the common sense understanding of objectivity. To be objective here is to be universal and necessary as opposed to what is contingent and dependent upon individual circumstances of perception. In this way it is actually our thoughts that are objective and the sensibly perceptible is subjective. This reversal or inversion is defended by Hegel against the charge of ‘linguistic confusion’ and indeed praised for drawing our attention to the fact that what was supposed to be registered in the term objectivity is that something ‘subsists on its own account,’ is independent or self-standing. If this is accepted, then it certainly is the case that the transitory nature of externality is not objective, and universal thoughts are. But, according to Hegel, this too falls short of what should be understood as objectivity. For Kant restricts these objective thoughts by claiming that they are ‘*only our* thoughts, and are cut off from what the thing is *in-itself* by an impassable gulf.’ One of Hegel's strategies for dealing with this limitation of thought is well

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However, for current purposes, it is not necessary to specify them. An example of the ontological reading can be found in Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel*, Routledge Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> All quotes in this paragraph come from *EL* §41a2.

known. This consists in showing that any attempt to draw such a restriction undermines itself (this is largely what the *Phenomenology of Spirit* aims to show); more specifically, that limit-concepts necessarily overstep their limits. This gets us the primarily negative result that our thoughts cannot in principle be barred from knowledge of things in themselves.<sup>66</sup> With this result Hegel can then give a more substantive account of what constitutes objective thought, namely, self-determination (which the *Logic* aims to show).

The basic claim Hegel makes is that thought-determinations remain merely ‘our thoughts’ when the investigation of thought itself fails to get rid of all presuppositions. According to Hegel, Kant’s criticism of the ‘forms of the understanding’ was not thorough enough.<sup>67</sup> Kant showed that naïve metaphysics did not investigate whether categories could yield knowledge of things-in-themselves, but ‘this criticism did not consider these forms on their own merits and according to their own peculiar content, but simply took them as accepted starting points from subjective logic: so that there was no question of an immanent deduction of them as forms of subjective logic, still less of a dialectical consideration of them.’<sup>68</sup> The reason why thought-determinations lack objectivity (in Hegel’s sense) is not that there is an unbridgeable gulf between thought and being, but because they only have a subjective status when their introduction into philosophical science depends upon the unjustified choices made by an individual philosopher (in this case, famously, Kant gets the categories from the logical functions of judgment – the so-called ‘metaphysical deduction’ – which does not satisfy Hegel’s standard of an immanent, or presuppositionless, deduction from pure thought). Pure thought, without any interference from us or other factors, needs to give itself its own content.

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<sup>66</sup> It is this type of argument for the identity of being and thought which I show to be untenable via a reconstruction of Adorno’s criticisms of Hegel in chapter two. I do not challenge the ontological claims Hegel makes here since Schelling subscribes to a similar view regarding the identity of thought and being (though *not* existence—see section 1.2). The tension between Adorno’s and Schelling’s views here will be addressed in chapter three.

<sup>67</sup> *SL* 46-47; cf. *EL* §41a1

<sup>68</sup> *SL* 47

This point is made more explicit when Hegel is considering the problem of how to begin science in an introductory essay to the *Logic*. If we are to avoid the influence of arbitrary factors when determining the content of science (the thought-determinations) – and therefore becoming subjective – then the starting point for that science takes on an extreme importance. Those that begin by presupposing a ‘concrete object’ (i.e. something that already contains determinations) and then proceed to analyse its content must guide the exposition in a way that is external to the science itself and thus rob categories of truth.

...with a concrete object, the analysis and the ways in which it is determined are affected by contingency and arbitrariness. Which determinations are brought out depends on what each person just *finds* in his own immediate, contingent idea. The relation contained in something concrete, in a synthetic unity, is *necessary* only in so far as it is not just given but is produced by the spontaneous return of the moments back into this unity—a movement which is the opposite of the analytic procedure, which is an activity belonging to the subject-thinker and external to the subject matter itself.<sup>69</sup>

It is only by this spontaneous movement that the content of thought is guaranteed to not be contingent upon a specific thinker. Spontaneous movement or self-determination is supposed to be an objective process, independent of any foreign influence, thus providing knowledge which is not merely limited to us, but attains to the in-itself. Thus presuppositionlessness is here not accorded only methodological significance, but also ontological significance.

More needs to be said, however, about what it means to say that we have knowledge of the in-itself of things. We already know the in-itself cannot be considered something outside of our thought: naïve metaphysics was criticised for illegitimately pursuing knowledge of transcendent entities. The strict immanence Hegel accords philosophical science also means that these categories cannot be said to be confirming the existence of externally present sensuous entities any more than they could be confirming the existence of intelligible ones. To this extent the ontological and Kantian or transcendental readings of Hegel agree. But, as

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<sup>69</sup> *SL* 74-75

we have seen, Hegel does not think the categories are only ‘ours’; they really grasp the truth in-itself. What it means to say that the determinations demonstrated in the *Logic* are the determinations of things also, is that the categories grasps the structure of the world, provides knowledge of the being of things. Here, Hegel is sticking within the limits of negative philosophy, as Schelling conceives it: the categories of the *Logic* are intended to say *what* things are, not *that* they are. In this way contemporary commentators like Frederick Beiser and James Kreines are correct to reject the terms of the debate about the metaphysical status of Hegel’s philosophy.<sup>70</sup> As Beiser puts it, we are presented with a ‘false dilemma: either Hegel is a dogmatic metaphysician or not really a metaphysician at all. The crucial assumption behind the dilemma is a very narrow notion of metaphysics as speculation about transcendent entities.’<sup>71</sup> The metaphysical knowledge produced by the *Logic* is not of the naïve or pre-critical variety, but is metaphysical nonetheless.

### 1.1.3.2 Self-determination qua activity of God

But if Hegel’s *Logic* is best understood ontologically, how does Hegel’s claim to rehabilitate the proofs of God’s existence fit in? It seems that the most the exposition of the concept can establish is *what* God is, not *that* God is. Perhaps this is all Hegel had in mind. After all, there are many formulations which indicate that the knowledge of God found in a science of reason is knowledge of the ‘content’ or the nature of God, not God’s existence as such. For instance, in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel claims that the logical determinations can be understood as ‘definitions of the Absolute, as the *metaphysical definitions of God*’.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel*, Routledge Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53-57; James Kreines, “Hegel’s Metaphysics: Changing the Debate,” *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 5 (2006): 466–80.

<sup>71</sup> Beiser, *Hegel*, 56

<sup>72</sup> *EL* §85

There is a problem with this, however. It overlooks the central way in which Hegel claimed to have overcome the deficiencies in the formal approach to the proofs of God's existence. The deficiency lay in the fact that the predicates (or determinations) of God were applied by external reflection to an assumed substratum (the subject in the propositional approach). The problem is not simply that the determinations are uncritically taken up, but, more importantly, that the determinations do not result from the concept's own immanent movement. To adequately describe God, these determinations must be God's own work—they must be self-given.

God, as the living God, and still more as absolute spirit, is known only in his *activity*; man was early instructed to recognize God in his *works*; only from these can proceed the *determinations*, which are called his properties, and in which, too, his *being* is contained. Thus the philosophical cognition of his *activity*, that is, of himself, grasps the *Notion* of God in his *being* and his being in his *Notion*.<sup>73</sup>

What has been gained by saying that God is both the set of determinations *and* the activity which accumulates these determinations? Could we not say that this has merely added a further definition? In which case Hegel would still be left with knowledge of what God is, but not that God is.

At this point the distinction between *what* and *that*, being and existence, is put under strain. If the nature of God is self-determining activity, and the philosopher observes this independent activity when doing logic, then this activity does indeed exist, albeit only as a purely intelligible existence. In other words, whilst unfolding *what* God is through the exposition of a series of determinations, we have shown *that* God is in the fact that we could only have produced a scientific derivation if there were an independent activity *attributed to the concept itself*, as distinct from an activity which merely belonged to us, to our external or subjective reflection. I take it that Quentin Lauer has something like this in mind when he

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<sup>73</sup> SL 706

claims that Hegel's proof of God is unlike the ontological proof insofar as the latter tries to prove the existence of God by establishing a transition *from* reason *to* God, whereas Hegel simply shows that reason *is* the proof. As Lauer puts it, 'the being of thought is the self-manifestation of God'.<sup>74</sup>

I think this suggestion is very illuminating. On the one hand, it makes sense of Hegel's general, and repeated, claims to be offering a genuine knowledge of God, and his more specific claim to have restored the proofs to 'their worth and dignity.' On the other hand, it resists making God a transcendent entity and therefore sticks to the thorough immanence demanded by Hegel's project. But even if it is conceded that Hegel really manages to prove that there is an objective activity or process which the philosopher witnesses while doing logic, can this activity really be called God? One reason to raise this question is that this activity does not resemble what is usually understood by God.<sup>75</sup> But we do not need to appeal to an external standpoint to find this question compelling. This is because some of Hegel's most entrenched philosophical commitments speak against God's existence being constrained to the realm of pure thought. Perhaps most familiar is Hegel's professed Aristotelian emphasis on the immanence of the form or universal in things.<sup>76</sup>

Does this mean that Hegel cannot have proven the existence of God without proving God's existence in the world? It might be tempting to make a distinction between the

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<sup>74</sup> Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, SUNY Series in Hegelian Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 230.

<sup>75</sup> Many commentators highlight the fact that Hegel's God does not resemble traditional religious notions in order to defend him against theological or theistic interpretations. See Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62; Ludwig Siep, "Hegel's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiry* 34, no. 1 (1991): 63–76, 76. Schelling also claims that self-determination or ceaseless movement is not equivalent to God, but does so as a criticism rather than a defence (*HMP* 159-60). I go into more detail on these issues in the next section.

<sup>76</sup> Incidentally, Alfredo Ferrarin has argued that, for Hegel, the only real advance of Aristotle over Plato is actually to be found in the introduction of *energeia* as what guarantees that the idea has the power to actualise itself in things (against the mysterious thought of the 'participation' of things in the idea). Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, *Modern European Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 106-8. Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of the current work to follow this up, but it is interesting to note that this way of understanding Hegel's relation to Aristotle reinforces the minimal theological dimension of Hegel's *Logic* which I propose: ensuring that the idea is not only immanent in things (in accordance with the ontological reading), but also the animating force which realises itself in things.

methodological status of a proof God and the substantive status of the existence of God. This would mean that a proof of God in pure thought would not preclude the possibility that God cannot exist apart from the world. But Hegel cannot make such a distinction precisely because, as we have seen, the proof *is* God—the existence of God cannot be detached from the way reason “proves” God (this is in line with Hegel’s characteristic commitment to the inseparability of truth from the process of arriving at truth). If Hegel is committed to the inseparability of substantive and methodological issues (and he surely is), then any proof of a God that is immanent to the world must proceed through the world. Indeed, Hegel suggests this is the case.

The basic content of reason is the divine Idea, and its essence is the plan of God. In the context of world history, the Idea is not equivalent to reason as encountered in the subjective will, but to the activity of God alone. We conceive of reason as a means of perceiving the Idea, and even its etymology suggests that it is a means of perceiving of something expressed, in other words, of the Logos – the true. *The true acquires its truth in the created world.* God expresses himself, and himself alone; he is that power whose nature is self-expression and whose expression can be perceived by reason.<sup>77</sup>

In the realm of history then, just as with the realm of pure thought, it is reason (as opposed to the understanding) that is equipped to perceive ‘something expressed’ or the true. But this leaves us with a puzzle: how does the study of the true in *Logic* and the study of the true in *Realphilosophie* relate to each other? If God is only genuinely proven in the latter, why did we bother with the former? The question of the systematic status of Hegel’s philosophy and the relation of the various branches within it is a large issue, which cannot be addressed here. But, on the face of it, there are three possible ways to construe the relation between the different parts of Hegel’s system, at least insofar as this relates to the different ways of knowing God: (1) the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie* present equally valid alternatives (i.e. it is up to the philosopher which route is taken to knowledge of God’s existence); (2) only one approach, either the *Logic* or the *Realphilosophie*, is the proper – or at least the more

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<sup>77</sup> *LPHI* 67 (emphasis added).

adequate – location of the proof of God; or (3) the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie* form a continuous proof. If we go for (1) we cannot make sense out of Hegel's (admittedly enigmatic) formulations like the one above, namely, 'the true acquires its truth in the created world.' This indicates that we could not grasp the full truth of God without the *Realphilosophie*. If the *Realphilosophie* takes this role, and we take into account Hegel's insistence that the *Logic* is a rescue of the ontological proof, then (2) seems unlikely. Thus (3) looks to be the best bet. This is especially the case since this is the only option that would make sense of the talk of 'the true' (which is the proper object of the *Logic*), which then undergoes further development in the world (the object of *Realphilosophie*).

So, how can the *Logic* and the *Realphilosophie* form a continuous proof? One way Hegel addresses this is by arguing for a kind of passage from one realm to the other; where God's activity in pure thought ends, God's activity in the world begins.

[...] logic as the *formal science* cannot and should not contain that reality which is the content of the further parts of philosophy, namely, the philosophical sciences of nature and of spirit. These concrete sciences do, of course, present themselves in a more real form of the Idea than logic does; but this is not by turning back again to the reality abandoned by the consciousness which has risen above its mode as Appearance to the level of science, nor by reverting to the use of forms such as the categories and concepts of reflection, whose finitude and untruth have been demonstrated in the logic. On the contrary, logic exhibits the elevation of the *Idea* to that level from which it becomes the creator of nature and passes over to the form of a concrete *immediacy* whose Notion, however, breaks up this shape again in order to realize itself as *concrete spirit*.<sup>78</sup>

Although the confirmation of the continuation of the self-determining process lies outside the scope of logic, Hegel assures us that the content of nature and spirit is only the concept developed in new ways. The real world of nature and spirit, then, are not to be considered as outside God, but as the further differentiation of God.

The problem, however, is how this creation is supposed to have happened. The self-determining activity in the *Logic* is driven by the immanent progression to higher forms of

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<sup>78</sup> *SL* 592

the concept, but once the concept achieves completeness in the absolute idea, it appears that there is no need to progress any further. This problem is one of the prime targets of Schelling's criticisms of Hegel.<sup>79</sup> If the difficulties of explaining an immanent transition from the *Logic* to the *Realphilosophie* prove insurmountable, then the realisation of God in the world is equally threatened. In Schelling's terms, Hegel's attempt to get positive content into his logical philosophy receives a blow if he cannot show that the movement of the concept necessarily brings about the transition to nature. But, as argued above, Hegel already manages to get positivity into the negative science through the claim to have established the self-determining activity of the concept. It has been seen that this is not sufficient to prove the existence of God, insofar as God's existence is tied to self-expression in the world also. But, I will argue, granting the existence of activity in pure thought already gives Hegel enough to be *confident* of God's existence, if not *prove* this existence.

## 1.2 Theological status of self-determination

At times it looks as though Schelling only finds fault with Hegel's philosophy to the extent that it has pretension to establish the existence of the concrete world (of nature and spirit) from within logical thought. As noted, Schelling targets Hegel's attempts to show a transition from the logical idea to nature (to show that the idea is the 'creator of nature' and 'freely releases'<sup>80</sup> itself into nature). If Hegel intends to explain the existence of the concrete or external world through the logical understanding of the idea, then this is a prime example of the pretension to get a positive content (the existence of a created world) from a merely negative investigation (logical analysis of thought-determinations). Schelling argues that, if Hegel's *Logic* were to be honest and remain only as negative, then the transition to nature

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<sup>79</sup> *HMP* 153-59

<sup>80</sup> *SL* 843

should be only hypothetical.<sup>81</sup> I now offer an argument on Hegel's behalf which would retain certain core theological convictions (namely, that the idea or God – as the freely self-determining concept – is the substance of history) without needing to attribute to him an a priori proof of the creation of the world.

### 1.2.1 Self-determination qua guarantee of God's realisation in history

One of the key strategies used to defend Hegel against Schelling's attack has been to claim that Hegel is far more of a negative philosopher than Schelling supposes. Alan White, for instance, has argued that we should not interpret the *Logic* as providing a 'creation doctrine.'<sup>82</sup> Supposing we ignore those statements where Hegel indicates a transition from the idea to nature, how much has Hegel's metaphysical or theological ambitions been thwarted? Not that much. He could no longer claim to have secured the rational comprehension of central parts of Christian doctrine, primarily the Trinity. As the above quote from the *Logic* indicates, the idea (God, the Father) is supposed to be the 'creator of nature', thus revealing divinity (the Son), only to return as spirit.<sup>83</sup> In more secular language, if the transition to nature was only hypothetical, Hegel could not establish that the emergence of a universe and human life and freedom is necessary.

Even conceding these losses, Hegel's *Logic* still lays claim to a great deal. The activity of the concept may not yet be God in a fully revealed sense, but it is still supposed to be an independent process with an existence of its own. If Hegel manages to keep this claim, then he does not need to also provide an account of the transition to nature in order to be confident

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<sup>81</sup> *HMP* 158; cf. *GPP* 151

<sup>82</sup> Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), 74.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume I: Introduction and The Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 126-27.

that nature and spirit will follow the rational path set out in the *Logic* (that God will be revealed in the world). For this to be the case, we only need to assume two things: (1) that a determinate world exists, and (2) that the determinations of this world are knowable in reason (i.e. the being of determinations, not their existence). If these are accepted and we grant that the *Logic* proves the existence of an activity native to the concept, then we also commit ourselves to the view that the concept will develop in the temporal realm of the real world just as it developed in the atemporal realm of logic. Thus Hegel would have warrant to his claim – albeit in a more circuitous route than he intended – that the self-determining activity of the concept is the ‘life-pulse’ or animating spirit of things.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, some of Hegel’s most robust claims regarding progress still stand on this limited foundation. For instance, when contrasting a merely subjective approach of interpreting history (i.e. from the perspective of the understanding or external reflection) to the properly rational approach (i.e. from the perspective of reason), Hegel claims that philosophy has the assurance that ‘a divine will rules supreme’ and that ‘reason governs history...that the events will match the concept.’<sup>85</sup> Hegel can still have this claim, then, even when we concede two major points to his defenders: first, that the *Logic* does not establish the creation of the world; second, that the *Logic* does not claim to have knowledge of a transcendent or supersensible entity (cf. 1.1.2.). Without attributing a ‘metaphysical theology’ to Hegel, we can see that his thought retains a theological dimension which requires adequate justification.<sup>86</sup> History is guaranteed to follow a self-determining or free course via the immanent dynamism of the concept. Grounding our hope that the world is meaningful and free is not as fantastical as grounding more specific Christian doctrines (a personal God, divine creation, etc.), but it is

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<sup>84</sup> *SL* 37; cf. *SL* 43, *EL* §24a2

<sup>85</sup> *LPHI* 30

<sup>86</sup> White, *Absolute Knowledge*, 74. White argues that his transcendental ontological reading of Hegel means that the *Logic* is not a special or theological metaphysics in that it does not posit the absolute as a real ground (80). As I have argued, the activity of the concept is certainly not an entity (1.1.3.2.), and need not be considered a real ground in order to secure something more than a mere account of the structure of being.

only a wilful myopia that would want to deny the theological dimension of these less fantastical claims.

Of course, not everyone will accept both assumptions. Presumably the first assumption – that there is a world – does not cause any problems (excepting an extreme scepticism or solipsism). The second, however, would not be accepted by everyone. Those that follow Hegel qua ontologist (see 1.1.3.1) would accept that, if there is a world, then it will be immanently conceptual; that the determinations of the world and the determinations of thought form one and the same content. Of course, even if the interpretive part of this claim is accepted (i.e. that Hegel claims the being, or in-itself, of things is conceptual), the substantive part may not. But what is important here is that Schelling accepts the substantive part. I now argue that this is the case.

### 1.2.2 Schelling's criticism: personification of the idea

Schelling's own negative philosophy is also supposed to be an ontology—to tell us about the being of things. He has no problem with the claim that things are conceptual; so long as we realise the extent to which they are also nonconceptual.<sup>87</sup> Schelling is perhaps most explicit on his stance in the 1841/42 Berlin lectures.<sup>88</sup> There he responds to those that believe his distinction between negative and positive philosophy – between *what* is and *that* something is – entails the view that reason does not deal with being.<sup>89</sup> Schelling claims that it would 'be a pathetic reason, which had nothing to do with being, thus only concerning itself with a chimera.' But this distinction was not meant to have this result.

Reason is, properly speaking, concerned with nothing other than just being and with being according to its *matter* and *content* (exactly this is being in its in itself).

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<sup>87</sup> *HMP* 147

<sup>88</sup> Hereafter referred to in text as the *Berlin lectures*.

<sup>89</sup> *GPP* 129-30

Nevertheless, reason does not have to show *that* it is since this is no longer a matter of reason, but rather of experience. Admittedly, if I have grasped the essence, the *whatness* of something, for example, of a plant, then I have grasped something that is real [...] it is true that what is real does not stand in opposition to our thinking as something foreign, inaccessible, and unreachable, but that the concept and the being are one: that the being does not have the concept outside itself, but rather has it within itself.<sup>90</sup>

This highlights the fact that Schelling still thinks reason can tell us what things really are, even if it cannot tell us that they are. And Schelling certainly can accept that there is a world—even if this can only be known through experience, rather than through reason alone.<sup>91</sup> Thus, if he wants to reject Hegel's claims about the necessary realisation of God, he needs to refute the proof of the existence of a life or activity in the concept. Although it is not as ostensible as his objection to the transition to nature, he does just that.

Schelling praises Hegel for fully bringing out the purely logical nature of the science of reason, but says that it is nevertheless more 'monstrous' than preceding philosophy for the fact that it then tried to give these logical relations the appearance of an 'objective and real process.'<sup>92</sup> Part of what Schelling means here is that Hegel tried to show that the concept is responsible for all creation. But Schelling also objects to the way that the idea, before creation (or, rather, considered independently of creation), is illegitimately given the appearance of existence through the way that the *Logic* surreptitiously presents the concept as developing via an objective process. In the Berlin lectures Schelling contrasts Hegel and Kant on the ways that they attempted to get to the idea of God.<sup>93</sup> Whereas for Kant this was assumed (or postulated), Hegel claimed to have attained it objectively through the logical movement of the concept. According to Schelling, this effort gave rise to 'wrongful and improper expressions of a self-movement of the idea, words through which the idea was personified and ascribed an existence that it did not and could not have.' (*mißbräuchlichen*

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<sup>90</sup> *GPP* 130

<sup>91</sup> 'That something exists at all, and particularly, that this determinate thing exists in the world, can never be realized a priori and claimed by reason without experience.' (*GPP* 129)

<sup>92</sup> *HMP* 136

<sup>93</sup> *GPP* 139/SW 13:73

*und uneigentlichen Ausdrücke von einer Selbstbewegung der Idee, jene Worte, wodurch die Idee personificirt, und ihr eine Existenz zugeschrieben wurde, die sie nicht hatte und nicht haben konnte.*)<sup>94</sup> This clearly indicates that the idea does not need to be the creator of the finite world in order to have been attributed an existence; to be ascribed a self-movement already does this.<sup>95</sup>

That Schelling thinks an immanent movement or life to the concept, were it to be so, would provide a positive content (i.e. knowledge that God is, not just what it is) is also revealed through the critical application of his understanding of the nature of cognition or knowledge (*Erkenntniß*). Despite much of the terminological variance in Schelling's philosophy, the specific significance and role of *Erkenntniß* and *erkennen* remains remarkably consistent in the *Spätphilosophie*. In the Munich lectures Schelling states that cognition (*Erkennen*) is only found in positive philosophy; in negative philosophy it is 'just a question of thinking and of the concept' (*bloß von Denken und bloß vom Begriff*).<sup>96</sup> We find a similar contrast in the Berlin lectures.

...in everything that is real there are two things to be known: it is two entirely different things to know that a being is, *quid sit*, and that it is, *quod sit*. The former—that answer to the question *what* it is—accords me insight into the *essence* of the thing [*Einsicht in das Wesen des Dings*], or it provides that I understand the thing, that I have an understanding or a concept of it, or have it *itself* within the concept. The other insight however, *that* it is, does not accord me just the concept, but rather something that goes beyond just the concept, which is existence. This is *a cognition* [*ein Erkennen*]<sup>97</sup>

In thinking about a concept I grasp the essence (or 'what') of a thing, but I do not cognise anything.<sup>98</sup> Cognition requires something that exists. This contrast is drawn in the very same

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<sup>94</sup> *GPP* 138-39

<sup>95</sup> Admittedly, Schelling does not present this conclusion as precisely resulting from the kind of argument I advance. At this point he simply claims that the claim to the self-movement of the idea resulted from the association of the idea with God and the connotations that came with it, namely, of dynamic existence. But it is clear that Schelling believes that the self-movement (and therefore existence) is also attributed to the concept because of the supposed objective process found in the *Logic*. This will be established presently.

<sup>96</sup> *HMP* 134/SW 10:127

<sup>97</sup> *GPP* 129/SW 13:57-58

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *GPP* 158/SW 13:98: 'Thought is still by no means knowledge.' (*Denken ist noch keineswegs*

lecture in which Schelling compares Kant and Hegel on the idea as God. And there Schelling says that Hegel, ‘by virtue of an objective method,’ ‘provided it [the idea] with the semblance of cognition (*Schein eines Erkennens*).’ Since we can find in both this lecture and the Munich lectures the consistent claim that cognition has existence or the positive as its object, it can be seen that Schelling holds Hegel’s false attribution of self-movement to the idea to be the false attribution of existence, since this is what allows Hegel a cognition rather than a mere thought.

So, we have found independent arguments in Schelling’s lectures to support the claim that the *Logic* intends to be cognising something existing—it intends to show *that* there is an activity native to the concept (i.e. not reducible to an individual’s activity). This shows that Hegel is still open to Schelling’s criticism even if he drops the claim that the idea creates nature. In the next section I argue that the *Logic* can be shown – under pressure of Schelling’s interrogation – to fail to prove that there is an activity or immanent movement in the concept.

### **1.3 Schelling’s attempt to expose the surreptitious movement of the concept**

Schelling pursues two lines of criticism in the Munich lectures in order to contest the apparent self-generating or immanent movement of the concept: (1) he argues that the concept is immobile and thus does not generate its own movement; and (2) advances two accounts of how movement gets into the *Logic*: through (2a) the existential subject, and (2b) Hegel’s surreptitious analysis. Stephen Houlgate argues that both strands make use of unjustified premises drawn from Schelling’s mature views regarding the nature and relationship between negative philosophy and positive philosophy. I concede that the argument Schelling advances for (1) makes use of unjustified premises, but argue that

Houlgate runs together two different strands in (2), only one of which makes use of an argument with unjustified premises, namely (2a). Although the strand I defend (2b) avoids the question-begging charge, I acknowledge it could still be found wanting in other respects. The point, however, is to dispute Houlgate's suggestion that, ultimately, what Schelling's critical reading of Hegel is little more than an expression of conflicting views and thus fails to enter into a genuine dialogue. A proper understanding of the non-question-begging argument for (2) is instructive because it demonstrates an immanent or internal approach to the criticism of Hegel's *Logic* and thus gives us reason to take seriously Schelling's engagement with Hegel.

### 1.3.1 Immobility of the concept

Houlgate frames his discussion of Schelling's criticism of Hegel by calling attention to its situation within Schelling's philosophical development. Schelling's criticisms of Hegel, found in the Munich lectures, belong to Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* (from the late 1820s onwards). Houlgate reminds us that Schelling's philosophy of this period revolves around the elaboration of the distinction between negative and positive philosophy. Houlgate dedicates roughly a third of his article to spelling out this distinction and what this tells us about Schelling's philosophical commitments in this period.<sup>99</sup> At the centre of Houlgate's article is his direct exposition and evaluation of Schelling's criticisms in the Munich lectures.<sup>100</sup> Before looking at Schelling's criticisms (and Houlgate's treatment thereof), a brief account of what is actually supposed to be happening at the open of the *Logic* is needed.

One of the primary tasks of the *Logic* is to provide a critical account of the forms of thought. This means showing how they arise in a necessary way within thought, as opposed

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique of Hegel's "Science of Logic"," *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 1 (1999): 99–128, section II, 101-111.

<sup>100</sup> Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 111-17

to them being given in advance or taken up in an arbitrary way (say, as we find them embedded in language or consciousness). As we know, this is to be achieved by letting the concept generate the determinations itself. But if *all* forms must be given to thought by its own activity, there can be no features of thought with which we could explain the force or efficacy of this activity in the first place.<sup>101</sup> The challenge Hegel faces, then, is to begin with the completely indeterminate being of thought – or, as he also calls it, pure being – and show that something springs forth from out of this indeterminacy or emptiness; moreover, is compelled to do so precisely in virtue of this indeterminacy itself.

The following presents how Hegel needs the transitions to work if the above restrictions and critical demands are to hold. The first move is to show that, since the being which we begin with is completely indeterminate, it has no resources within itself to be able to maintain its own identity as being; it therefore loses its character as being and becomes nothing. The next move is to show that, since this most abstract nothing is not to be considered the absence of any particular thing but rather is nothingness as such, it ‘*is* (exists) [*existiert*]’ immediately; so, it is the same kind of indeterminacy which pure being is—i.e. an indeterminacy which *is*. Finally, it is because being and nothing do not stay what they are – but vanish into one another – that Hegel claims they have no self-subsistence upon which we could ground what each term actually is. Rather, the truth of each is found in their perpetual vanishing into one another—what Hegel calls becoming. Becoming is the first appearance of a determinate concept in the *Logic*<sup>102</sup> since there are distinguishable moments within it, whereas being and nothing had only indeterminacy. It is in this way that the occurrence of a determinate thought (becoming) is necessitated by the nature of the abstract thought of the indeterminacies of being and nothing. So, Hegel gets a movement, a becoming, into the

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<sup>101</sup> For an exploration of the various difficulties in understanding how the beginning of the *Logic* relates to the end of the *Phenomenology*, in terms of having a presuppositionless start in science, see William Maker ‘Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as Introduction to Systematic Science,’ in *Philosophy without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*, SUNY Series in Hegelian Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 67-82.

<sup>102</sup> *EL* 88a, p. 144.

completely indeterminate starting point by showing that pure being and nothing turn out to be the same. It is because they effect this vanishing solely of themselves that Hegel can claim to have traced a genuinely immanent progress where thought is self-determining. Now, this is little more than a brief restatement of how the *Logic should* progress, if it is to demonstrate that indeterminacy, by being what it is, logically entails the emergence of determinacy.

Houlgate believes that the *Logic* does follow this path, and that Schelling fails to appreciate what is really happening in the thought of pure being. Before directly considering Schelling's two criticisms, Houlgate suggests that these criticisms rely upon a basic conviction of Schelling's, namely, that pure thought cannot grasp being. This conviction is said to come through in the claim that, in the beginning of the *Logic*, Hegel does not think being, but actually failed to think anything at all. For Houlgate, Schelling's claim here (call it the 'vacuity claim') is just an expression of Schelling's views about being and thought.<sup>103</sup>

Schelling does not, however, offer the vacuity claim with no attempt at support whatsoever. The argument he gives in support of this claim, schematically presented, goes as follows: (i) being is always determinate (here Schelling claims that being either takes the determination of 'objective being' or 'essential being'); (ii) the being at the beginning of the *Logic* is indeterminate; therefore, (iii) no being (i.e. nothing) is thought and thus the opening thought of the *Logic* is actually an 'un-thought.'<sup>104</sup> Although Houlgate does not address this particular argument it is still vulnerable to the question-begging charge. The major premise assumes the exhaustiveness of the distinction between two different modes of being that is by no means self-evident. Thus Hegel could assert the contrary and say that the thought of pure being shows that there is a mode of being different to what Schelling specifies. So, although

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<sup>103</sup> 'As far as Schelling is concerned, however, this Hegelian thought of pure being is definitely not the positive thought of *das Seiende selbst* or existence as such which lies outside thought, nor is it the pure *Vorstellung* of such existence.' Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 113

<sup>104</sup> *HMP* 139-140

the vacuity claim is not simply imported without further commentary, the argument offered still requires crucial assumptions to be made.

Now, Schelling's failure to make a convincing case for the vacuity claim already casts doubt on his interrogation of Hegel. More specifically, Houlgate argues that Schelling's criticism that the pure concept is a lifeless product of thought, which is unable to generate movement from out of itself, makes use of the unjustified vacuity claim and thus falls with it. Before presenting Houlgate's account of Schelling's argument in detail some background is needed. The strategy Schelling takes here is not to provide independent reasons for thinking that the concept is necessarily immobile; rather, he challenges the means by which Hegel attempts to demonstrate that the concept is self-moving. Hegel aims to demonstrate this movement through an analysis of a proposition. Hegel believes the proposition 'pure being is nothing,' properly understood, shows that being and nothing are simultaneously the same and yet also different. In short, such a unity in difference is supposed to yield an oscillation, a constant movement of one into the other. In this way, for Hegel, pure being has generated the category of becoming. Schelling has a different way of understanding this proposition. 'Pure being is nothing' does not contain two distinct yet inseparable terms; rather, it is nothing more than a tautology which merely 'contains a combination of words, and therefore nothing can follow from it.'<sup>105</sup>

So, we appear to have a stand-off: Hegel and Schelling interpret this proposition in contrary ways; one interprets it as demonstrating the inherent dynamism of the concept, the other interprets it as demonstrating the inherent lifelessness of the concept. Houlgate attempts to undermine Schelling's alternative interpretation by presenting Schelling's argument for this interpretation as resting on the vacuity claim: 'From Schelling's point of view, indeed, the Hegelian thought of pure being is one in which nothing is actually thought; it is an "un-

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<sup>105</sup> *HMP* 140

thought.” The proposition advanced by Hegel himself that “pure being is nothing” is thus for Schelling really a tautology, because what it actually says is “nothing is nothing.”<sup>106</sup> This is not quite how Schelling’s argument goes at this point in the Munich lectures, but the argument he does advance is nevertheless guilty of assuming the validity of premises which beg the question against Hegel. Rather than calling upon the vacuity claim, Schelling proceeds on the basis of a specific understanding of the nature of the proposition. Schelling ruminates on the forms that the proposition can take and claims that it must either be a judgment or a tautology. He then rules out the possibility that Hegel could mean the proposition ‘pure being is nothing’ to be a judgment, before concluding that it must therefore be a tautology. This is different to Houlgate’s account, but, again, Schelling nevertheless fails to come off any better.<sup>107</sup> Much like the argument which was first discussed in this section, Schelling assumes a dichotomy which excludes Hegel’s option from the start. This time it is the dichotomy of the forms of proposition (judgment or tautology). For Hegel, the proposition is speculative and Schelling offers us no reason to prefer his account over Hegel’s. Having presented Schelling’s argument for (1) and identified the unjustified premise at work within it, we can proceed to the analysis of (2).

### 1.3.2 The non-immanent source of the concept’s movement

The next way Schelling tries to reveal the lack of immanent movement is by exposing how movement gets into the *Logic*. Unfortunately, Schelling’s attempt to expose the real animating force of the *Logic* is not as clearly presented as it might be. The biggest problem

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<sup>106</sup> Houlgate, “Schelling’s Critique,” 113

<sup>107</sup> Houlgate actually discusses the argument I reconstructed here in *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity*, (Indiana, Ind: Purdue University Press, 2006), 95-98. Houlgate rightly points out that Schelling has failed to consider another option: the speculative proposition. Houlgate also addresses the difference in the views of Hegel and Schelling on the question of thought and judgment in “Schelling’s Critique,” 119-21, but is presented as a separate, general issue.

posed by Schelling's presentation is that he actually offers two distinct accounts of the source of the movement in the *Logic*,<sup>108</sup> but does not do enough to draw our attention to this fact. Before going on to consider Houlgate's discussion, then, I will untangle Schelling's two accounts through a reconstruction. With this clarification in place I proceed to show how Houlgate confuses these different accounts and consequently conflates different aspects of Schelling's arguments.

Both of Schelling's alternative accounts of the movement of the *Logic* offer the activity of the thinking subject as an explanation. However, the specific type of movement they aim to explain is different in each case, as is the nature of the intervention of the thinking subject. In other words, the object of explanation (the *explanandum*) and the explanation offered (the *explanans*) changes in Schelling's two accounts of the movement of the *Logic*.

### 1.3.2.1 The 'proto-existentialist' argument

In the first account the explanandum is the compulsive force with which a completely indeterminate thought moves to a determinate one.<sup>109</sup> When thinking about what this compulsive force is, it is important to recall how Hegel thinks of the *Logic* in relation to its subject matter. The subject matter of the *Logic* is just thought itself. But this is pure thought, not the thought of any particular person. As Hegel puts it, the thought which is the object of logic 'is to be taken simply in the absolute sense as *infinite* thought untainted by the finitude of consciousness, in short, *thought as such*.'<sup>110</sup> The *Logic* qua text is not the immanent movement of pure thought itself, but only a chronicle or record of the self-generating

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<sup>108</sup> The first appearing at 138, the second at 140-1.

<sup>109</sup> *HMP* 138

<sup>110</sup> *SL* 63

progression of pure thought.<sup>111</sup> This is not to say that Hegel neglects how movement appears in the text; the *Logic* is supposed to be a demonstration of this movement after all. What should be kept in mind is that, while the movement of the subject matter and the movement of the demonstration are supposed to match up, the nature of the cogency of each is different. The former is supposed to impress upon any mind whether or not they have Hegel's book in front of them, provided they genuinely start with a thought without any presuppositions (in this way Hegel takes up Fichte's strategy of claiming that the philosopher's job is not to fashion an artefact, but to observe the object of science).<sup>112</sup> The latter can act as a guide to that activity, but it also aims to provide a proof for those unwilling or incapable of such an activity.<sup>113</sup> I bring up this distinction to highlight that we are dealing with the universal nature of thought which appears to any individual when trying to think an indeterminate thought. As we will see, Schelling challenges Hegel's understanding of this experience of thought. But the important point is that Schelling – in his first account at least – accepts Hegel's demand to just observe what happens when anyone tries to think indeterminacy and, further, even accepts that there is indeed a necessary movement when taking up this activity. Where Schelling departs from Hegel is in his explanation of why this movement occurs—that is, he offers an alternative explanans.

As we know, for Hegel, the explanation for this movement is that the concept generates its own movement when left to its own devices (i.e. without any subjective interference). Schelling argues that this movement only happens because anyone who tries to think

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<sup>111</sup> One language may be more or less adequate to represent specific thought determinations (*SL* 32), but the self-movement itself only occurs in pure thought free of any external clothing, not in the medium of language itself.

<sup>112</sup> See Fichte's 'Second Introduction to the science of Knowledge: For readers who already have a philosophical system,' in *Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29-85.

<sup>113</sup> That there is such a distance between the movement of the subject matter and the movement of the demonstration or exposition of the *Logic* is indicated by many of Hegel's comments on the composition of the *Logic* – for instance, the issue of language noted above – including his remark that what makes an exposition scientific is that it 'conforms to its [the subject matter] simple rhythm,' (*SL* 54) indicating that there is a separation of the movement – or rhythm – of pure thought and its exposition in the *Logic*.

indeterminacy will *feel* dissatisfied with such a ‘meagre diet of pure being’ and thus it is the existing subject which drives the compulsion to a more determinate thought, not the concept itself.<sup>114</sup> This feeling of dissatisfaction in turn is explained by Schelling as resulting from other aspects of the subject’s existence. It is because thinking subjects have always already had richer, more determinate experiences which remain in our memory that the indeterminacy of the first thought of the *Logic* shows up as deficient. In other words, the existential subject’s experience yields a norm, standard, or goal which reveals the poverty of an indeterminate or abstract thought. So, in order to explain the compulsion to leave an indeterminate thought (explanandum) Schelling offers the existential subject (explanans).

### 1.3.2.2 The diagnostic argument

With the second account Schelling shifts gears. Rather than considering the compulsive thrust of thought as such, it is Hegel’s analysis which is under scrutiny. More specifically, it is Hegel’s analysis of the notion of beginning that Schelling now tackles.<sup>115</sup> In the *Encyclopaedia Logic* Hegel responds to those that would claim the unity of being and nothing incomprehensible by saying that everyone has access to notions which prove they already make use of such a unity—one of which is the notion of beginning. Hegel claims that we could begin logic with the notion of beginning as beginning and see that this contains the representation of something to come. Hegel’s explanation of this point is difficult and compressed. If we use an illustration that he is fond of using in other contexts we can get a better grasp of it. The seed is the beginning of the plant, but the plant is not already there in the beginning. Yet we cannot say that the plant is straight-forwardly not there in the way that an animal or an emotion is not there in the seed. To move back to more abstract language, we

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<sup>114</sup> *HMP* 138

<sup>115</sup> *EL* §88

start with being which is also nothing since in the beginning we are dealing with a being which it is not yet what it is to become; nevertheless, it is not simply nothing – without any being– since it is the beginning of something. So, we have a unity of being and nothing which indicates a progression or movement. That this movement is demonstrated through an *analysis* undertaken by the philosopher, and not through the simple *witnessing* of the unfolding of pure thought, is significant. When Schelling challenged the latter he needed to offer an alternative account of the experience of compulsion. With the former he can simply challenge the validity of Hegel's analysis. Schelling does challenge the validity of Hegel's analysis and the explanation he offers for the apparent success of Hegel's argument will now be addressed.

Schelling argues that the reason Hegel seems to get an immanent emergence of becoming from an analysis of beginning is because Hegel sneaks in a content into the supposedly indeterminate beginning. For Hegel, if this movement is going to be immanent, then the philosopher cannot introduce any external content or influence the process in any way. Unlike Schelling's previous explanation he is not claiming that the external influence comes from the nature and activity of the existential subject as such. Rather, he now points to how a specific individual – namely, Hegel – has brought in a movement. An important consequence of this is that, whereas Schelling's previous account uncovers a necessary influence, he now claims to only expose an avoidable influence. So, what is the nature of this avoidable influence? Essentially, this influence is introduced by Hegel's use of illicit or surreptitious moves.

Schelling argues that the only reason Hegel manages to get a movement here is because he snuck in a determination through the use of the word 'yet' when he describes beginning by saying that 'the matter is not yet in its beginning.' Hegel wants this notion of beginning to reveal the unity of being and nothing that necessarily generates a becoming. Schelling

suggests unity is guaranteed by this ‘yet’ since the proposition ‘pure being is nothing’ now becomes ‘being is here – from this point of view – *still* nothing.’ Implicitly, through a subtle use of language, Hegel has slipped a potential into being, the potential to become something more. If Hegel had not determined being as ‘still nothing’ or ‘not yet real being’ he would not have been able to demonstrate the immanent generation of becoming. We can see that Schelling locates the movement in an illicit move made by an individual thinker and exposes this source of movement through a close reading of Hegel’s text.

This explanation is thus very different to the previous one. Most notably, Schelling no longer appeals to general features of our existence (e.g. experience of concrete being, memory, desire, and dissatisfaction) to explain movement and thus avoids taking on the burden of a theory of the subject. Thus, not only is the object of explanation and the explanation advanced different in each case, but the argumentative strategy is also different. The first is an external criticism and the second an internal criticism. The external criticism utilises what might be called – following Houlgate’s designation – a ‘proto-existentialist’ argument; whereas the internal criticism only utilises what can be called a ‘diagnostic’ argument.

### 1.3.3 Houlgate’s conflation of Schelling’s arguments

As noted at the beginning of this exposition, Schelling does little to alert us to these crucial differences. Before looking at how Houlgate fails to distinguish between these two explanations I want to briefly consider some general interpretive issues that might lead us to overlook this distinction. The first has already been touched upon, namely, the flaws in Schelling’s presentation such as the lack of signposting. Not only does the reader have to make their own way through much of these lectures, but the terrain itself is difficult to

navigate. In particular, the two explanations share fundamental characteristics which could throw the reader of the text. The explanandum in both cases is movement, but in one it is the compulsion experienced by thought as such when faced with indeterminacy, and in the other it is the becoming which is supposed to be demonstrated in Hegel's analysis of the notion of beginning. The explanans looks to be the same in both cases also because both cite the activity of the thinker. But, as we have seen, in the first explanation this activity is of thinking or subjectivity as such (and thus unavoidable), and in the second this is the activity of only a specific thinker (and thus avoidable). These are subtle and easily missed distinctions, but they are important to observe if we are to properly evaluate the strength and significance of Schelling's critical engagement with Hegel's dialectics.

Finally, a contemporary reader can easily subsume the second explanation under the first because the latter resonates so strongly with the subsequent tradition of Hegel criticism in European philosophy. Much like Schelling's first explanation, existentialist and materialist criticisms of Hegel advanced from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards point to the practical (whether individual or social) conditions of theoretical activity. Houlgate correctly identifies Schelling as an early exponent of this kind of criticism. Unfortunately he goes one step further and subsumes the entirety of Schelling's objections to Hegel under the rubric 'proto-existentialist' (i.e. the first type of account of intervention by the thinker). I now show in more detail how Houlgate subsumes the second explanation under the first and thus neglects the internal or diagnostic element of Schelling's criticism.

In the following passage Houlgate starts by summarising Schelling's first – proto-existentialist – account.

First of all, the Hegelian philosopher anticipates the goal of full being (as concept, idea, and ultimately nature) and judges that the meagre concept of pure being, with which the *Logic* begins, falls short of that goal.

Houlgate then continues by presenting Schelling's reading of Hegel's text as though it were premised on the above (indicated by '...is thus revealed...'):

The proposition "Pure being is nothing" is thus revealed as saying that "Pure being is *still (noch)* nothing" or that "it is *not yet (noch nicht)* real being." By being recast as not yet real being in this way, pure being is understood not just as nothing but as harboring the possibility for real being which is yet to be fulfilled, that is, as being *in potentia*. With the interpolation of the word yet (*noch*), Schelling maintains, pure being is thus understood as lacking, but also as promising, something which has yet to be. That is to say, pure being is thought as pointing beyond itself and as heralding real being which is to come. In this way, Schelling claims, the transition is made by the Hegelian philosopher from the thought of pure being to the thought of coming to be or becoming. One moves from pure being to becoming, therefore, not by understanding pure being as pure being, but by understanding it as not yet real being and so as pointing forward to the future coming of that real being itself.<sup>116</sup>

This exposition is inaccurate and misleads through omission and equivocation. Houlgate here omits Schelling's close reading of Hegel's analysis of the notion of beginning. This omission is problematic because in Schelling's reading he shows how Hegel is the one that illicitly determines being as 'not yet real being' through his analysis of beginning. In place of Schelling's legitimate critical approach Houlgate insinuates the illegitimate use of the perspective of a subject familiar with lived experience which finds pure being wanting and then apparently judges that being also has the potential to be something more. As the earlier reconstruction has shown, Schelling does not claim that being attains an implicit potential because it falls short of our other experience but because Hegel sneaks it in through his analysis.

It should be noted that, although Houlgate omits Schelling's close reading from his central exposition, he does address it later in the article. There he claims that Schelling's attribution of the determination of being as being in potentiâ to Hegel is a misrepresentation fuelled by a blinkered refusal to entertain the thought that pure being can generate its own

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<sup>116</sup> Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 114-15

movement.<sup>117</sup> But to call Schelling's interpretation a misrepresentation is an abuse of language. Houlgate claims it is a misrepresentation because it does not accurately represent Hegel's view of pure being. But Schelling is not trying to represent Hegel's view of being; instead he aims to uncover the mechanisms or philosophical artifices Hegel *actually* uses in his texts in order to get the result needed to confirm his view of being and its supposed immanent transformation.

Houlgate compounds the impression that there is only one continuous account in Schelling's attempts to reveal the real animating force of the *Logic* when he fails to distinguish between the subject who finds pure being wanting (in comparison to the anticipated 'goal of full being') and the subject who manages to get a transition from the category of being to becoming by understanding being as 'harboring' or 'promising' something yet to be—that is, by determining being as being in potentiâ. Houlgate equivocates between these two different subjects by giving them both the same ambiguous designation 'the Hegelian philosopher.' Again, as was shown in the reconstruction, the subject in the first case is subjectivity or thought as such; the subject in the second case is a specific individual author, namely, Hegel. When we remember this aspect of Schelling's criticism it becomes clear that the designation 'the Hegelian philosopher' is inadequate to accurately represent what is going on: it is both too specific – to capture the sense of subjectivity as such – and too general – to capture the sense of a surreptitious move made by a specific author. Each explanation works on fundamentally different registers.

It is surprising that Houlgate would run together these two different explanations since they are not even strictly compatible. The 'goal' imposed by subjectivity can only be said to drive the movement when faced with a genuinely indeterminate starting point (this is the whole point of Schelling's first explanation); and the 'promise' found in Hegel's being can

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<sup>117</sup> Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 124-125

only be doing the work if the starting point is not indeterminate at all, but in fact determined by the philosopher (in this case, Hegel). Now, it might be wondered, if these explanations are in competition with each other, Schelling's criticism at least has serious internal tensions and that he must promote just one of these explanations. But they are not really in competition with each other since they are explaining different things.

Now that we have seen how Houlgate's exposition obscures aspects of Schelling's account of movement in the *Logic* it becomes clear how he could miss that Schelling provides an internal criticism which is not question begging. But just because Schelling's criticism of Hegel's analysis of beginning does not rest upon assumptions about subjectivity does not mean that it necessarily hits the mark. A problem with Schelling's argument that being is determined as being in potentia is that this interpretation is based on Hegel's analysis of the notion of beginning that Hegel claims is only a representation or notion (*Vorstellung*) which everyday knowledge is familiar and is distinct from philosophical knowing. Hegel does not use this analysis of beginning in the scientific exposition of pure being, only in remarks. As Houlgate points out, these remarks are only intended to aid communication of the material and not direct the deduction of the categories in the *Logic*.<sup>118</sup> If we take it that Hegel's remarks do not guide the deduction in the science itself, then Schelling's diagnostic reading can be deflected by the Hegelian.

With this result the question might be asked: if this argument cannot provide the silver bullet against Hegel's *Logic*, why go to the effort to disentangle it from the question-begging argument? The reason is that Houlgate's conflation not only leads him to overlook some of Schelling's arguments, but, more importantly, also leads him to promote the pernicious view that Schelling's lectures are of no worth to the reader wanting to learn something about Hegel's *Logic*; that the most that can be gotten from consulting them is a record of

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<sup>118</sup> Of course, that Hegel wants these remarks to be external to the science itself does not mean that Hegel succeeds in so neatly separating out the deduction from the communication. I will not take up this line of inquiry here, however.

disagreements. With this Houlgate can then restrict the reader's options to an affirmation of one philosopher over the other.

Now it is, of course, possible that Schelling is right about the relation between thought and being and that as a result the *Logic* cannot proceed immanently, as Hegel claims it does, from the thought of being as such. But there is also another possibility: that the *Logic* does proceed immanently from the thought of being as such and that Schelling is incapable of grasping this because he has simply assumed from the outset that thought by itself cannot bring being as such before the mind.<sup>119</sup>

This is a stifling prescription because it makes it seem as though anyone wanting to test Schelling's suspicion that the movement of the *Logic* is not immanent must first settle the question of the nature of being and thought—one of the most perennial and challenging tasks in philosophy. Thus Houlgate's apparently modest proposal – to weigh up the merits of Schelling's and Hegel's philosophy in lieu of a definitive conclusion – conceals the bolder injunction to resolve huge philosophical issues before looking to how Schelling can expose problems in Hegel's *Logic*. It is this tacitly excluded option that I now want to pursue. That is, I want to read Schelling's lectures carefully to mine resources that reveal the *Logic* to be driven by a non-immanent source of movement *without* needing to first establish that the concept is *necessarily* immobile (i.e. assume Schelling's views about being and thought) but, rather, only show that it *is* immobile in Hegel's treatment of it.

#### **1.4 Schellingian immanent criticism**

I now explore the potential of another objection Schelling levels at Hegel's *Logic* which Houlgate does not consider and would be overlooked if we followed Houlgate's prescription for how to approach Schelling's engagement with Hegel. In the following passage Schelling again entertains the role of the thinking subject, but this time does not import assumptions

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<sup>119</sup> Houlgate, "Schelling's Critique," 125

about the nature of thinking or of how our existential conditions influence our theoretical activity. Rather, Schelling turns out attention to the minimal fact that someone is doing the thinking, rather than being thinking itself anonymously.

...after I have posited pure being, I look for something in it and find nothing, because I have forbidden myself to find anything in it precisely by the fact that I have posited it as pure being, as mere being in general. Therefore it is not at all being itself that finds itself, but rather *I* find it as nothing, and say this in the proposition: "Pure being is nothing".<sup>120</sup>

This passage seems to be suggesting that the transition from being to nothing occurs because there is a drive of the *I* to find something in being and that it matters that there is nothing for the *I* there. This would imply that Schelling has in mind another account of the subject which he is using in order to locate a non-immanent factor. If this is what is happening in this passage then Schelling would again be tasked with providing further arguments for why this is more persuasive than Hegel's immanent account. But I think an insight can be gleaned from Schelling's comments here without taking on any of this extra burden.

#### 1.4.1 Exposing the split within pure thought

What is highlighted in the above passage is the difficulty involved in saying that the concept somehow investigates itself—i.e. that the concept should 'find itself' as nothing. As we have seen, Hegel places a high importance on the point that the concept should only get its determinations from itself; the philosopher should not be the one to discover the determinations, but should 'simply let the inherently living determinations take their own course'.<sup>121</sup> To see more precisely what Hegel has in mind it will be helpful to reconsider his criticism of Kant. Previously we saw that Hegel claimed Kant was not critical enough in his

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<sup>120</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 139-140.

<sup>121</sup> *EL* §24a2; cf. *SL* 63

estimation of naïve metaphysics. Kant certainly questioned how categories could be used to yield knowledge, but did not sufficiently ask about the ‘content’ of these categories in themselves, nor how philosophy comes across them in the first place (see 1.1.3.1). The problem was, according to Hegel, that the way the philosopher chooses the categories is still coloured by arbitrariness and contingency. This is a very severe criticism, but Hegel has an even more fundamental objection.

Even before we get to the problem of the content of the categories, Hegel thinks that the minimal distinction between what is known (thought-determinations) and the knower (the transcendental inquirer) in transcendental philosophy already presupposes too much. Kant forgets that the investigation of thought-forms is already a kind of knowing which also requires a critical grounding. But if the investigation itself is then subjected to critical inquiry, this inquiry in turn needs to be justified, which would then need a further investigation, and so on. Hegel’s proposal avoids this infinite regress by rejecting the separation of the object of investigation from the investigation itself. Hegel revisits this criticism, which he had famously elaborated in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

The activity of the forms of thinking, and the critique of them, must be united within the process of cognition. The forms of thinking must be considered in and for themselves; they are the object and the activity of the object itself; they investigate themselves, they must determine their own limits and point out their own defects. ... [This activity of thinking] is not brought to bear on the thought-determination from outside; on the contrary, it must be considered as dwelling within them.<sup>122</sup>

So, the critique needs to come from the thought-determinations themselves, rather than from an external investigator. As suggested, the externality Hegel objects to here in transcendental inquiry is not that of empirical consciousness. Hegel can allow that Kant has raised the inquiry to the point where it is ‘the ego common to all’ (i.e. not a specific, empirical,

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<sup>122</sup> *EL* §41a1

individual consciousness) which is related to the categories.<sup>123</sup> There is, then, a separation of this ego common to all from the categories, and the former investigates the latter, rather than the categories investigating themselves.

Schelling's passage quoted above suggests that Hegel has fallen into the very separation which Kant had done. Even within a realm of pure thinking a subtle gap has been opened up between the subject-matter (the categories or thought-determinations) and the knowing or investigating of that subject-matter. But this challenge is not in the service of merely pointing out that Hegel left something outside of his investigation. What I take this challenge to show is that Hegel needs to exploit this gap within thought in order to get movement in the *Logic*. That is, there needs to be a gap between thought qua subject-matter of the *Logic* (the concept) and thought qua what actually thinks this subject-matter (the *I*) in order for there to be a generation of a new content. If an interpretation of the beginning of the *Logic* along these lines can be convincingly made, Hegel can no longer claim that the unfolding of content is purely the immanent self-determination of the concept but must be *animated by a perspective external to the strict subject-matter* of the *Logic*. In short, he would have returned to the opposition of consciousness – supposedly overcome at the end of the *Phenomenology* – where the transition or movement would be generated by the tension between the observer and what is observed.

#### 1.4.2 Rereading the beginning of the *Logic*

The description of the opening moves of the *Logic* given earlier aimed to represent what *should* be happening if the movement is to remain immanent (1.3.1). What I argue now is that if we hold Hegel to his own standard of scientific derivation – that the development from one

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<sup>123</sup> *SL* 63

category to another should be self-evident – the movement from being to nothing is inexplicable without appeal to an external perspective. Specifically, that Schelling’s insight – that being only becomes nothing through our own observation or *discovery* of it *as* nothing – points us in the direction of understanding how Hegel gets movement into the *Logic*.

Hegel has no problem showing the identity of being and nothing. Pure being and pure nothing are both characterised as pure indeterminacy. Hegel is right to reject assertions of their absolute difference by pointing out that only determinate being is opposed to nothing, but being in its purity has no features with which it could be distinguished from nothing. But if there is no distinguishing features in being to separate it from nothing it looks as though there are no immanent reasons to resist simply collapsing them into one. And, as we know, this would be an unwelcome result for Hegel because, if being and nothing are straightforwardly the same, he would not have gotten any further in the science since no new content would have showed up—we would just have two ways to describe the same thing. Conversely, Hegel cannot get around this problem by guaranteeing the difference of being and nothing through specifying distinct determinations for each because then the first object of philosophy would be merely given or presupposed.

So, how can Hegel get being and nothing to be the same in the relevant sense? The official story is that being, independent of our perspective on it, effects this transition. But the details of this transition are thin in Hegel’s description. The only explanation Hegel offers in the first section is that, since there is nothing to be thought in pure being (or being is just empty thinking), being is in fact nothing. But why this is a movement from being to nothing and not a straightforward sameness is left mysterious. The only marker of a transition is when Hegel claims that there is ‘nothing to be intuited in it’. Thus it is only when being is considered from the perspective of intuition (or thinking) that it can show up as nothing. In other words, Hegel needs a moment of *discovery* in order for being and nothing to be

distinguished (the content must be the exact same indeterminacy). Any Hegelian will quickly respond that this cannot be what is happening because this implies a temporality – an actual duration in the mind of a concrete thinker – and that the vanishing of both terms into one another is not a transition from one *to* the other, but should be understood as an *immediate* vanishing (...‘does not pass over, but has passed over’). Even if we could make sense out of what a vanishing without temporality is and, further, if we accept the Hegelians bare assurance that this is what is happening in the *Logic*, this still leaves our question unanswered. If the concept is supposed to generate the movement by itself, why does being only show up as nothing in Hegel’s demonstration at the point where he enlists the help of the perspective of thinking or intuition?

If Hegel does enlist the perspective of thought to generate the movement, does this establish that the movement of the *Logic* is not immanent? After all, Hegel claims that the object of the *Logic* is just as suitably understood as pure knowing or pure thinking as much as it is considered the concept. Is it not the case that thinking or knowing in their pure form is just another name for the concept? Even if this is taken into account, this is not sufficient to explain the manner in which Hegel appears to use the perspective of thinking to generate movement. The problem is not the presence of thinking as such. The *Logic* claims that it begins with the collapse of the subject-object distinction since thought is at once the subject and the object. But the problem posed here is that there is a *gap* between subject and object— not that the same thing can now be considered the concept, now be considered thought. If Schelling’s suggestion is correct, the transition from being to nothing occurs because that which is conceptualized is taken to be distinct from the process of conceptualization. In this way the *Logic* would not have collapsed the distinction between subject and object, but mobilise the opposition between them (albeit within the realm of pure thought).

The demand for immanence and presuppositionlessness thus appear not to have been met in the opening of the *Logic*. Although Hegel would not welcome this conclusion, we find support for it from Hegel himself in the equivalent section of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. This time Hegel actually emphasises the role that the activity of thinking plays in the development of a content in the *Logic*. Moreover, he even posits a specific kind of activity of thinking, namely, a drive. Hegel claims that those empty abstractions that we begin with only attain further determination because we try to pin down the meaning of these terms.

[...] the *drive* to find in being or in both [being and nothing] a stable meaning is this very *necessity*, which leads being and nothing further along and endows them with a true, i.e., concrete meaning. This progression is the logical exposition and course [of thought] that presents itself in what follows. The *thinking them over* that *finds* deeper determinations for them is the logical thinking by which these determinations produce themselves, not in a contingent but in a necessary way.<sup>124</sup>

At first it might not be clear how this speaks to our problem of how Hegel intends to get being to be equated with nothing without simply collapsing them into one another. It should be recalled what is actually entailed in the development of further determinations at the beginning of the *Logic*. Becoming is the first determinate content of the *Logic* because it has distinguishable moments which pure being and pure nothing do not have when addressed as pure abstractions. To develop deeper determinations at this first stage, then, requires the transition from being to nothing. If, as Hegel claims, the indeterminate thought of pure being would not become determinate were it not for our drive then this implies that the attempt to pin down a meaning of pure being is responsible for the transition to nothing. So, in order to make sense out of the unity of being and nothing we can reread the opening moves of the *Logic* in light of the gap Hegel opens up between what is thought (being and nothing) and the way in which we think it.

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<sup>124</sup> *EL* §87r

After noting that pure being is completely indeterminate, the first step Hegel takes in demonstrating a movement out of pure being is to point out the difficulty faced in trying to think this being. The attempt to think the content of pure being – in other words, the attempt to find a stable meaning for pure being – fails. This failure is due to the fact that there is nothing within it which would allow us to distinguish it from anything else (except its very indistinguishability). Our attempt to find a stable meaning, then, is what reveals being to be nothing. Faced with this disconcerting instability in what was believed to be the most certain and basic thought, we now attempt to pin down the meaning of nothing. But when thought tries to keep nothing distinct from being by searching for a meaning peculiar to it, it gives an existence to it in this very act<sup>125</sup> and thus nothing turns out to have the same affirmative indeterminacy as pure being. Thus, to borrow Schelling's terms, being does not find itself as nothing, but the *I* which needs to understand the meaning of being finds it to be nothing.

Schelling's hint, alongside Hegel's suggestion in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, proves to be a powerful aid in interpreting the movement of the *Logic*: that is, it makes sense of an otherwise obscure movement from being to nothing in Hegel's exposition. Although this interpretation provides an explanation of how Hegel text gets movement into logic, it obviously conflicts with the scientific demand that the derivation of the categories be the result of the concept only. Neither the distinction between thought and that which thinks this thought, nor the characterisation of this thinking as a drive for stable meaning appear to receive a deduction in the *Logic*. Not only does this mean that there are presuppositions in Hegel's science but, more importantly for Schelling, this means that the life or spiritual movement is not inherent to the logical realm; rather it is animated by Hegel's surreptitious use of the perspective of the subject that thinks the concept.

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<sup>125</sup> See *SL* 101 'Nothing is thought of, imagined, spoken of, and therefore it *is*; in the thinking, imagining, speaking and so on, nothing has its being.'

### 1.5 Houlgate's defence of the beginning of the *Logic*

Although Houlgate does not consider the possibility of reading the *Logic* in this way in his article on Schelling, he does in his more recent book *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity*.<sup>126</sup> However, he only gives serious consideration to this reading as it is found in authors other than Schelling.

In a section of his book addressing the problem of how being and nothing move, Houlgate rehashes his rejection of Schelling, this time in the company of Trendelenburg and Kierkegaard.<sup>127</sup> These thinkers are said to have originated the view that being isn't the source of its own movement into nothing, and that, instead, it is the philosopher's attempt to render each term intelligible that generates a movement. At this stage, however, Houlgate is still limiting his investigation of the problem of movement to his curtailed understanding of Schelling. Schelling's objection is said to start from the assumption that movement does not belong in the logical realm and presupposes a theory of the subject which accounts for how we *inevitably* move from the thought of being to nothing.<sup>128</sup> In support of this way of framing the objection Houlgate regurgitates a compressed account of his take on Schelling's criticism of Hegel from his earlier article. Schelling's criticism is supposed to be boiled down to this: he first presupposes that the subject must only experience being a posteriori; the memory of this experience is what impels us to be dissatisfied with pure being; and thus is the source of movement (the concept is immobile). As mentioned before, this is only one aspect of Schelling's criticism. What I have argued is that Schelling has resources to question the source of the movement in the *Logic* without making these kinds of assumptions. The type of interpretation of the *Logic* elaborated on the basis of Schelling's alternative suggestion

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<sup>126</sup> Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity*, Purdue University Press Series in the History of Philosophy (Indiana, Ind: Purdue University Press, 2006).

<sup>127</sup> 'Why do Being and Nothing "Move"?', in *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, 272-74.

<sup>128</sup> Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, 103-04

manages to propose an understanding of the movement of the *Logic* as dependent on the experience of a thinking subject purely through an immanent criticism of Hegel's text.

Once Houlgate has dismissed the originators of this view he goes on admit that the general view that the *Logic* is moved by the activity of the philosopher has some basis. He cites one of several passages where Hegel brings in a perspective external to the concept in order equate or unify being and nothing. To address the apparently more respectable version of this worry Houlgate considers contemporary criticism of the *Logic* which is much more closely related to the one I have been advancing via Schelling than the caricature Houlgate offers. Wolfgang Wieland claims that the category of nothing only emerges due to the effort we make to thematize or determine pure being. As a result, the category of pure being would forever remain pure being if it weren't for our activity in trying to render it intelligible. Since Houlgate does not address the Schellingian criticism advanced here – and Wieland's criticisms is broadly in agreement with it – I will investigate Houlgate's response to the latter.

In response to this challenge Houlgate – refashioning a point from Dieter Henrich – reminds the potential critic of the professed aim of the *Logic* and Hegel's intentions for this science.

...any reading that understands the move from being to nothing to be prompted by the activity of the philosopher must be mistaken because it turns speculative logic into a *phenomenological* logic—an account of what happens when pure being is thought *by us*, not an account of the logical character of pure being *itself*. Hegel states clearly in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that the categories “investigate themselves” and that dialectic dwells “within” them ... If this is the case, they must be understood to develop or “move” because of their own *logical* character, not because of the way we think of them or experience them.<sup>129</sup>

The argument here is slightly odd. The force of the ‘must’ in his claim that the alternative interpretation ‘must be mistaken’ is ambiguous. We can understand an interpretation of a text

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<sup>129</sup> Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, 273-4

to aim to either: represent the declared aims of the author of the text or represent what is actually going on in the text. In the above passage Houlgate appeals to the declared aims of the *Logic* and what Hegel would like to achieve. And, of course, the interpretation advanced by Wieland (and the reconstruction of Schelling I advance) do indeed fails to match up with Hegel's intentions. But this is not a convincing objection. Houlgate has simply missed the point of a *critical* interpretation: precisely the purpose of a critical interpretation is not to represent how the argument *should* go if the author is going to be as good as their word; rather, the point is to show how the author actually does support their claims. In other words, a critical interpretation is diagnostic. In this case, then, Houlgate has not managed to prove that this interpretation is mistaken (only that it didn't lovingly repeat Hegel's own claims).

If Houlgate wanted to avoid this conclusion, the only other option is to say that he really has established that those interpretations are mistaken (and do not merely misrepresent Hegel's intentions). But this route leads to even worse problems. In this case he would have rejected the interpretation which uncovers the role of the subject in the movement of the *Logic* merely by citing Hegel's claim that the movement is all the work of the categories themselves. And this would be to beg the question.

I have argued that the movement in the *Logic* is made possible by Hegel's employment of a particular activity of the philosopher and the exploitation of a gap between the concept and the I. One reason to interpret the *Logic* in this way is because of Hegel's account of the drive of the subject to find stable meaning in the categories in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. However, this conflicts with Hegel's official account in the *Logic* itself and thus it would be justifiable to ask why we should take up the explanation found in *Encyclopaedia Logic* and not in *Logic*. The main reason is because Hegel's official story was found to leave the nature of the movement obscure. That is, the motivation to take up this alternative account lies in the need to make sense of the movement in the *Logic*. Now, although Houlgate fails convincingly to

demonstrate the failure of the alternative interpretation, he does offer his own account which tries to maintain the claim to immanence. I will now consider Houlgate's defence of the *Logic's* claim that the concept determines itself without any external perspective.

Houlgate admits that when Hegel says that being turns out to be nothing because there isn't anything to be thought in it, this leaves us with the impression that it is only because we think the concept that a transition takes place. Even though Houlgate dispenses with a few commentators that take this line, they are rejected because of specific weaknesses in their reconstruction rather than the plausibility of this approach as such. When it comes to facing this issue head on Houlgate once again contents himself to remind us that such an approach would fall short of the ambitions of the *Logic*. As pointed out, though, this in itself does not constitute a refutation.

Houlgate does finally offer his way of understanding the transition from being to nothing in an immanent manner. He cannot find resources within the opening of the *Logic* itself to elucidate this movement; instead he quotes from the third remark: 'because being is devoid of all determination whatsoever, it is not the (affirmative) determinateness which it is; it is not being but nothing.'<sup>130</sup> This baffling claim to the effect that "*it is due to what being actually is that it turns out to not be what it is*" does not add anything to the bare assurance that being, by itself, turns into nothing—it is merely a different way to describe the same mysterious occurrence. But Houlgate simply reaffirms this description over and over again without further explanation.<sup>131</sup> Thus, without a convincing counter-interpretation the diagnosis presented here holds up. And in this way I think we have grounds to take Schelling's worry

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<sup>130</sup> *SL* 99

<sup>131</sup> E.g. '...logically it is not even the pure being that it is' (277); 'Being vanishes immediately into nothing because the very indeterminacy of being itself means that logically being is not even the being it is.' (278); '...it is too indeterminate even to be being and so immediately vanishes' (279); '...it is so indeterminate in itself that logically it is not actually being at all.' (279); '...logically it is not even the very being it is.' (280); 'Moreover, sheer being and nothing both prove themselves to be more than they immediately are, through what they immediately are.' (281).

seriously and reject Hegel's claim to have proven that the concept has its source of activity within itself.

## 2 Adorno's criticism of Hegel: hypostatization of the concept

The previous chapter investigated Schelling's criticism of Hegel's attempt in the *Logic* to yield a positive result from a merely negative philosophy; that is, to have a logical investigation of the concept tell us something about existence. Adorno is also concerned to curb the pretensions of the concept in Hegel's philosophy. Moreover, in both cases it is a matter of diagnosing illicit philosophical moves which give the appearance of cognition without anything but pure thought. As we shall see, what it is that Hegel is supposed to have gained knowledge of within pure thought is different for both. And with this the nature of the metaphysical excess is different also.

Much like Schelling's encounter with Hegel, Adorno's evaluation is not the most sober; frequently oscillating between the extremes of praise and invective. For this reason it may be hard to take Adorno's criticisms seriously. I will try to present what I take to be the insightful and well-considered core of Adorno's criticisms and argue that he gets Hegel's measure right. Even before the substance of Adorno's arguments can be evaluated, however, the first hurdle is to clarify the nature of Adorno's accusation against Hegel. Adorno finds as many faults in Hegel's philosophy as he does virtues, but one core objection he has is the identity of being and thought which Hegel's idealist dialectic claims to establish (I will refer to this as the 'identity thesis').

It should first be pointed out that the identity referred to here is not supposed to indicate an identity between representational thought or consciousness and an externally present object. Adorno does not need to ascribe this kind of pre-critical or naïve metaphysics to Hegel in order to find his approach to the concept troubling. The concept is made to yield a content of its own, independent of anything else—it is self-determining. This content is then said to be the truth of things (see 1.1.3.1), securing the fundamental intelligibility and rationality of the world. Even once we have seen that the identity invoked by the identity

thesis is not a representational one, there are still questions as to the appropriateness of calling a claim about the intelligibility of being an identity thesis. Just because – in its basic principles or structures – being is fully knowable, does not mean that all the concrete manifestations of being can be run-off of reason. Indeed, even while affirming the a priori character of being, Hegel acknowledges that there are contingencies, the content of which can be known only a posteriori.<sup>132</sup> Defenders of Hegel are right to cite this against those that would find Hegel’s idealism guilty of positing the *exhaustive* identity of *mind* and *world*—an identity which engenders an egregious metaphysics: either as the denial of the existence of a mind-independent, external world, or else the attribution of existence with mentality (e.g. panpsychism). The defenders are wrong however in thinking that, once they have disabused us of such pernicious interpretations, no objectionable metaphysics remain.

In fact, it is once we stop restlessly pointing out that Hegel does not subscribe to an exhaustive identity (and its corresponding fantastical metaphysical views), I argue, that we can see he is guilty of holding the kind of identity indicated by the identity thesis. What is involved in this kind of identity is not the reduction of all the contingencies of the world to thought, but that what is *significant* in the world (the basic principles of being) is made to coincide with thought. Although this identity is not of the exhaustive kind, it still results in the affirmation of the essential rationality of the world.<sup>133</sup> This metaphysical result might not be as obviously objectionable as those outlined above, but this does not mean it is justifiable.

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<sup>132</sup> *SL* 682. For some time it has been popular to highlight the sophistication of Hegel’s idealism by pointing out that there is a systematic place for contingency within it. But, as the central argument of this chapter aims to establish, this move does not curb the pretension of Hegel’s idealism; rather, the placing of contingency within the system is only one example of the strategy Hegel uses to surreptitiously confirm the identity thesis.

<sup>133</sup> Incidentally, this already indicates why the commentators that point out that Hegel’s famous claim – ‘what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational’ – does not commit Hegel to the view that everything is as it ought to be, misses the mark. Adorno does not take his criticism to be against a view that everything is as it ought to be, but against the view that the significant elements of the world are in accordance with reason. Hegel lets the cat out of the bag when he states that the elements of the world which aren’t as they ought to be are the merely ‘trivial...conditions’ or the world (*EL* §6a), which, by implication, means that the non-trivial conditions (i.e. the significant aspects) are as they ought to be. I elaborate on these issues in chapter 3.

Failure to consider Adorno's critique of the way Hegel's idealist philosophy sets up the identity thesis leaves a blind spot in the evaluation of Hegel's thought.

I focus on two works in which Adorno aims to undermine Hegel's identity thesis: *Negative Dialectics* and the *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* given in 1965/66. In the relevant passages found here Adorno is not content to simply oppose the identity thesis with his alternative, in a dogmatic fashion.<sup>134</sup> Rather than claim directly that the identity thesis is wrong, Adorno aims to uncover a fallacious move in Hegel's manner of attaining the identity thesis, thereby providing an immanent criticism of Hegel's idealism. Of course, Hegel believes he establishes the intelligibility of being legitimately: first, according to Hegel's system, if we simply test the coherence of standpoints which reject the identity thesis (i.e. that assume the correctness of the standpoint of consciousness) we will necessarily be led to the standpoint of science (i.e. the collapse of the subject-object opposition); second, once elevated to the standpoint of science, we need only look on at being to see that it turns out to be fully intelligible. *Pace* Hegel, Adorno argues that being does not simply show itself to be intelligible to the speculative philosopher's gaze; rather, being masquerades as intelligible because that aspect of being which is not the same as thought (the nonidentical) is surreptitiously expelled so that the philosopher can rest assured that they have hold of something that is completely accessible and transparent to thought.

Adorno often refers to this operation – whereby thought annuls its other – as an act of identification or hypostatization. I first distinguish this form of Adorno's criticism of identity from other forms in his thought. This lays the ground for understanding Adorno's criticism of Hegel's idealism and, I argue, also sheds light on a neglected aspect of Adorno's criticism of identity which is crucial to understanding his relation to the philosophical tradition (2.1). Once I have isolated the aspect of Adorno's criticism of identity which is most pertinent for

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<sup>134</sup> *ND* 172/174; *LND* 59-60/91

his critical response to idealism, I further clarify this through a comparison with Kant's account of hypostatization and transcendental illusion more generally (2.2). Then I put this to work by seeing if Hegel can be charged with hypostatization in Adorno's sense. Insofar as this criticism is levelled at the beginning of the *Logic*, I argue that it cannot meet Adorno's demand for an immanent criticism because Hegel has already established the standpoint of science by this point and therefore assumes the collapse of the distinction between subject and object or thought and being (2.3). But insofar as it is targeted at Hegel's very attempt to prove that the opposition of subject and object *must* collapse (i.e. establish the standpoint of science), I argue that Adorno can provide an immanent criticism (2.4). Finally, I consider one of the most prominent approaches in 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship to save Hegel from metaphysical excess; namely, to read him "non-metaphysically" as a transcendental philosopher or a category theorist (2.5). I do not dispute the claim that Hegel is not doing pre-critical metaphysics—indeed, as highlighted, Adorno already read Hegel in much the same way. Rather, I argue that this approach still subscribes to the metaphysical view Adorno targets (the identity thesis). Moreover, I point out that the arguments commentators use to defend their reading of Hegel (Klaus Hartmann and Terry Pinkard) actually succumb to the same surreptitious moves found in Hegel's hypostatization and thus are open to Adorno's criticism themselves.

## 2.1 Adorno on identity-philosophy

Identity is one of the most prevalent and yet most ambiguous terms in Adorno's critical thought.<sup>135</sup> As with most of Adorno's terminological practices, he does not aid the reader

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<sup>135</sup> For an account of the diversity of the various uses of identity in Adorno see Herbert Schnädelbach, "The Dialectical Critique of Reason: Adorno's construction of rationality," in *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Simon Jarvis (London: Routledge, 2007), Volume 1, 155-177; 159-160.

with any schematised account of his usage of the term.<sup>136</sup> For convenience I distinguish three different levels at which Adorno uses the term. Identity can refer to: (1) a condition (the existence of identity), (2) a discourse (which takes identity as its principle or theoretic goal), or (3) a practice (of identification).<sup>137</sup> In this chapter I focus on the relation between the level of discourse and the level of practice. Specifically, how an illicit operation (a practice of identification) within the *Logic* underwrites Hegel's identity thesis (a discourse of identity). Part of what is meant by identity at the level of discourse has been clarified in the gloss on the identity thesis in the introduction. Thus this section needs to give an account of the practice of identification before we can see if Adorno is correct to say that this lies behind Hegel's identity thesis.

### 2.1.1 Two forms of identification: 'identity-thinking' and 'hypostatization'

For the purposes of investigating Adorno's criticism of Hegel's identity thesis I need to further distinguish two different modes of identification: (3a) 'identity-thinking' and (3b) 'hypostatization'.<sup>138</sup> Identity-thinking refers to a set of practices which do an injustice to the particularity or uniqueness of things in the process of *dealing with objects*. Hypostatization, on the other hand, refers primarily to a set of philosophical practices which *banish* the nonidentical in the mistreatment of *concepts*. In other words, whereas identity-thinking *behaves* as though thinking were boundless, hypostatization is the route through which

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<sup>136</sup> This is a matter of principle for Adorno. See *ND* 33/43-44

<sup>137</sup> I do not claim this schema to be exhaustive. In particular, there are many crucial distinctions to be made within each level; to provide a detailed account would take us beyond the scope of the current study. Another word of caution: the pedagogical presentation should not lead one to think that the levels are discrete from one another. For instance, Adorno claims that the 'assertion of the identity of concept and thing is inextricably intertwined with the structure of reality itself.' (*LND* 20/37). Here, the level of discourse ('the assertion of the identity...') and the level of conditions ('the structure of reality itself') are connected. The precise nature in which the different levels are connected, for Adorno, is complex. I focus on one such connection in this chapter (the grounding of discourse through a practice) and another in chapter 5 (the relation between condition and discourse).

<sup>138</sup> I justify and explain these labels in turn as I treat them.

philosophy tries to *prove* that thinking is boundless. Due to the shared pathos of each strand it is easy to run them together. To bring into relief the strand I examine in this chapter I need to give a brief sketch of identity-thinking (and the problems of privileging this strand when reading Adorno) and hypostatization so that they can be clearly contrasted.

Identity-thinking entails the use of concepts in such a way as to subsume things.<sup>139</sup> This can happen in the more primitive context of predicting and controlling nature for the purpose of self-preservation. Or it can happen in the more sublimated context of epistemic experience where particulars are classified by universals.<sup>140</sup> Although the former is more orientated to practical interests and the latter to theoretical interests, both are essentially concerned with knowledge. Thus, in our knowing relation to the world, we reduce objects to our conceptual scheme and strip them of their particularity.

Hypostatization entails the use of concepts in such a way as to purge the concept of the trace of what is not the concept. This does not happen through the use of concepts on things that are not concepts; it happens through the use of concepts on themselves. For this reason hypostatization usually takes place in philosophy, whose business it is to deal in concepts. This also indicates why Kant is the most important reference for Adorno on this issue. The transcendental dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a relentless attack on philosophical attempts to yield knowledge with the use of concepts alone. The force and scope of this is registered in Moses Mendelssohn's epithet: the *all-crushing* Kant. Adorno similarly saw his criticisms of philosophy as trying to correct or resist the tendency for philosophy to believe that it possesses something secure in concepts independent of their use in experience.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> It is slightly puzzling that this should have become the usual term of art used by commentators. 'Identitätsdenken' appears only four times in *Negative Dialectics* and not at all in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Due to its resonance with commentary I nevertheless retain it to designate the first strand of identification I specify here.

<sup>140</sup> As Adorno puts it, 'identitarian thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself.' (ND 149/152)

<sup>141</sup> E.g. ND 33/43-44

A crucial difference between identity-thinking and hypostatization is that the normative status of each differs. The damage done to the particular in identity-thinking, though ‘wrong,’ is a ‘necessary moment in the stage of dialectics’.<sup>142</sup> This is because cognition of objects requires universals. Though universals fail to grasp that part of the object which is not exhausted by classificatory or identificatory thinking, the answer is not to eschew concepts altogether. Rather, we need to use concepts in different ways to reveal what insistence upon their universal power does not.<sup>143</sup> The damage done to concepts through hypostatization is not an unavoidable casualty of cognition, but an avoidable illusion of philosophical hubris. In fact, as noted above, Adorno’s engagement with the philosophical tradition is largely concerned to expose and resist hypostatization.<sup>144</sup>

Unfortunately, hypostatization has been largely overshadowed by commentator’s emphasis identity-thinking.<sup>145</sup> That said, even if the one-sided emphasis on identity-thinking is regrettable, it is not itself philosophically suspect. There are many legitimate reasons for such a focus. For instance, the topics of interest to contemporary philosophy may dictate where a commentator looks in Adorno’s work. Adorno’s concern to show the limits of identity-thinking – that experience is deprived in the case of the suppression of the nonidentical – is an obvious source of interest for established academic fields such as

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<sup>142</sup> ND 173/175

<sup>143</sup> ND 162f./164f.

<sup>144</sup> It should be noted that, although the illusions of hypostatization are not accorded any cognitive status for Adorno, the illusory character (*Scheincharakter*) of art does lay claim to such a status. Adorno even claims that his account of art resists Kant’s judgment about illusion: ‘Artworks are semblance in that they externalize their interior, spirit, and they are only known insofar as, contrary to the prohibition laid down by the chapter on the amphibolies, their interior is know,’ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1997), 109/166. I cannot go into Adorno’s positive assessment of illusion here; but it is sufficient for this chapter to point out that the illusion involved in philosophy grounding itself has no positive value for Adorno.

<sup>145</sup> Deborah Cook, “Adorno, Ideology and Ideology Criticism,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27, no. 1 (2001): 1–20; Peter Dews, “Adorno, Post-Structuralism and the Critique of Identity,” *New Left Review*, I, no. 157 (June 1986): 28–44; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas MaCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), section IV.

epistemology.<sup>146</sup> And, although the detection of illicit moves is equally, if not more established (informal logic), this is not an area which is likely to appropriate – or, indeed, even bother to appraise – Adorno’s analysis of the delusions which make philosophy believe it is sovereign.<sup>147</sup> So, whatever the reason for overlooking the problem of identification qua hypostatization, it is not necessarily the case that this is damaging to this issue as such.

What we do need to be wary of is the confusion of these two strands. In both strands, the object of Adorno’s criticism is the over inflation of the power of the concept. But, as noted, the operations in each strand of identification are different: identity-thinking performs a subsumption of particulars, whereas hypostatization performs illicit moves in order to give the concept an illusory existence or substantiality. It will be noticed, however, that this differentiation of operations also allots different results: the former type of identification results in the reduction of objects (usually in order to make things more manageable or controllable), while the latter functions to ground philosophy by showing that the concept needs no basis in anything but itself. When exploring Adorno’s contribution to the criticism of philosophy in particular I think it is important to keep these distinctions in mind. But this is not to suggest that Adorno believes that each result is exclusive to each operation; each operation can generate a different result. For Adorno, subsumption (operation of identity-thinking) can work to ground philosophy (the primary result of hypostatization) and, conversely, the positing of the identity of subject and object via illicit moves (the operation of hypostatization) can work to break down experience into more manageable chunks (the primary result of identity-thinking). But this possibility for realignment should not detract

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<sup>146</sup> J. M. Bernstein, “Mimetic Rationality and Material Inference : Adorno and Brandom,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 1 (2004): 7–23. Brian O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>147</sup> In this respect the reception of Adorno finds an interesting parallel in the reception of Kant in 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglophone scholarship. The Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic have received almost exclusive attention, with the Transcendental Dialectic being relatively neglected. A recent exception is Michelle Grier’s *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Following his student’s lead, Henry E. Allison’s updated canonical work significantly expands discussion of the Transcendental Dialectic; Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, Rev. and enl. ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

from the point that each result is primarily established by the appropriate operation (as specified above).

The reason I stress this point is because the dominant approach to Adorno not only neglects the issue of hypostatization in favour of identity-thinking, but also frequently falls into the trap of assuming that subsumption is not only the prime operation for identifying objects in experience but also the prime operation in philosophy's attempt to prove its sovereignty. In particular, Adorno's criticisms of Hegel are still frequently presented as though the identification going on in Hegel's idealism is an issue of identity-thinking.<sup>148</sup> To focus on one example, Alison Stone has argued that the fundamental worry Adorno has with Hegel's dialectics is the way that the latter functions as a 'mechanism for expanding thought to cover objects.'<sup>149</sup> This mechanism is said to proceed through a process whereby a concept (the first moment of the dialectic) confronts an object (the second moment of the dialectic), resulting in a supposed reconciliation (the third moment of the dialectic), which is in fact nothing but the subsumption of the object under the concept.<sup>150</sup> Stone is correct to say that Adorno objects to this function of Hegel's dialectic, but wrong to suggest that this exhausts Adorno's critical appraisal: 'This shows that what Adorno finds problematic in Hegel's dialectic is – as we saw earlier apropos of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – the way that Hegel conceives the dialectic's third, speculative moment. For Adorno, that third moment as Hegel conceives it is not genuinely conciliatory but represents merely the first moment of the dialectic expanding to dominate the second'.<sup>151</sup> As I will show in this chapter, Adorno's criticism of Hegel goes beyond this regularly repeated account of Adorno's strategy.

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<sup>148</sup> Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, Thinking the Political (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 100-101; Brian O'Connor, 'Adorno's Reconceptualization of the Dialectic', in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 537–55, 545; Alison Stone, "Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22:6 (2014):1118-1141, 1133f.

<sup>149</sup> Alison Stone, 'Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic,' 1133.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 1133-34

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 1134

### 2.1.2 Further clarification of hypostatization

The term hypostatization does not have a fixed meaning in Adorno's thought. Sometimes he talks generally of hypostatization as making or treating something as invariable, immutable, or unmediated.<sup>152</sup> Hypostatization is then found in a large array of phenomena: affective dispositions,<sup>153</sup> practices,<sup>154</sup> socio-historical situations,<sup>155</sup> or even specific opinions.<sup>156</sup> When Adorno does indicate why these forms of hypostatization take hold, he often points to certain damaged or reified forms of consciousness manifested in anything from straightforward cognitive incapacity to psychological conditions.<sup>157</sup> Despite this diversity and scope, hypostatization also has a more specific meaning.<sup>158</sup> To anticipate the more detailed discussion below (2.2), the basic features of this meaning can be sketched. Firstly, hypostatization involves the purification of concepts so that the traces of what they refer to – what is not the same as the concept – are eradicated, imbuing the concept with an illusory substantiality or being of its own. Secondly, hypostatization is found primarily in certain types of sophisticated or fallacious reasoning. Thirdly, it is the very nature of thought or

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<sup>152</sup> ND 80-81, 96/88, 103; LND 64/97.

<sup>153</sup> 'The extreme innerworldly fear of this situation, because there is nothing discernible that might lead beyond it, is hypostatized as an existential or indeed a transcendental anxiety.' Adorno, 'Reason and Revelation', in *Critical models interventions and catchwords*, trans. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 135-142, 139.

<sup>154</sup> Adorno claims that Marx's insistence that labour is 'not the sole source of social wealth' shows that labour is not to be hypostatized (ND 177-8/179).

<sup>155</sup> 'The separation of subject and object is both real and semblance. True, because in the realm of cognition it lends expression to the real separation, the rivenness of the human condition, the result of a coercive historical process; untrue, because the historical separation must not be hypostatized, not magically transformed into an invariant.' T. W. Adorno 'On Subject and Object', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (Columbia University Press, 2005), 245-58, 246.

<sup>156</sup> '...the individual can reflect upon his opinion and guard against hypostatizing it. Yet the very category of opinion, as an objective state of mind, is shielded against such reflection. This is first of all due to simple facts of individual psychology. Whoever has an opinion about a question that is still relatively open and undecided [...] tends to cling to that opinion or, in the language of psychoanalysis, to invest it with affect. It would be foolish for anyone to claim to be innocent of this tendency. This tendency is based on *narcissism* [...]' T. W. Adorno, 'Opinion Delusion Society', in *Critical models interventions and catchwords*, trans. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 105-122, 107.

<sup>157</sup> See notes 22 and 25, respectively.

<sup>158</sup> Hereafter 'hypostatization' will be reserved for the form which is the focus of this chapter, and 'general hypostatization' will be used to indicate the broader sense just outlined.

conceptuality that leads us into thinking that concepts must be primary, which then predisposes us into accepting those philosophical errors.

This final point is not meant to suggest that this process goes on in a vacuum. Historically specific social forms (e.g. capital) and associated forms of consciousness do influence philosophical practices. Indeed, a prevalent strategy Adorno utilises in his engagement with philosophy is to show the social or objective root of tensions or flaws in the edifice of philosopher's texts. For instance, antinomies found in philosophical theories are often said to repeat or reflect antagonisms in society.<sup>159</sup> But, no matter how prevalent this strategy, this does not give us warrant to say Adorno always sees philosophical problems or errors in this light. The significant differences in types of philosophical problem Adorno typically focuses on – between hypostatization and antinomical theories – should already warn against too quickly uniting them under one explanatory frame. But even where social forms of explanation figure in Adorno's account of hypostatization, they are only supplementary to the main explanation.

There is not only a danger of reducing the *explanation* of hypostatization to the explanation of general hypostatization—there is also a danger of so reducing the *result*. Some commentators have distinguished the problem of hypostatization from the problem of identity-thinking, only to then lump it into a more general issue of the way that static and inflexible thought cuts us off from the world.<sup>160</sup> The type of hypostatization I want to focus on does indeed result in static or invariant concepts, but the problem is far more troubling than this. For instance, in his lecture course titled '*Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*', Adorno discusses the way that philosophy has perennially given concepts a false substantiality or positivity and thus bestowed an independent existence upon them.<sup>161</sup> This

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<sup>159</sup> E.g. *ND* 261/258.

<sup>160</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 3; Brian O'Connor, *Adorno*, Routledge Philosophers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 91-93.

<sup>161</sup> *MCP* 70-73

does make concepts appear imperishable or invariant, but what is distinctive about this ‘universal problematic’ – which is ‘the crucial fallacy in traditional philosophy as a whole’ – is that it gives philosophy the pretence to know the truth of things from within concepts alone; indeed, to know concepts *as* the truth, bestowing concepts with a fundamental existence.<sup>162</sup> Adorno hammers the point home by considering the curious attempt – by the ‘so-called philosopher named Maximilian Beck’ – to base the existence, and the immortality, of the soul on the possession of the concept of the essence of the soul. This is mocked for the lack of comfort it would provide those expecting immortality. The invariance or imperishability of the concept of the soul certainly distorts reality. But unlike reified consciousness, it is the fallacies of philosophy that excel at convincing us our concepts have an existence of their own.

This can be further clarified through Adorno’s evaluation of Kant on this issue. Brian O’Connor questions the pertinence of Adorno’s criticisms of philosophical or metaphysical hypostatization by showing that the invariance of the a priori categories in Kant’s transcendental philosophy does not get in the way of a proper – ‘historical materialist’ – appreciation of the social world.<sup>163</sup> If Adorno’s concern with philosophical hypostatization was only about the invariance of concepts, this would show a significant limit to Adorno’s criticism of hypostatization. But, in the same lecture considered in the previous paragraph, we can see that the concern cannot be so limited: ‘Kant was the first to avoid this hypostasis, but even for him the concept has a moment of autonomy, of hypostasis, since his work contains pure forms of an almost pre-Aristotelian kind, which are not required to be the forms of a possible content.’<sup>164</sup> If hypostatization were just a matter of invariance, how could Kant have

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<sup>162</sup> O’Connor actually notes that hypostatization entails identifying essences which are treated as though they ‘existed – or subsisted – more fundamentally outside the conditions of historical reality.’ (O’Connor, *Adorno*, 91). However, the full ramifications of this are neglected in favour of focusing on the problem of how invariant concepts cut us off from the world.

<sup>163</sup> O’Connor, *Adorno*, 93

<sup>164</sup> *MCP* 73

been the first to avoid hypostatization? Where Kant does succumb to hypostatization it is not found in invariance as such, but when a form or concept can function without that which they are the form of.

This can be seen more clearly in Adorno's lectures on *Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*. Kant is accused of hypostatizing the 'I think' or transcendental consciousness by giving it a meaning independent from the actual individual or empirical consciousness where synthesis actually takes place.<sup>165</sup> Even though transcendental consciousness is invariant, the problem from the *perspective of hypostatization* only occurs when it is taken to have an independent being. Adorno sometimes speaks as though the construction of the transcendental itself were the problem. For instance, Adorno claims that 'the whole doctrine of subjective constitution' commits Kant to the same error he diagnosed in rationalism, namely, 'an amphiboly of the concepts of reflection.'<sup>166</sup> But, as Adorno well knows, specifying a constituents only becomes an amphiboly when it is made to yield knowledge without the *constitutum*.

The entire proof of the antinomies, of the paralogisms as well as the amphibolies, all the things that Kant has criticized, that he has 'smashed', all say the one thing, again and again. This is that something subjective, namely, the form – which possesses validity only in relation to a matching content, and fulfils any sort of objectivizing function only in relation to this content – that this subjective element claims to be objective. We might say that this is the pattern of the amphibolies, the pattern of the confusion on which all the fallacies of reason are based.<sup>167</sup>

The a priori categories are not guilty of any of these problems so long as they are not claimed to yield knowledge independently.<sup>168</sup> None of this should be taken to mean that Adorno does not *also* find invariance problematic. Invariant structures can falsify historical reality and potentially curtail our experience. But we should not let Adorno's concern with this overshadow his attempt to draw out other problems. Hypostatization not only cuts us off from

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<sup>165</sup> *KC* 253; cf. *KC* 247 passim

<sup>166</sup> *ND* 195-96/195-96

<sup>167</sup> *KC* 202.

<sup>168</sup> It may be worried that I have changed the topic from hypostatization to amphibolies etc. That this is not the case will be seen from the exploration of these issues in the following section.

the world in certain ways, but also *justifies* the world. This is done by bestowing concepts with an existence independent of what they should refer to, and thus making existence of the nature of the concept or reason.

## 2.2 Kant and Adorno on transcendental illusion and hypostatization

Now that some potential ambiguities have been addressed and a clearer idea of what is philosophically at stake in the issue of hypostatization, for Adorno, a little more detail of the nature of this form of identification can be given. Here Adorno has in mind something similar to how Kant uses the term hypostatization when diagnosing the illusions which reason necessarily succumbs to when it believes itself to have gotten hold of a transcendent object through ‘dialectical inferences’.<sup>169</sup> Three key features of Kant’s account of illusion can be specified which are echoed in Adorno’s account. These three features regard: (i) the source of illusion, (ii) the means through which this illusion takes hold in philosophy, and (iii) the hypostatized result of the illusion.<sup>170</sup> On each point there is overlap in Adorno’s and Kant’s account: (i) Both hold the source of the illusion to entail that it is inevitable; that it is thought’s own tendency to succumb to illusion, not imposed by something alien to thought.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp-Smith, New ed (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), ‘Transcendental Dialectic’. For Kant’s use of ‘hypostatization’ see A384, A386, A392, A395, A582-3/B610-11

<sup>170</sup> There are two drawbacks to this schematized presentation: first, it might lead us to see each feature as discrete; second, it does an injustice to Kant. Regarding the first point, it should be stressed that this form of presentation is not meant to indicate that each feature can be clearly separated from each other. It may be that they are actually simultaneous, but for the purposes of explication, I present them separately—in this way, it might be better to call them aspects or moments, rather than features. Regarding the second point, this presentation undoubtedly oversimplifies Kant’s account and covers over many ambiguities and problems in understanding transcendental illusion as Kant presents it in the transcendental dialectic. However, since my purpose is not to weigh-in on interpretive debates (much less offer an evaluation of Kant’s account) – but only to use as a backdrop to bring Adorno’s thought into relief – this is not an issue. There is still serious dispute among commentators as to how, for instance, dialectical illusion relates to the errors that metaphysics perpetrates (See Michelle Grier, *Kant’s Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, *Modern European Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 68).

<sup>171</sup> For Kant, see A298/B354, A382. For Adorno, see *ND* 11-12, 20-21, 148-9, 175, 181.

(ii) Kant<sup>172</sup> and Adorno<sup>173</sup> claim that illusion is ordained by philosophy via a set of errors.

(iii) They both hold that the result is that something which is dependent upon something else for knowledge is made self-subsistent. Kant articulates this in the following way: ‘All *illusion* may be said to consist in treating the *subjective* condition of thinking as being knowledge of the *object*.’<sup>174</sup> The subjective condition is dependent upon something given in order to produce knowledge. But transcendent metaphysics claims knowledge through this condition alone and therefore treats it as independent or self-subsistent. Adorno echoes this early in *Negative Dialectics* when he warns against being seduced into confusing the necessity of conceptualization as a condition for knowledge with ‘what it is in itself’ and thereby bestowing an ‘illusion of being-in-itself [*Schein des Ansichseienden*]’ upon the concept.<sup>175</sup>

With this shared ground in view we can now further illuminate Adorno’s position by looking to the parts where he diverges from Kant.

### 2.2.1 Source of illusion

For Kant, the inevitability of illusion is due to the faculty of reason. The vocation of reason – as the ‘faculty of inferring’ – necessarily leads it to think of the unconditioned and eventually

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<sup>172</sup> Kant frequently talks of errors or fallacies philosophy succumbs to in the process of hypostatizing something that should only have a subjective or regulative role (e.g. the unity of apperception or transcendental ideas) and therefore believing themselves of having hold of something objective or constitutive. Perhaps the most common error is one of ‘substitution’ or ‘subreption’ (e.g. A402, A582-3/B610-11, A619-20/B647-8), but Kant also identifies specific fallacies, for instance *sophisma figurae dictionis* (fallacy of a figure of speech or of equivocation; usually understood as the fallacy of the “ambiguous middle”). It should be noted that, for Kant, it is uncertain if the illusion results directly from reason or if philosophy must also enlist sophisms. On the one hand Kant claims that illusion arises from the nature of reason alone (A298/B354, A382) and that any sophisms involved are not artificially imposed by philosophers but belong to reason itself (A351, A339/B397, A421-2/B449-50). On the other hand, Kant suggests that, though reason inevitably produces ideas of which no experience can match, we can avoid the trap of thinking we do have an experience to match them precisely because there are sophisms located in ‘theories’ (A388) or a defective ‘judgment’ (as opposed to having their seat in understanding or reason) (A643/B671). Though this issue need not be decided here, it is worthwhile to bear both possible interpretations in mind since a similar tension is found in Adorno’s account.

<sup>173</sup> In the lectures on *Negative Dialectics* Adorno refers to the way that Hegel’s *Logic* established the identity thesis through a ‘subreption’ (LND 61/94); and then in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno again refers to Hegel’s idealist procedure of substituting the concept for thing (i.e. hypostatization) through an ‘amphiboly of reflexive concepts’ (ND 173/175). Adorno also talks of paralogisms in reference to what he talks to be one of the most persistent problems in the history of philosophy (MCP 70ff). See also Adorno’s lectures on Kant (KC 202).

<sup>174</sup> A396

<sup>175</sup> ND 11/23 (translation modified). Although Adorno does not mention hypostatization in this passage, he does elsewhere to signify precisely what he is talking about here (ND 154/156).

to form ‘transcendental ideas’ or ‘pure concepts of reason.’<sup>176</sup> These ideas do not contribute to knowledge, but they do allow us to *think* (or conceive) beyond the limits of our knowledge.<sup>177</sup> Because we necessarily have these ideas, we are ‘incited’ to put them to use for knowledge. For Adorno, on the other hand, this compulsion to identify part of ourselves (for Kant, our ideas of the unconditioned; for Adorno, any thinking not directed at the heterogeneous) with the whole is not due to the nature of a specific faculty. Rather, it is because of the nature of the subject as such. As Adorno puts it:

Still transparent, however, is the reason for the illusion that is transcendental far beyond Kant: why our thinking in the *intentio obliqua* will inescapably keep coming back to its own primacy, to the hypostasis of the subject. For while in the history of nominalism ever since Aristotle’s critique of Plato the subject has been rebuked for its mistake of reifying abstraction, abstraction itself is the principle whereby the subject comes to be a subject at all. Abstraction is the subject’s essence. This is why going back to what it is not must impress the subject as external and violent. To the subject, what convicts it of its own arbitrariness—and convicts its *prius* of aposteriority—will sound like a transcendent dogma.<sup>178</sup>

For Kant, it is primarily the seduction to gain – or claim – knowledge about transcendent objects which impels us to hypostatize concepts (i.e. subjective conditions). For Adorno, there is a more basic force underlying this seduction. It is the compulsion to reject anything outside our reach. Although the modality of the drive to illusion is the same (it has necessity in both Kant and Adorno), its scope is larger because even those that have inoculated themselves against doing transcendent metaphysics can still be seduced into affirming the illusion on Adorno’s account. The subject is led to illusion not because it wants to go beyond itself, but because it wants to make sure there is nothing beyond it.

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<sup>176</sup> A330/B386ff

<sup>177</sup> A311

<sup>178</sup> ND 181/182-83

### 2.2.2 Philosophical ordination of illusion

Regarding the way philosophy ordains illusions, Adorno follows Kant's critical procedure of uncovering certain errors. Where he departs from Kant is on the question of what the critical philosopher must do to guard against such errors. Neither thinker believes these errors are of the kind which could simply be dissolved through an especially vigilant eye for missteps in reasoning. The errors rest upon a more fundamental blindness. This is Adorno's account:

To think means to think something. By itself, the logically abstract form of "something," something that is meant or judged, does not claim to posit a being; and yet, surviving in it—indelible for a thinking that would delete it—is that which is not identical with thinking, which is not thinking at all. The *ratio* becomes irrational where it forgets this, where it runs counter to the meaning of thought by hypostatizing its products, the abstractions. The commandment of its autarky condemns thinking to emptiness, and finally to stupidity and primitivity.<sup>179</sup>

For Adorno, then, it is through negligence of the fact that thought or the concept requires reference to its other (the heterogeneous or nonidentical) in order to be genuine thought that errors can take hold of philosophy unnoticed.<sup>180</sup> The task of battling this negligence is thematized in *Negative Dialectics* as 'self-reflection' (*Selbstreflexion*).<sup>181</sup> Kant prescribes a similar activity, but instead of the nonconceptual nature of the concept as such, it is the proper *location* of the conceptual and nonconceptual respectively which Kant claims is the object of the critical philosopher's vigilance—namely, the allocation of representations to the faculties to which they properly belong.<sup>182</sup> In short, without the insight of transcendental idealism, for Kant, the philosopher is always susceptible to errors, no matter how

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<sup>179</sup> *ND* 34/44

<sup>180</sup> Adorno links the specific errors of 'equivocation', 'substitution', and 'the amphiboly of reflexive concepts' – and the hypostatization which follows (the concept is 'cleanse[d] of all that resists' it) – with the inattentiveness to the constitution of the concept by the nonconceptual at (*ND* 173-4) when he argues that Hegel fails to see that to think "something", no matter how indeterminate, always indicates that there is more than mere "nothing" (i.e. more than our activity of thinking). Cf. *ND* 135/137.

<sup>181</sup> *ND* 12, 23, 31, 148-51, 176, 180

<sup>182</sup> It should be noted here that this claim is more properly to be located in the Amphiboly section, which belongs to the analytic in the first *Critique*, rather than the dialectic. An interesting further project would be to provide a fuller comparison of Adorno and Kant and draw out the importance of distinctions like these. For current purposes I need not elaborate on this.

sophisticated their reasoning. It is important to note that both Adorno and Kant thus elaborate a theory of proper cognition as a standpoint from which illusions can be perceived. As will be shown later, Adorno needs to assume this account of proper cognition in order for his criticism of the *Logic* to work—thus undermining his claim to immanence. However, it will also be shown that Adorno need not assume this account in order to provide a successful immanent diagnosis when his criticism is aimed at other aspects of Hegel’s philosophy (namely, Hegel’s attempt to secure the standpoint of science through an argument for complete conceptual mediation).

So, the difference between Kant and Adorno here is subtle. But whether the philosophical errors rest on forgetting the nonconceptual or on an ignorance of the proper location of representations is significant.

### 2.2.3 Hypostatized result of illusion

Finally, with regards to the hypostatized result, Kant and Adorno place a different accent on the way in which a thought or concept is made into a thing. As noted above, where Kant and Adorno overlap is in their characterisation of hypostatization as self-sufficiency. Where they differ is in what precisely is entailed by becoming self-sufficient. For Kant an important aspect of this transformation of a thought into something self-sufficient is that it has the character of being ‘outside’ the transcendental subject.<sup>183</sup> Adorno places no such emphasis upon the externality of the hypostatized thought. For Adorno the illusion which philosophers succumb to when they believe themselves to have the concept purified of any reference to nonconceptuality does not necessarily involve transforming such a concept into an object—

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<sup>183</sup> A384, A386, A392. For clarity it should be pointed out that, although the existence of the soul (as the object of the paralogisms) is not outside the human being for common consciousness (“my soul is in me”), it is certainly outside constitutive or transcendental subjectivity. Thanks to Pavel Reichl for alerting me to the potential confusion.

which would be known in opposition to our thought of it. In fact, one of Adorno's favourite examples of hypostatization is the attempt of many 20th century philosophers to know something which is neither an object outside us, nor merely the subjective contribution to knowledge.<sup>184</sup> Adorno actually agrees that we cannot reduce everything to either subject or object, but he objects to the way this insight is treated. But rather than the mistreatment being due to transforming it into an object, it is due to thinking that the excess of the subject-object relation is independent of that relation (making it into a 'third', as he often puts it).

To see what Adorno has in mind here, we can look briefly to a particular example of this form of hypostatization in Heidegger account of being.<sup>185</sup> Heidegger's 'being' is neither the subject nor the object. Adorno praises this much, agreeing that neither the subject nor the object can be the ultimate. If the subject were the source of being then we would have subjective idealism; if the object were the source of being we would have positivism.<sup>186</sup> Philosophy can indeed reflect on this fact and be aware that there is something "more" to the subject-object relation, but, for Adorno, we are only able to say that this more is a result of the entwining of subject and object. We are not able to say that this more forms its own moment independent and beyond the subject-object relation.

Because "is" is neither a merely subjective function nor a thing, an entity—because to our traditional way of thinking it is no objectivity—Heidegger calls it "Being," that nonsubjective, nonobjective third. [...] The insight that "is" can be neither a mere thought nor a mere entity does not permit its transfiguration into something transcendent in relation to those two definitions.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Targets include: Bergson (*ND* 8), Husserl (Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, trans. Wills Domingo (MIT Press, 1984), 66ff), Heidegger (*ND* 76).

<sup>185</sup> For current purposes it is not necessary to decide whether Adorno's criticism is fair to Heidegger or not; I cite it to illustrate that hypostatization, for Adorno, need not entail objectification (in the sense of being 'outside' the subject, as outline above).

<sup>186</sup> Adorno applauds Heidegger's 'anti-positivistic' point that being cannot be merely 'the totality of all there is, of all that is the case.' (*ND* 106)

<sup>187</sup> *ND* 104

Being is here not an object outside us; rather, it is a kind of condition of the subject-object relation, but one not located in the subject (as it is for Kant). Thus, on Adorno's reconstruction of Heidegger's account of being, we attain knowledge of something which is not an entity (or an ultimately large set of entities), nor merely our contribution, but a "third" beyond this relation. Thus the excess of the subject-object relation is hypostatized in the sense of being made into an independent moment, not by being made into an object or entity.<sup>188</sup>

So, there are three core points which differentiate Adorno's account of illusion from Kant's: (1) the drive to illusion is found in the nature of subjectivity itself rather than simply the faculty of reason; (2) philosophical errors rest on the purification of the concept as such rather than only being due to the misuse of them; and (3) the hypostatized product need not be assumed to be an object outside us (transcendent to us, in Kant's terms), but anything that is made independent of its nonconceptual conditions. It will be noticed that Adorno's points of departure from Kant on these issues are closely related. They all come down to Adorno's extension of the criticism of illusion beyond the targets of 'pre-critical' or transcendent metaphysics. Whether Adorno can make a criticism of illusion work in this way will only be seen through an extended discussion of one particular example (to be seen in this chapter). But what this does establish is that, unlike Kant's account, this has a warrant to criticize philosophies which self-consciously avoid falling into the trap of pre-critical metaphysics.

### **2.3 The charge of hypostatization I: Hegel's *Logic***

Of the three features of hypostatization outlined above, it is the second which is the focus of Adorno's criticism of the beginning of the *Logic*—namely, the errors which facilitate

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<sup>188</sup> 'Because, in the best Hegelian manner, it [being] cannot be reduced to either a subject or an object without leaving a remainder, it is regarded as beyond subject and object—although, independently of them, it would indeed not be at all.' (ND 105)

hypostatization. There is an important reason for this: in principle, exposing an error undermines a claim without needing to take on the burden of proof required to overturn a claim with an opposing one.<sup>189</sup> In the lectures Adorno emphasises this by stating that he does not want to oppose idealism with materialism, but to provide an immanent criticism of idealism.<sup>190</sup> The purpose of this section is to see if Adorno can successfully undermine Hegel's idealism in an immanent fashion.

### 2.3.1 The 'linguistic slippage'

Adorno focuses his critical attention on the very first moment of the *Logic*: the characterisation of pure being. Hegel's more detailed account of pure being offered in the third remark, following the exposition of the transition from being to nothing to becoming, is the main object of Adorno's analysis. Adorno quotes the following passage from the third remark.

They [i.e. the thoughts of pure space, pure time, pure consciousness, or pure being] are the results of abstraction; they are expressly determined as *indeterminate* and this – to go back to its simplest form – is being. But it is this very *indeterminateness* which constitutes its determinateness; for indeterminateness is opposed to determinateness; hence, as so opposed, it is itself determinate or the negative, and the pure, quite abstract negative. It is this indeterminateness or abstract negation which thus has being present

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<sup>189</sup> Kant's following remark is helpful in this regard:

All *objections* can be divided into *dogmatic*, *critical*, and *sceptical*. A dogmatic objection is directed against a *proposition*, a critical against the *proof* of a proposition. The former requires an insight into the nature of the object such that we can maintain the opposite of what the proposition has alleged in regard to this object. It is therefore itself dogmatic, claiming acquaintance with the constitution of the object fuller than that of the counter-assertion. A critical objection, since it leaves the validity or invalidity of the proposition unchallenged, and assails only the proof, does not presuppose fuller acquaintance with the object or oblige us to claim superior knowledge of its nature; it shows only that the assertion is unsupported, not that it is wrong. [...] A critical objection, on the other hand, confines itself to pointing out that in the making of the assertion something has been presupposed that is void and merely fictitious; and it thus overthrows the theory by removing its alleged foundation without claiming to establish anything that bears directly upon the constitution of the object. (A388-9)

Adorno wants to take the critical path in the lectures for the reasons Kant offers here.

<sup>190</sup> *LND* 59-60; cf. *LND* 50

within it, which reflection, both outer and inner, enunciates when it equates it with nothing, declares it to be an empty product of thought, to be nothing.<sup>191</sup>

Adorno draws our attention to the subtle differences in Hegel's characterisation of pure being here. First, being is said to be 'indeterminate' (*unbestimmt*); this is then replaced by the term 'indeterminateness' (*Unbestimmtheit*). This change in the characterisation of being could be easily missed. Even if noticed, it would be understandable to dismiss the inconsistency as nothing more than a mere accident or laxness of expression.<sup>192</sup> Adorno claims that the change in terminology – or 'linguistic slippage' – is of the highest significance.

Adorno points out the contrary meanings of each term. When being is said to be indeterminate there is reference to something substantial (*sachhaltige*)—a something that is described as being indeterminate; whereas when we say that being is indeterminateness, we elevate the lack of determinations into a self-standing quality so that we are now referring to this hypostatised quality in itself, independent of anything which might be so predicated. As Adorno puts it:

when Hegel substitutes 'indeterminateness' for this [the indeterminate], the concept, namely, the absence of determinateness *as such* takes the place of *what* is undetermined – through what Kant would have called a 'subreption', that is, a misrepresentation. The purely linguistic slippage from 'the indeterminate', the term that denotes what is underlying [*Substratausdruck*], to indeterminateness is itself the turn to the concept. And it is only this conceptual abstraction that is equated with being through this manoeuvre – that is, basically we have here a primal act of identification that eliminates the element of being that *is*, that is to say, that is not indeterminateness but merely something that has not been determined<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *SL* 98-9, quoted in *LND* 60-61

<sup>192</sup> Whether or not the change in terminology is attributed to an intentional replacement on Hegel's behalf, however, is not the significant point. The point is simply that there is a change. If Adorno is correct in locating the source of the establishment of the concept

<sup>193</sup> *LND* 61/94

Here we find a specific analysis of the hypostatization which was outlined in its general features in the previous section.<sup>194</sup> Adorno uncovers an error and shows how this leads to hypostatization. The error is an illicit substitution of one term for another—or, following Kant, Adorno calls this a ‘subreption.’ Through this substitution Hegel manages to advance a thought of being cleansed of any reference to something outside of this thought.<sup>195</sup> In other words, Hegel has forgotten the trace of the nonconceptual in the concept and has thus unknowingly perpetrated a subreption which affirms the purity of the concept.

### 2.3.2 Externality of Adorno’s criticism of the *Logic*

Now, Adorno faces a difficulty in making this charge stick. As noted, in the lectures Adorno does not want to take on the burden of proving that Hegel’s claim to yield knowledge in the realm of pure thought (in Adorno’s terms, to have hold of the hypostatized concept) is wrong by positing the opposed claim that knowledge must occur outside of pure thinking (i.e. that knowledge proper requires the nonconceptual as well as the conceptual). Rather, he wants to show how Hegel’s method of attaining that claim is illegitimate and thus force the abandonment of that claim. But the Hegelian can argue they have not attained this claim by illegitimate means and further that the only thing Adorno’s detailed linguistic analysis shows is that Hegel was not as attentive to nuances of connotation as he might have been. A central reason this line of defence is plausible is because Hegel is not attempting to offer an

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<sup>194</sup> Although the first of the three features is missing here (i.e. the source of the illusion), for the purposes of evaluating whether Adorno can immanently show that Hegel succumbs to illusion, it is not necessary to defend this aspect.

<sup>195</sup> The above quote is somewhat misleading in that it appears to set up an opposition between the concept and something completely divorced from the concept. If this were the case then Adorno would be saying that existent being itself were being annulled in the hypostatization, rather than saying that the *reference* to existent being *in the concept* were being annulled. I do not suggest that latter interpretation over the first, more fantastic, interpretation simply in accordance with the charity-principle, but because Adorno explicitly advances the latter interpretation in *Negative Dialectics* when discussing this issue and, moreover, advances the latter reading precisely in opposition to the first (*ND* 135). Thus, when Adorno says in the passage from the lectures that the linguistic slippage is what incites ‘the turn to the concept’, we should read: the turn to the *hypostatized* concept. That is, a turn to the concept deprived of nonconceptuality rather than to the concept as such.

*argument* for the move from being qua indeterminate something to being qua concept of indeterminateness; rather, the *Logic* begins with the claim that pure being cannot be conceived as a ‘something’ which is indeterminate, as opposed to indeterminateness as such. In the first remark to the opening section on the move from being to becoming Hegel argues that ‘the being of something is already determinate and is distinguished from another something’<sup>196</sup>; the implication is that, if being were a something it could not be truly indeterminate and therefore not meet Hegel’s demand to begin with a completely immediate and indeterminate point.<sup>197</sup> Without a commitment to a distinction between something and concept in pure being the beginning of the *Logic* leaves no room for an immanent diagnosis of hypostatization.

Adorno seems to be aware of this difficulty. He is careful to note that pure being is indeterminate and, as such, cannot contain any distinctions within it. To say that pure being is a concept or a thing (*Sache*) at this stage would be to forget that it is indeterminate. Adorno follows this concession with the apparently contradictory claim that pure being ‘in this absence of differentiation appropriate to it...does possess both: both the concept and the thing that is undetermined.’<sup>198</sup> This is a perplexing claim. What would it mean to both admit that pure being is indeterminate and assert that it does in fact ‘possess’ the determinations of concept and thing (*Sache*)? This is certainly not something Hegel would assent to; nor does Adorno give us sufficient reasons in the lectures for why Hegel must be committed to this view.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> *SL* 83

<sup>197</sup> Adorno even seems to recognise this point in *Negative Dialectics* when he objects to precisely the fact that the *Logic* begins with being rather than with ‘the abstract something’ (*ND* 135; cf. *ND* 120).

<sup>198</sup> *LND* 61/93-4

<sup>199</sup> Adorno offers an unconvincing justification for his claim that pure being should be considered to have reference to being qua thing by pointing to the origin of Hegel’s term ‘the indeterminate’ in F.H. Jacobi. Adorno claims that, for Jacobi, the term still had reference to ‘underlying reality’ (*Substrat*) (*LND* 62/94). Unfortunately, Adorno does not give sufficient reasons for why Jacobi meant to refer to an underlying reality with the term ‘the indeterminate’. It is only Adorno’s reflections on linguistic connotation which support this claim. Moreover, there are important reasons to think that Jacobi did not mean the designation of pure being as ‘the indeterminate’ to indicate an underlying reality. Jacobi is responding to the prominent attempts of his contemporaries to get

So, how does Adorno justify this claim? I think it can be clarified by reminding ourselves of what Adorno believes is the philosopher's role in guarding against hypostatization (detailed in the comparison with Kant on the issue of how philosophy ordains illusions with fallacies, 2.2.2). Through a reconstruction from various fragments I showed that Adorno elaborates a theory of what constitutes genuine thought – namely, that the concept requires reference to the nonconceptual in order to produce knowledge – and that this often informs – albeit usually implicitly – his critical claims to uncover illicit philosophical moves. Although Adorno does not inform his audience in the lectures, I think this background to Adorno's criticism of hypostatization shows that the claim about the thought of pure being (i.e. that it possesses both concept and thing) performs the same function as the claim about genuine knowledge: to provide a perspective from which fallacies can be exposed. In this particular case, without supposing that pure being did 'possess' distinct determinations, the terms 'the indeterminate' and 'indeterminateness' would not be able to pick out either a thing or a concept and thus a slippage between the terms would be harmless.

So, Adorno cannot provide an immanent criticism of the identity thesis found in the beginning of the *Logic*. If Adorno is to specifically target the beginning of the *Logic* then he either needs to find an argument that can be tested for fallacious reasoning which Hegel does use to set us the identity thesis or else abandon the immanent approach and instead advance independent argumentation for an opposed thesis (a nonidentity thesis, as it were—i.e. that being is a something which exceeds thought). There is another option available, however. As noted, Adorno diagnoses hypostatization in a multiplicity of places. Unsurprisingly, then, Adorno does not claim to find hypostatization only in the beginning of the *Logic*, but throughout Hegel's work. I now argue that Adorno can only succeed in an immanent

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some determinate content from out of absolute indeterminacies like pure consciousness or pure time. The point is that when purity is taken consistently it makes no difference what it is that is supposed to be pure (e.g. pure consciousness, pure time, etc) since the purity guarantees that we are dealing with abstractions. And, importantly, this holds as much for 'the indeterminate' as it does for 'indeterminateness'.

criticism if he targets Hegel's philosophical strategy for establishing the collapse of the subject-object distinction (what Hegel calls the 'opposition of consciousness') rather than targeting Hegel's treatment of being after he has claimed to achieve this. In this way Adorno does not need to presuppose a theory of proper cognition or of what constitutes the thought of being because Hegel is committed to provisionally accept the nonidentity of being and thought in his attempt to show that any position which subscribes to this nonidentity will necessarily collapse and yield the standpoint of science.

#### **2.4 The charge of hypostatization II: Hegel's argument for mediation**

There is no shortage of examples to be found in *Negative Dialectics* of the accusation that Hegel establishes idealism through hypostatization. Unfortunately, we have already seen Adorno's most substantial textual support for his criticism. Elsewhere Adorno makes only passing hints as to where we can find these errors occurring in Hegel's texts. What makes this even more difficult is that those passing textual references usually only illustrate one aspect of the hypostatization process (namely, (iii) from the outline offered in 2.1). For example, Adorno claims that Hegel hypostatizes the particular by substituting for it 'the general concept of particularization pure and simple—of "Existenz," for instance, in which the particular is not particular any more.'<sup>200</sup> We see the same structure here as in the criticism of the beginning of the *Logic*: a concept *of* something (e.g. the concept of something that is indeterminate or particular) is replaced with a hypostatized concept of that something (e.g. the concept of the quality of indeterminateness or particularization, independent of anything that might have these qualities). In these cases Adorno fails to specify a passage in Hegel which convincingly shows that this movement from one term to another is performed

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<sup>200</sup> ND 173/174

fallaciously. In the case of the *Logic* Adorno simply imposes the distinction between concept and thing onto Hegel's text through an insufficient linguistic analysis; in the case of 'particularization' an attempt to show that Hegel is committed to this distinction is omitted entirely. This is not to say that Adorno avoids the work of analysing an argument to show that he is correct in diagnosing a fallacy. It is only to say that he does not clearly indicate *where* in Hegel this argument is to be found.

Instead, Adorno presents a reconstructed account of an idealist argument which he claims Hegel utilises. In short, this idealist argument is presented by Adorno as follows: the use of concepts entails mediation;<sup>201</sup> cognition of immediacy results in its mediation; therefore, both mediation and immediacy are within the concept and, as such, nothing lies outside conceptual mediation.<sup>202</sup> Adorno does not dispute either of the premises.<sup>203</sup> What is disputed is the conclusion. Adorno argues that there is an equivocation between the meaning of mediation in the first and second premise; and that it is only because of this equivocation that conceptual mediation can be claimed to be total and therefore establish the idealist claim that nothing is out of the reach of the conceptual. Mediation in the first premise refers to the mediation which is essential to the concept in virtue of the fact that concepts imply other concepts in attaining meaning and thus mediation is "total" in this sphere. Mediation in the second premise refers to a mediation which is not essential to the immediate in the way that it is for the concept. The immediate is not mediated in the same way as the concept since mediation

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<sup>201</sup> The most obvious sense in which this is the case for Hegel is that the thought-determinations of the understanding (which Hegel sees as akin to Kant's categories) are finite and conditioned and, since they do not have the ground of their being within themselves, are thus mediated (*EL* §44a).

<sup>202</sup> This is a compressed account of part of Adorno's reconstruction at (*ND* 171)

<sup>203</sup> Even though Adorno resists reducing immediacy to mediacy, he nevertheless remains Hegelian in the sense that appeals to *pure* immediacy are completely rejected (*ND* 181-3). The philosophical attempts to break out of idealism through such appeals – by Bergson, Husserl, Kierkegaard – are rejected, as is positivism's attempt to ground scientific knowledge in the immediate particular. Adorno responds to the accusation that he thereby sweeps up all immediacy (e.g. affect, experience, facts, etc) into the tide of mediation by arguing that: 'By referring something back to the conditions that prove immediacy to have been conditioned, you do indeed strike a blow against immediacy, but that immediacy survives nevertheless. For we can speak of mediation only if immediate reality, only if primary experience survives. [...] So the point about dialectics is not to negate the concept of fact in favour of mediation, or to exaggerate that of mediation; it is simply to say that immediacy is itself mediated but that the concept of the immediate must still be retained.' (*HF* 20-21).

does not exhaust immediacy in the same way that it does the concept. For immediacy mediation is only one way immediacy can be dealt with as opposed to its very nature. This is only an abstract sketch of how Adorno understands the elements of an equivocation in Hegel's argument for idealism; more detail will now be provided by locating and analysing a specific argument in Hegel's texts which illustrates Adorno's criticism.

#### 2.4.1 Hegel's argument against Kant's 'thing-in-itself'

One of the most distinctive arguments Hegel provides for his idealism is generated in his answer to Kant's dualism—or any position that sets ultimate limitations to thought or reason. This argument is of the same form as the one outlined above. In its most general form this argument goes something like this: The moment we try to reach outside the sphere of conceptual mediation to grasp something which is supposedly exempt from this sphere (i.e. is immediate) we necessarily bring it into the sphere of conceptual mediation (or else banish it into empty meaninglessness).<sup>204</sup> This argument, in one form or another, is pervasive in Hegel's opus,<sup>205</sup> from his earliest published works, such as *Faith and Knowledge*,<sup>206</sup> to his most mature, like the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.<sup>207</sup> I start by considering a version of this argument in the *Logic* before considering its analogue in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

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<sup>204</sup> For Hegel, mediation and immediacy are only opposed in this way from the perspective of the understanding: 'It is only the ordinary abstract understanding that takes the determinations of immediacy and mediation to be absolute, each on its own account, and thinks that it has an example of a *firm* distinction in them; in this way, it engenders for itself the unsurmountable difficulty of uniting them—a difficulty which, as we have shown, is not present in the *factum* [the mediation implicit in the unity of idea and being in Jacobi's 'immediate knowing'], while within the speculative Concept it vanishes too.' (*EL* §70). This point about Hegel's claims for the speculative concept does not invalidate Adorno's reconstruction. This is because the argument reconstructed here is precisely of Hegel's attempt at an immanent criticism of philosophies of the understanding.

<sup>205</sup> Incidentally, like many central Hegelian arguments, this is anticipated in Schelling's early work. See F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, (University Press of Virginia, 1978), 38f.

<sup>206</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf, and H. S. Harris, (SUNY 1977), 89-90.

<sup>207</sup> *EL* §44r

The section of the *Logic* which I focus upon is chapter 2, determinate being (*Dasein*), specifically the section on ‘Something and Other’ within ‘B. Finitude.’ Here Hegel unfolds the determination of ‘something’, eventually reaching the claim that it is the unity of being-in-itself and being-for-other. This is an important moment in the *Logic* since establishing that what is ‘in-itself’ is not divorced from what is ‘for-other’ we already have the seed of the overcoming of all limitation—i.e. that there is nothing that can outreach our grasp. Hegel himself hints at the decisiveness of this point when he points out that this identity (of being-in-itself and being-for-other), though already present in determinate being, is shown ‘more expressly in the consideration of *essence* and of the relation of *inner* and *outer*, and most precisely in the consideration of the Idea as the unity of the Notion and *actuality*.’<sup>208</sup> Now that the general context of this specific moment of the dialectic in the *Logic* has been outlined, we can go into more detail.

Hegel takes the opportunity to criticise Kant (though he does not mention him by name). Hegel claims that his account of finitude as ‘something’ undermines a certain conception of the ‘thing-in-itself.’

Things are called ‘in themselves’ in so far as abstraction is made from all being-for-other, which means simply, in so far as they are thought devoid of all determination, as nothings. In this sense, it is of course impossible to know *what* the *thing-in-itself* is. For the question: *what?* demands that *determinations* be assigned; but since the things of which they are to be assigned are at the same time supposed to be *things in-themselves*, which means, in effect, to be without any determination, the question is thoughtlessly made impossible to answer, or else only an absurd answer is given. The thing-in-itself is the same as that *absolute* of which we know nothing except that in it all is one. What is *in* these things-in-themselves, therefore, we know quite well; they are as such nothing but truthless, empty abstractions. What, however, the thing-in-itself is in truth, what truly is in itself, of this logic is the exposition, in which however something better than an abstraction is understood by ‘in-itself’, namely, what something is in its concept; but the concept is concrete within itself, is comprehensible simply as concept, and as determined within itself and the connected whole of its determinations, is cognizable.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> *SL* 120

<sup>209</sup> *SL* 121

The first point Hegel makes here is that the thing-in-itself is specifically the thought of something which is “abstracted” from conceptual mediation. For Hegel, determination is only brought about through the concept; so, we cannot say what determination the thing-in-itself has since it designates what is outside conceptual mediation (or, as Hegel puts it, it is abstracted ‘from all being-for-other’). Nevertheless, Hegel proceeds to tell us what the thing-in-itself is *for* conceptual mediation (indicated by asking ‘*what?*’ the thing-in-itself is): an empty abstraction.<sup>210</sup> Moreover, Hegel claims that his logic aims to provide an exposition of the ‘in-itself’. But with this announcement Hegel has done little more than changed the topic. We are told that this exposition is of the concept and its concrete determinations and that, in virtue of this nature of the concept, it is better than the in-itself which lacks conceptual determinations within itself. But to say that the in-itself conceived as the concept meets the standard of conceptual determination, whereas the in-itself conceived as marking what is outside conceptual determination does not meet this standard, begs the question and tells us nothing about whether there is an in-itself outside conceptual mediation.

Now, Adorno signs up to the Hegelian idea that determinacy only comes about through conceptualization. He also takes Hegel to be right that the thing-in-itself, as the placeholder for what is outside conceptual mediation (determination), *can be defined*, that is, can be given the determination of being abstract, by conceptualizing it. But this does not mean that we have thereby successfully reassured ourselves that the in-itself really is equal to thought. All that has been established is that the in-itself *can* be defined as what is abstract—that is, mediated by the concept in a specific sense. What has not been shown – but needs to be, if Hegel is to get the result he wants – is that this way of mediating the in-itself is the same as the mediation which is native to the concept.

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<sup>210</sup> It should be remembered that, for Hegel, the distinction between abstract and concrete takes a specific meaning—one contrary to the usual connotation which associates concrete with the empirical and abstract with thought-products. For Hegel, there is something like an abstract-concrete scale which indicates the level of mediatedness or richness of conceptual differentiation.

It could be objected that Hegel does not have to accept that things-in-themselves indicate something beyond the concept in the first place. On the contrary, it could be maintained that the thought of a thing-in-itself is nothing more than a concept and therefore Hegel has no duty to provide an explanation why mediation of this is the same as mediation of the concept, since, on Hegel's terms, it is self-evident that mediation is the same in both cases. In this way it seems that we have again run into the roadblock which the criticism of the beginning of the *Logic* faced: there is no room for an immanent criticism because the diagnosis of an illicit move (e.g. an equivocation or subreption) only works if Hegel subscribes to the same terms. But there are reasons to think that Hegel does accept that the thing-in-itself is more than a determination of the concept.

#### 2.4.2 Hegel's argument against Jacobi's 'immediate knowing'

It is the case that Hegel introduces the 'in-itself' in the *Logic* explicitly as a determination of the concept, specifically, as a form of finitude qua something. But Hegel also recognises that it has a meaning outside his science that needs to be shown to be wrong in order for his *Logic* to take the status of the authoritative account of the in-itself. Although the quote above is from the body of the *Logic* (i.e. where scientific exposition is to take place), it has the tenor of a remark (i.e. an historical aside not strictly part of the deduction). More specifically, it has the same aim and target as a passage in the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. There, Hegel is trying to argue that the different 'positions of thought with respect to objectivity', which ultimately uphold the opposition of thought and being, are incoherent and necessarily lead to a more advanced position—eventually ending in the standpoint of science where concrete content is reducible to thought-determinations.<sup>211</sup> But before Hegel can get to this

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<sup>211</sup> In this sense the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* aim to lead the reader to the standpoint of science in a similar manner that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* aimed to lead to the standpoint of science. That is, by

standpoint (and therefore his account of the in-itself) he needs to show that the position which does hold things-in-themselves to be opposed to, or outside, thought-determinations is wrong to do so. In this way Hegel is committed to dealing with the thing-in-itself qua immediacy (i.e. outside conceptual mediation) in a way he was not committed to dealing with being qua thing in the beginning of the *Logic*.

This point becomes more explicit when Hegel addresses a similar issue in Jacobi. For Hegel, Jacobi's 'immediate knowing' represents a higher stage than Kant's in the development of the positions of thought in relation to objectivity. This is because Jacobi restores our relationship to the absolute which was barred by Kant. What this means in Hegel's narrative – which leads towards the standpoint of science – is that it is one step closer to realising that thought is the truth of being—i.e. to the collapse of the opposition between consciousness and objectivity. Nevertheless, Jacobi is still chided for limiting our access to the absolute to immediacy, rather than through the mediations of reason. Jacobi's immediate knowing of the absolute (or God) leaves this outside the concept and therefore – much like Kant's think-in-itself – as deprived of conceptual determination.

Finally, the immediate knowing of God is only supposed to extend to *that* God is, not *what* God is [*daß* Gott ist, nicht *was* Gott ist]; for the latter would be a cognition and would lead to mediated knowing. Hence God, as the object of religion, is expressly restricted to *God in general*, to the indeterminate supersensible, and the content of religion is reduced to a minimum.<sup>212</sup>

So, Hegel recognises that thinking the thing-in-itself is initially a thought of what is outside 'mediated knowing'—the thought of the *that*, as opposed to the *what*, as Hegel puts it. This means that to mediate this immediacy involves something different than it does to mediate what is intrinsically the concept already. It is not clear that Hegel realises the implications of

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deducing the necessity of arriving at the collapse of the subject-object opposition which is the starting point of doing a science of logic. §25 of the *Encyclopaedia*, and Hegel's accompanying remark to this section, address this issue. Hegel states that the *Phenomenology* and the presentation of the different 'positions of thought' have the same aim: to lead to the standpoint of Logic.

<sup>212</sup> *EL* §73

this point. If he did, he would surely have to admit that, although the ‘content’ or the *what* of something immediate (e.g. thing-in-itself or immediate knowing of God) can be given, this still does not exhaust the *that* of the immediate.

Of course, Hegel has a category up his sleeve to yet again reabsorb this remainder. But to offer this answer to the problem is to move too quickly. Hegel thinks he can show that the Kantian – or Jacobian – attempt to think the thing-in-itself (or the immediate) will have to admit its conceptuality, even by their own lights. It will not do, then, for Hegel to merely assert his category as a replacement. The point is that the way Hegel attempts to reduce immediacy to mediacy in his argument against Kant and Jacobi exploits an equivocation between different forms of mediation. Thus Adorno is correct to point out that Hegel hypostatizes the nonconceptual as conceptual through surreptitious means.<sup>213</sup> As Adorno summarises:

As long as philosophers employ the concepts “immediate” and “mediate”—concepts they cannot forgo for the time being—their language will bear witness to the facts denied by the idealist version of dialectics. That this version ignores the seemingly minimal difference serves to make it plausible. The triumphant finding that immediacy is wholly mediated rides roughshod over the mediated and blithely ends up with the totality of the concept, which nothing nonconceptual can stop any more. It ends up with the absolute rule of the subject. In dialectics, however, it is not total identification that has the last word, because dialectics lets us recognize the difference that has been

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<sup>213</sup> Although Adorno did not seem to be aware of the difficulty of proving this from within the exposition of the *Logic* as such. From the reconstruction provided here we see that Adorno should have focused his attack on how Hegel attempts to prove the collapse of the opposition of consciousness rather than target the movement of Hegel’s dialectic once he has already gotten to work on the development of the concept within the standpoint of science.

spirited away. Dialectics can break the spell of identification without dogmatically, from without, contrasting it with an allegedly realistic thesis.<sup>214</sup>

This immanent (i.e. non-dogmatic) criticism is possible because Hegel accepts a contrast between immediate and mediate before trying to show that immediacy is only a moment of mediation.<sup>215</sup>

There are two significant defences a Hegelian might want to take at this point. The first is in response to the force of Adorno's criticism. The very strategy of disputing a claim by exposing the illegitimacy of the argument offered for it has the limitation that the claim itself is not necessarily defeated—another argument could take the place of the one exposed as illegitimate.<sup>216</sup> Although I have not provided an exhaustive analysis of Hegel's arguments for the identity thesis, the one which was analysed was shown to be just one instance of a general idealist strategy utilised by Hegel. Due to the pervasiveness of this strategy in Hegel's thought – noted above – I think there are strong grounds to take Adorno's diagnosis of hypostatization seriously. If a Hegelian wanted to avoid the attack by producing an alternative strategy to back up the identity thesis, they would still need to do substantial work to (i) show that such a strategy is distinctively Hegelian (as the one discussed here is), and (ii) say why Hegel put so much stock in a surreptitious approach if a legitimate alternative was available.

The second defence would consist not in finding a replacement argumentative strategy for Hegel's idealism, but in deflating Hegel's philosophy so as to avoid the critical attentions of

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<sup>214</sup> ND 172/174 (translation modified)

<sup>215</sup> As noted above, for Hegel, immediacy and mediacy are within the *speculative concept*, but not within the concept of the understanding.

<sup>216</sup> It might be thought that Hegel's analysis of pure being in the *Logic* would precisely do this job since we were not able to successfully perform an immanent criticism there. But this thought would be mistaken. The reason an immanent criticism was not possible was because Hegel had already presupposed the identity thesis by that point—thus Adorno was foolish to try to target this aspect of Hegel's philosophical project and not where he explicitly tries to argue for establishing the identity thesis.

thinkers antagonistic to the apparent metaphysical excesses of Hegel's thought. If such an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy is plausible then it would seem to make Adorno's criticism redundant. I turn to this now in the final section of this chapter.

## 2.5 The 'non-metaphysical' defence of Hegel

There is a prominent strand of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hegel-interpretation which attempts to rescue Hegel from obscurity or straightforward dismissal by claiming that his philosophy is not objectionably metaphysical.<sup>217</sup> This approach downplays the metaphysical commitments of Hegel's philosophy whilst emphasising the Kantian or transcendental aspects. Rather than dispute these interpreters, I argue that the "non-metaphysical" Hegel is still guilty of holding the identity thesis. Thus, despite the admirable defence of Hegel against some of the more extravagant perceptions of his philosophy, there is still an objectionable metaphysical commitment – in short, that being is rational – which Adorno exposes and reveals to be illegitimate.

Non-metaphysical interpretations rightly point out that Hegel's philosophy cannot be accused of the following metaphysical enterprises: (i) pre-critical speculation of transcendent objects (i.e. 'special metaphysics'), (ii) reducing existence to the mental (either in the sense of positing the mind-dependence of existence or making existence a mental substance, e.g. panpsychism), (iii) yielding exhaustive knowledge of entities through reason alone (what Klaus Hartmann refers to as making 'existence claims').<sup>218</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Adorno does not actually think Hegel held any of those fantastical views. Thus

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<sup>217</sup> There are many representatives of this trend. For example: J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, (Aldershot, England: Gregg Revivals, 1993 [1958]) and Klaus Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. A. MacIntyre (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976). This trend perhaps reaches its pinnacle in Terry P. Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>218</sup> See Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," 108-09, 110, 117; Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility*, 12, 14.

the non-metaphysical reading does not in principle exempt Hegel from Adorno's criticism. It might be thought, however, that, since the non-metaphysical reading stresses the transcendental aspect of Hegel's thought – that his *Logic*, for example, is a 'theory of categories'<sup>219</sup> – this would also ensure that Hegel is not open to Adorno's criticism of the identity thesis. After all, if Hegel's philosophy is primarily about displaying the categorial structure of thought, surely he is not committed to making claims beyond this sphere.

But the difficulty which the transcendental or non-metaphysical interpreters face is that, if they are to promote a distinctively *Hegelian* transcendental philosophy, they need to address its difference from Kant's transcendental philosophy. In particular, they must make sense of Hegel's frequent claims to have overcome Kant's supposed subjectivism—that is, to overcome the sceptical worry that we do not know if Kant's categories actually meet up with the real. Hegel's argumentative strategy for dealing with the limit on truth which Kant's thing-in-itself posed was outlined above (2.4.1). Interestingly, we find the non-metaphysical interpreters make use of this very same strategy in order to retain the distinctively Hegelian twist to transcendental (or 'speculative') philosophy. For instance, Klaus Hartmann promotes Hegel's practice of 'placing' nonconceptualities (what Hartmann refers to as 'irreducibles') within categories and claims that Hegel has thereby achieved the identity of being and thought (even if he remains silent on knowledge of 'individual items').

Hegel does not "know" more than Kant when he "places" the thing-in-itself in a hermeneutical context while Kant denies knowing anything about it and yet talks about it. There need be no anchorage in existences by-passing categorization or understanding, in order to make ontology possible. Or, there need be no metaphysics; and if we are correct, there is a defensible reading of Hegel's philosophy as a non-metaphysical philosophy.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," 104

<sup>220</sup> Hartmann, "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View," 117.

Or, we can note Terry Pinkard's rendition of a similar point; namely, that what concepts grasp is not 'things in the cosmos' (Hartmann's 'individual items'), but 'the true natures of things' (Hartmann's 'ontology'):

In our experience, whether it be in the laboratory or of what Husserl call the life-world, we encounter conceptual unities, configurations of the world produced by adopting certain descriptive schemes. Behind or beyond this world is nothing (even the idea of a thing-in-itself functions as a limiting concept in our conceptual apparatus). To paraphrase Hegel himself, one can no more jump out of one's system of descriptions than one can jump out of one's skin.<sup>221</sup>

Both suggest that Hegel overcomes Kant's dualism by claiming that, since the thing-in-itself *can* be absorbed into our thought, we thereby bypass the worries about whether or not our conceptual schemes really do capture being or not. Hartmann claims that Hegel does not "know" more than Kant. And this is true insofar as the object of this knowledge is supposed to be 'individual items.' But Hegel clearly does claim to know more than Kant in another sense: he knows the structure of being itself. Pinkard similarly endorses this 'ontological' status of Hegel's dialectic.<sup>222</sup> I have argued above that the faith in this Hegelian procedure is misplaced; constituting a serious error, a hypostatization. In this way I think so-called non-metaphysical readings are still guilty of surreptitiously advancing the – still quite metaphysical! – claim that being is truly captured by categories and therefore that being is rational.

The non-metaphysical reading, then, may save Hegel from the accusation of holding some of the more fantastical metaphysical claims, but they still endorse a non-trivial, and certainly not self-evident, metaphysical claim regarding the identity of being and thought. Moreover, if Adorno is right to claim that Hegel gets this identity via hypostatization of the concept, then we have also revealed one of the most significant and influential trends in the

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<sup>221</sup> Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility*, 12.

<sup>222</sup> Pinkard points out that Hegel's philosophy must answer Kantian doubts 'that it is possible at all to say that this is the way the *world* is, as opposed to the way we must experience and think about that world.' (*Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility*, 21-2).

20<sup>th</sup> century Hegel-scholarship – which precisely aims to save Hegel from metaphysical excess – as succumbing to a serious metaphysical flaw.

### 3 Conclusion to part I and introduction to part II

I have argued that Schelling and Adorno have provided powerful and incisive criticisms of Hegel's ambitions for the concept. I claim this not just in the sense that I believe I have shown their arguments to be philosophically more cogent than they are usually given credit for; but also in the sense that shed new light on Hegel's philosophy. In the case of Schelling, this was located in his uncovering of a different type of metaphysics in Hegel's *Logic*. The debate around Hegel's metaphysics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was mostly animated by the question of whether Hegel had lapsed into a pre-critical metaphysics or not. Commentators from Hartmann to Pippin attempted to save Hegel from these charges by stressing the transcendental dimension of Hegel's philosophy, especially in the *Logic*. More recently an intervention in this debate, most notably by Beiser, has brought attention to the ontological nature of the *Logic* – especially as it relates to Hegel's proximity to Aristotle – and shown how this cuts through the opposition of 'metaphysical' or 'non-metaphysical' readings. This is certainly a welcome corrective, but it does not capture the whole story. Schelling's exposure of the illicit animation of the concept revealed how Hegel had attempted a new kind of *critical* metaphysics which, while not a transcendent metaphysics, was still more robust than the ontological reading since it claims knowledge not just of the structure of being, but also of an existent activity (albeit one immanent to thought).

In the case of Adorno, the new light brought to the issue of the metaphysical nature of Hegel's thought was located in the uncovering of the way that Hegel's idealistic account of dialectics establishes the intelligibility and rationality of being. This is a somewhat more familiar issue in the criticism of Hegel than the problem of – what I have called – a critical metaphysics. But, unlike the more common worry that Hegel's identification of actuality and rationality results in the complete rationality of the world, Adorno is fully aware that actuality is a specific category for Hegel which does not cover everything that just happens to be the

case in the world. Adorno's criticism of hypostatization in Hegel's use of the concept was aimed at the way that Hegel can assure us of the basic rational structure of things. This brings nuance into our understanding of Adorno's criticisms of identity philosophy (which I elaborate on below). The type of metaphysics Adorno has exposed in Hegel's fallacious use of the concept is different to Schelling; but again, it is located somewhere between the ontological reading and the transcendent metaphysical reading. The object of Hegel's metaphysics for Adorno is not a structure (whether of intelligibility or of being—i.e. the transcendental or ontological reading), nor an entity (as in the transcendent metaphysical reading), nor an immanent activity (as in Schelling's reading). Rather, the object is an assurance—the assurance that the concept cannot encounter any resistance from something nonconceptual.

It may sound odd to call an assurance a metaphysical object, but I think that we can see why it makes sense to say that this assurance is, at the least, a metaphysical aim of Hegel's account of the concept. Hegel's argument for complete mediation attempts to show that anything that appears as nonconceptual, turns out to be fundamentally conceptual. The way this argument goes looks to be closer to a transcendental argument than an account of being or of an entity (e.g. an existent supersensory object)—at least in the minimal sense that it says what *must* be the case, rather than what *is* the case. Hegel's argument for complete mediation tries to say that what must be the case, is that existence is of the nature of the concept. Since existence itself is not the object here (only what existence *must* be) it is not a transcendent metaphysics. And since it is not the necessary structure of things which is the object (rather, it is the necessary quality of things—to be essential or of the concept), it is not a straightforward ontology.

The type of metaphysics Schelling and Adorno discover in Hegel's philosophy may be unfamiliar, but in both cases the worry is with the over inflation of the concept; that is, with

the nature of Hegel's idealism. The preceding chapters have hopefully clarified the nature of Schelling's and Adorno's objection to Hegel—both in terms of their similarities and their differences. But the differences in the type of metaphysical object they find in Hegel's philosophy only goes so far in revealing important differences between Schelling and Adorno. We not only want to know how they think the concept can overextend itself, but exactly what it is that is thereby threatened by such an overextension. In short, for Schelling this is pure existence (the meaning of this will be provided below), and for Adorno this is the nonconceptual (that which is supposed to be brought into philosophy through negative dialectics). This abstract statement does not tell us much. For this reason I now unpack this indirectly by defending Schelling's and Adorno's criticisms against the possible worry that their concern with what is outside the concept is either unwarranted or beside the point—at least from the perspective of Hegel's philosophical aims. In the course of defending Schelling and Adorno on this score the details of their respective accounts of what should be outside the concept will be provided.

### **3.1 How extensive is the pretention of Hegel's concept?**

Adorno and Schelling often put their objection to Hegel in terms of the idealist dialectic disallowing anything outside the concept. But we need to be careful with these kinds of formulations. If we take them very literally then we will miss the point. Moreover, Hegelians can easily respond that there is something outside the concept and even point out that the Hegelian system requires there to be something which is not conceptual.<sup>223</sup> When Adorno and Schelling claim that Hegel has extended the concept, reason, or thought to engulf everything, we should add the qualification, 'in effect': Hegel has extended the concept to, *in effect*,

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<sup>223</sup> William Maker, 'The Very Idea of the Idea of Nature, or Why Hegel Is Not an Idealist', in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (SUNY Press, 1998), 1–27.

engulf everything. Both Adorno's and Schelling's criticisms are not diminished by acknowledging that Hegel's system does not pretend to be exhaustive in its knowledge of the world, and thus does not absorb the nonconceptual wholesale; the crucial point is exactly what role the nonconceptual plays in Hegel's thought.

### 3.1.1 Schelling's account

'Hegel is so little inclined to recognise his philosophy *as* the merely negative philosophy that he asserts instead that it is the philosophy which leaves absolutely nothing outside itself.'<sup>224</sup>

Alan White has taken this kind of objection to express the worry that Hegel's sciences stop short before the rich empirical detail of the world.

...Hegel's doctrine of truth teaches that judgments reporting only what happens to be are at best merely correct; they cannot express the truth with which the philosopher is concerned. The philosopher therefore does not focus on what is or what happens as such. [...] In Hegel's view, those who value the knowledge of what merely takes place as the most important philosophical knowledge remain fixated at the standpoint that should have been overcome through Kant's "Copernican revolution": they continue to view the object, rather than the determinations of thought, as the ground of truth. For Hegel, philosophy tests reality to determine the extent to which it is true; reality is incapable of testing truths of philosophy.<sup>225</sup>

Schelling's complaint is not that Hegel has failed to achieve a 'quantitative all-inclusiveness.'<sup>226</sup> The reason why White can present Schelling's worry in such a way is because of an assumed dichotomy regarding knowledge: on the one hand, 'what is or what happens' is said to be the exclusive concern of empirical judgments, and, on the other hand, the truth that the philosopher is concerned with is said to be purely occupied with the truth of thought-determinations. This dichotomy does not hold for Schelling. Moreover, his criticism

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<sup>224</sup> *HMP* 135

<sup>225</sup> Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge: Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1983), 145-46.

<sup>226</sup> White, *Absolute Knowledge*, 147

of Hegel precisely involves the rejection of such a dichotomy. Schelling does not think that freedom is the kind of thing that can be proved through concepts—this was seen in his criticism of the *Logic*. But neither does he think freedom can be proved through the empirical. More detail regarding how Schelling does think philosophy can grasp freedom will be the focus of chapter 4. Here I would like to first note an important aspect in the history of philosophy which already indicates why Schelling rejects the limitation of philosophy to either purely conceptual analysis or empirical judgments.

An important part of the development of German thought after Kant was indebted to a basic insight, usually said to begin with J. C. F. Hölderlin – who attended the Tübingen seminary where Hegel and Schelling also studied – and traced through the work of the ‘German romantics,’ including Schelling.<sup>227</sup> The basic thought goes as follows. The knowing relation between subject and object could not exist without a ground of that relation (i.e. if there was nothing shared between them it would be a mystery as to how they come into a genuine relation in the first place). Such a ground cannot already contain a split between subject and object otherwise it would not be the ground of such a split (Hölderlin calls this the ground ‘absolute Being,’ which cannot be equated with the ‘Identity’ between subject and object<sup>228</sup>). Any attempt to make this ground an object of cognition treats it as an object opposed to the subject and thus must falsify it. Following Hölderlin’s lead, the young Schelling thought that we could find a way past this problem through intellectual intuition.<sup>229</sup> The extent to which the later Schelling’s answer to this problem is continuous with his earlier answer is debatable; in any case, Schelling still took this to require an answer of some

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<sup>227</sup> See, for instance, Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), ‘The Place of Hölderlin’s “Judgment and Being”,’ 279-95; Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 467.

<sup>228</sup> J. C. F. Hölderlin, ‘Über Urtheil Und Seyn’, in *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801*, by H. S. Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 515–16.

<sup>229</sup> For a helpful account of how Schelling’s account of intellectual intuition develops from the reception of Fichte, see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, ‘The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling’, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117–40.

kind.<sup>230</sup> We will see that this ground is understood in a way not anticipated by Hölderlin's path breaking remarks, but that it nevertheless elaborates on the basic insight found there.<sup>231</sup>

It is strange that White should take Schelling's criticism of Hegel to run along the lines of the distinction between empirical judgments and ontological enquiry, given this well established background to Schelling's intellectual development. Hölderlin's 'absolute Being' is clearly neither accessible through reflection on the concept or on empirical beings. The issue does get more complicated in Schelling's mature thought, however. The importance of the ground of separation for philosophy becomes more of an ethical and theological issue than a straightforwardly metaphysical or epistemological one. To briefly indicate how this shift can occur we can consider the issue of how the separation arises in the first place. If the separation results of necessity, if being originally splits in an unfree manner, then the formation of a determinate world looks to be hostile to our hopes for freedom and meaning. But if a free act was behind the original split, then our hopes for the hospitality of this world might be more secure. The way that a quite abstract metaphysical issue, with seemingly little ethical significance, can be imbued with such practical importance might strike us as rather idiosyncratic. But something homologous is at the heart of Hegel's system. The question of the self-determination of the concept can be understood in plainly metaphysical or epistemological terms, but – as I have argued in the chapter 1 – becomes central to Hegel's ethical and theological ambitions, namely the freedom of historical development and the knowledge of God. For Schelling, knowledge regarding these ethical and theological matters

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<sup>230</sup> We will see some of the difficulties Schelling faces in trying to turn philosophy towards something which is neither empirically know, nor simply a self-knowing reason in 4.1.3. Perhaps Schelling's most powerful investigation into the issue raised by Hölderlin can be found in his 1821 Erlangen lecture 'On the Nature of Philosophy as Science', in *German Idealist Philosophy*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), 210–43.

<sup>231</sup> Indeed, Manfred Frank claims that it is only once we get to Schelling's late philosophy that this understanding of being, as what precedes the subject-object relation, 'first win[s] some ground.' Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 56.

is not to be found in an enquiry into the concept – as it is for Hegel – but neither is it to be found in empirical judgments.

It is important to point out that the investigation that Schelling has in mind does not neglect the negative part of philosophy completely. Schelling thinks that reason, of itself, can tell us about this ground. As we saw in Schelling's criticism of Descartes' ontological proof of the existence of God (1.1.1), Schelling argues that this argument establishes the modality of God, but not the existence of God. Later Schelling would argue more explicitly that this provides us with the proof of the existence of this ground of relation as that which necessarily exists.<sup>232</sup> But this is not yet to prove the existence of God. 'I cannot...proceed from the concept of God to prove the existence of God, but I can proceed from the concept of that which indubitably exists and conversely prove the divinity of that which indubitably exists.'<sup>233</sup> Ultimately, for Schelling, to prove that the ground of the subject-object relation is God amounts to proving that the world is fundamentally free or purposeful (i.e. divine).<sup>234</sup>

Thus we see that Hegel and Schelling are both concerned with the problem of whether the world is fundamentally free, purposely, or divine. But whereas Hegel thinks philosophy can pursue this concern from within pure thought, Schelling thinks that we need to leave pure thought and investigate that 'absolute Being' which Hölderlin brought to our attention.

...positive philosophy starts out just as little from something that occurs merely in thought (for then it would fall back into the negative philosophy) as it starts out from some being that is present in *experience*. If it does not start out from something that occurs in thought, and, thus, in no way from pure thought, then it will start out from that which is before and external to all thought, consequently from being, not from an empirical being.<sup>235</sup>

In the first chapter the distinction between the *Was* and the *Daß* was drawn where the former referred to conceptual content and the latter to existence. At that point it was not necessary to

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<sup>232</sup> *GPP* 199/*SW* 13:156-57

<sup>233</sup> *GPP* 201/*SW* 13:159

<sup>234</sup> *GPP* 168-69, 177/*SW* 13:113-14, 124-25

<sup>235</sup> *GPP* 178/*SW* 13:126-7

further specify that existence can mean either the existence of empirical things or the existence of the being which is the ground before all separation of concept and object, the being which is ‘before and external to all thought.’ Schelling uses a variety of terms to designate this: ‘that which purely is’ (*das rein Seyende*), ‘that which just exists’ (*bloß Existirende*), pure *thatness* (*reine Daß*).<sup>236</sup> It is this non-empirical being – which I will refer to as pure existence – that Schelling claims Hegel fails to consider.<sup>237</sup> So, his complaint to Hegel cannot be that the *Logic* fails to be acquainted with the multiplicity of empirical things; or, as White puts it, with an abundance of ‘merely correct’ judgments.

Now, it could be the case that one reason White misunderstands the target of Schelling’s criticism of Hegel is that Schelling frequently says that positive philosophy has ‘actual happening [*Geschehen*]’ as its object.<sup>238</sup> Schelling’s emphasis on what happens could lead to the suspicion that it is what happens in the empirical realm only which Schelling believes Hegel to be crucially ignorant of. Moreover, it might not be clear how the concern with the ground could be a matter of seeing what happens. It is true that, if the ground turns out not to be fundamentally free (divine), then nothing would ‘happen’ there in Schelling’s understanding of that term. Happening is associated with act, will, and freedom for Schelling. If the ground does turn out to be divine, then the development of a world of differences from that ground will have been the result of an *act*.<sup>239</sup> By attributing an act to the concept, Hegel had absorbed that ground into the play of dialectical movement in the *Logic*.

It is in this way that the concept *in effect* engulfs everything. The concept does not pretend to contain the wealth of empirical content, but it does pretend to contain knowledge about the freedom or divinity of existence. Insofar as the nonconceptual is considered only as the wealth of empirical material available for making judgements reporting the existence of this

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<sup>236</sup> *HMP* 88/SW 10:65, *GPP* 199, 211/SW 13:157, 173

<sup>237</sup> *GPP* 204/SW 13:164

<sup>238</sup> *GPP* 169/SW 13:114

<sup>239</sup> *GPP* 177/SW 13:125

or that finite object, Hegel's concept does not engulf everything. But insofar as the nonconceptual is considered as the realm of freedom Hegel does engulf everything. It should be pointed out that in a certain sense this is merely to restate the conflict between Hegel and Schelling. For Hegel, the philosopher should not look to the nonconceptual here because free development precisely is characterised as the self-determination of the concept.<sup>240</sup> However, I argued in the first chapter that Schelling has the resources to show this view to be mistaken. Thus now we can see that this gives us grounds to claim that Hegel has in fact illegitimately excluded the nonconceptual. And by doing so he has allowed the science of reason to take on the task of justifying existence.

At this point I need to note an issue regarding Schelling's intellectual development. The criticism of Hegel presented here is found in the *Spätphilosophie*. As noted, at this final stage in Schelling's development he is concerned to find out whether pure existence can be understood as free or not. In the *Freiheitsschrift* the rough equivalent to pure existence is presented in the terms 'indifference' or the 'unground.'<sup>241</sup> These play a relatively minor role in the *Freiheitsschrift*, but what Schelling there refers to as the unground carries the same theological and ethical importance: it is supposed to guarantee the meaningful unity of the separations in the world (which Schelling characterises as 'love').<sup>242</sup> If this unground were to be swallowed up in the play of dialectical relations, according to Schelling, then it would also be deprived of this role.

The main difference between the *Freiheitsschrift* and the *Spätphilosophie* is the emphasis on human freedom as what a science of reason cannot grasp within itself. Human freedom is akin to the ground insofar as it is also properly seen as an act or deed. But the fact of human

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<sup>240</sup> Hegel frequently equates freedom with the self-determining concept. For example: '[...] the *mind*, whose absolute determination is efficacious reason, i.e. the self-determining and self-realizing concept itself—freedom.' G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007); cf. *SL* 816-17.

<sup>241</sup> *FS* 276f.

<sup>242</sup> *FS* 278

freedom does not itself already justify the meaning of purposefulness of the world in itself (whereas, if the ground were found to be free, existence would be meaningful). This is partly because human freedom can bring evil into the world. On this account, then, Hegel's limitation to the concept not only means he cannot grasp the justifiability of the world (i.e. its divinity), but he also could not grasp if the world was unjustifiable. These issues will be important for the following chapter. For now, we just need to note that the threat which the concept poses to pure existence is also posed to human freedom.

### 3.1.2 Adorno's account

When Adorno accuses Hegel of promoting the 'primacy of the subject' or of establishing the world as a 'mental totality' we can be forgiven for thinking that the charge being made is something like Hegel's philosophy ends up as an extreme subjective idealism where everything is dissolved into consciousness.<sup>243</sup> But this is not what Adorno has in mind. As we saw, hypostatization does its work on concepts, not on things—the entities of the world are outside the scope of this operation. It is not existing things, then, that are supposed to have been consumed by the concept. So what kind of identity can hypostatization have set up? To answer this question we need to return to the discussion of the nature of hypostatization.

First of all, it will be remembered that the concepts which Adorno tries to defend from hypostatization are quite general and abstract ones: immediacy, indeterminacy, particularity, and so on. These concepts pick out precious little of the concrete detail of specific entities in the world; so we know that the concern is not that such concepts might be further deprived of empirical detail. What these concepts do pick out is the very fact that there is something substantial (*Sachhaltig*), or a substrate (*Substrat*), which our concepts refer to; for example,

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<sup>243</sup> ND 7, 10

something *which is* indeterminate or something *which is* particular. This might seem like an obvious or trivial point, but it is a point which Adorno thinks philosophers frequently overlook to damaging effect. It is just this very minimal recognition of a substrate – rather than specific objects – which needs to be secured in this instance.

There is no Being without entities. “Something”—as a cogitatively indispensable substrate [*denknotwendiges Substrat*] of any concept, including the concept of Being—is the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter [*Sachhaltigen*] that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process. Without “something” there is no thinkable logic, and there is no way to cleanse this logic of its metalogical rudiment. The supposition of an absolute form, of “something at large” that might enable our thinking to shake off that subject-matter, is illusionary. Constitutive for the form of “subject-matter at large” [*Sachhaltiges überhaupt*] is the substantive experience of subject-matter.<sup>244</sup>

The real problem comes, however, not with ignorance of the substrate, but with the transfiguration of the concept of this substrate (e.g. the concept ‘something’ which is the most abstract reference to there being a substrate) into something wholly conceptual, thereby eliminating the part that is not identical to the concept. This abstract and high-altitude sketch can perhaps be clarified if we return to one of Adorno’s specific engagements.

Adorno is not the most sensitive reader of Heidegger, but the reflections that result from his critical engagements often allow insight into the details of Adorno’s thought. Heidegger’s ‘Dasein’ is treated by Adorno as another example of a concept of a substrate – or, in other words, a concept that necessarily refers to the nonconceptual<sup>245</sup> – which, like the concept of ‘something,’ can easily be mistreated by the philosopher.

The concept of the ontological cannot be attached to a substrate [*Substrat*], as if ontological were its predicate. To be a fact is no predicate which can attach itself to a concept; and, since Kant’s criticism of the ontological proof of the existence of God, any philosophy should be careful not to affirm this. The same holds true for the nonfacticity of concepts, their essentiality. This essentiality is localized in the relation of the concept to the facticity that is synthesized in it—and never belongs to it, as Heidegger suggests,

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<sup>244</sup> ND 135/139

<sup>245</sup> Cf. ND 11/23, 149/150

as a quality of it itself. To say that Dasein “is ontic or ontological,” can, strictly speaking, not be judged at all, for what is meant by existence is a substrate [*Substrat*].<sup>246</sup>

This is a complex passage, but if we read it in the light of the previous one I think we can unpack what is going on here. Perhaps the most confusing part is the claim that ‘what is meant by existence is a substrate.’ As we have seen, in *Negative Dialectics* substrate is defined not as a specific object, but as a kind of place holder indicating ‘the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking.’ In this way the substrate looks to do similar work as the thing in itself does for Kant. But it should be remembered that the substrate is not supposed to indicate the wealth of what is experienced by the subject.<sup>247</sup> As Adorno puts it, the substrate is the ‘*abstraction* of the subject-matter...not to be abolished by any further thought process.’ It is a concept which explicitly points to nonconceptuality.

Now, we might ask, if we are dealing with a concept, what mischief could it possibly suffer in the philosopher’s hands? In short, this concept can be purged of its inherent reference beyond itself. Adorno does not object to the use of concepts to pick out ‘what essentially belongs to something that is’ (the *what* in Schelling’s language, or the determination in Hegel’s language)—he claims it is ‘obvious’ that such use is ‘ontological.’<sup>248</sup> The philosopher does not damage the substrate by doing ontology in this sense. It is when the concept ‘unnoticeably [becomes] the ontological essence of the existent in itself’ that we get into trouble. To understand this we can think about Adorno’s inventive twist on Kant’s criticism of the ontological proof of the existence of God: just as we cannot say that something exists just because we think about it, we cannot say that something is

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<sup>246</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 118 (translation modified); *Jargon Der Eigentlichkeit: Zur Deutschen Ideologie, Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 492.

<sup>247</sup> For a helpful account of how the nonidentical or the nonconceptual resonates with aspects of Kant’s transcendental account of experience (specifically with the thing in itself and with ‘intuition’), see Brian O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 61-65.

<sup>248</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 120; *Jargon Der Eigentlichkeit*, 493

essential (i.e. ‘the nonfacticity of the concept,’ or the conceptual part of the concept) just because we think about it. If the concept of ‘existence,’ the ‘indeterminate,’ the ‘thing in itself,’ or simply ‘something’ is said to be conceptual through and through, then what these concepts refer to is simply the concept again.<sup>249</sup> In this way the substrate has been given the quality of being essential.

Now, Adorno’s claim is not that philosophers, such as Hegel and Heidegger, bring a substrate into existence merely by thinking it (Adorno’s nod to Kant’s criticism of the ontological proof should not throw us off here). Nor is Adorno’s point that this operation makes all of existence knowable from within philosophy. The point is that, however we find the world, we know in advance that it is as it should be because no matter what happens in the world it cannot challenge the philosopher’s conviction that, with the concept, they do not simply know the essence of things, but know that things are of the essence. The ‘rule of the subject’ in this instance is not about the mastery of all things, but the indifference to things; it is the ‘totality of the concept, [in] which nothing nonconceptual can stop any more.’<sup>250</sup> Thus Hegel has not engulfed all of existence with the concept, but has only *in effect* engulfed everything by predetermining the substrate as essential and thus making the nonconceptual impotent against this essence. As Hegel himself affirms, any content that our thought can attain is from the categories alone (thought-determinations or the essence of things), not from ‘sensible material’; and this is the case even for the philosophy of nature and spirit.<sup>251</sup>

We now hopefully have a better picture of the manner in which the nonconceptual is treated in the hypostatization of the concept. But it is not evident why Adorno claims this operation results in the a priori justification of the world. In concluding his discussion of

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<sup>249</sup> One of Schelling’s most consistent criticisms of Hegel’s philosophy was that it held proper philosophy to have as its object purely the concept: ‘Hegel often refers to the fact that people have always thought that philosophy primarily entails thinking or reflection. This is true, but it does not follow from it that the object of this thinking is again only thinking itself or the concept.’ (*HMP* 146)

<sup>250</sup> *ND* 172/174

<sup>251</sup> *EL* §43a. See also the discussion at 1.1.3.2.

Heidegger's hypostatization of the substrate 'existence,' Adorno says: 'It vindicates without authority and without theology, maintaining that what is of essence is real, and, by the same token, that the existent is essential, meaningful, and justified.'<sup>252</sup> First of all, it is striking how this contrasts with Schelling's criticism. Schelling precisely did find a theological justification (albeit a very minimal theology). It is fairly straightforward to see how the proof of a living force in the concept can underwrite a justification of the world (although not as straightforward as a more robust account of creation, as we saw in 1.2). But how can the conceptuality of existence be said to guarantee its meaningfulness or justification? Adorno is not terribly helpful on this point, despite it being central to many of his critical claims. Sometimes he suggests that saying anything about the world, and history more specifically, which goes beyond mere facts, is already to bestow meaning.<sup>253</sup> But he goes on to say that his own attempt to formulate a philosophy of history goes beyond the mere facts and yet is able 'to understand it as something *meaningless*.'<sup>254</sup> We will go into this in more detail in chapter five. For now we just need to note that, *prima facia*, Adorno is committed to the thought that constructing a history beyond the facts does not necessarily entail bestowing a meaning on history or affirming it.

Another clue comes with Adorno's suggestion that what ultimately stops us from affirming history is the antagonistic course it has taken.<sup>255</sup> In short, where the universal (i.e. rationality) and the particular (i.e. individuals) cannot reciprocally affect each other,<sup>256</sup> and the universal suppresses the particular.<sup>257</sup> In this case, the particular would bear the brunt of the antagonistic (or unreconciled) relationship it has with the universal, and history would be

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<sup>252</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 121; *Jargon Der Eigentlichkeit*, 494. Adorno similarly claims that Hegel does not enlist theology for his justification of the world, e.g. *HF* 26.

<sup>253</sup> *HF* 4, 8

<sup>254</sup> *HF* 27

<sup>255</sup> *HF* 13, 17

<sup>256</sup> *HF* 29-30

<sup>257</sup> *HF* 27

nothing more than 'blind fate.'<sup>258</sup> A confusing aspect to call attention to here is the fact that Adorno's remarks must be understood at two different levels. As noted previously, Adorno thinks Hegel's philosophy is both true and untrue simultaneously: true in virtue of reflecting the real situation, untrue in virtue of transfiguring that situation into a rational appearance. According to Adorno, Hegel privileges the universal over the particular in his account of history. But, rather than presenting the privileging of the universal as revealing the unreconciled relationship to the particular, Hegel presents it as reconciliation. The illusion of reconciliation provided by hypostatization grounds the conviction that history is meaningful because all conflicts are guaranteed to never seriously threaten the primacy of the concept.

### 3.2 Tensions

In both Schelling's and Adorno's accounts, then, what is outside the concept cannot change our convictions about whether the world is justified or not. In Schelling's case this is because Hegel has claimed to have knowledge of the existence of a self-determining activity from within reason alone; and in Adorno's case this is because Hegel has guaranteed a harmony between the concept and the nonconceptual by ensuring that the latter cannot upset the former. Now, although both Schelling and Adorno object to Hegel for illegitimately reducing to thought that which is not identical to it, we need to be careful not to too quickly assimilate their respective understandings of the non-identical. I now consider the divergence of Schelling's and Adorno's account of the non-identical and then note some of the consequences of this divergence for their views of history.

#### 3.2.1 Immediacy: inside or outside the subject-object relation?

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<sup>258</sup> *HF* 17; cf. *HF* 27

A recent example of this kind of assimilation is found in an article by Franck Fischbach.<sup>259</sup> Fischbach claims that Adorno's philosophy is directed to the same object as Schelling's positive philosophy, namely the pure existence which is external and prior to all thought.<sup>260</sup> As I have shown in this chapter, this cannot be the case. Adorno is not after pure existence, but simply the nonconceptual referent of the concept. The latter cannot be equivalent to the former for numerous reasons. Firstly, pure existence must precede all separation between concept and nonconcept. Secondly, Adorno does not credit the nonconceptual – which Hegel reduces to the concept – with the quality of freedom or will. Finally, Adorno repeatedly claims that we cannot cognise something beyond the subject-object relation. Indeed, his criticism of hypostatization targets precisely the claim that philosophy makes to know something like a 'third' beyond the subject-object relation. The distortions and confusions in Fischbach's comparison of Schelling and Adorno are encapsulated in his misrepresentation of the point just noted, that Adorno refuses a standpoint beyond the subject-object relation. Fischbach quotes Adorno's claim that it is impossible for thought to transcend the separation of subject and object, only to completely miss the point of this claim.<sup>261</sup> Fischbach interprets this to mean that Adorno believes there to be a standpoint beyond the opposition between subject and object, but simply that it is not accessible *for thought*.<sup>262</sup> Adorno is assimilated to Schelling's position by claiming that Adorno believed such a position to be accessible through will rather than thinking. It is hard to believe Adorno could be so badly misunderstood. This is especially the case since the quote cited by Fischbach is situated precisely within Adorno's accusation that Heidegger's attempt to attain a standpoint beyond the subject-object relation is irrationalist.

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<sup>259</sup> Franck Fischbach, 'Adorno and Schelling: How to 'Turn Philosophical Thought Towards the Non-Identical'', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (2015): 1167–79.

<sup>260</sup> Fischbach, 'Adorno and Schelling,' 1173, 1176

<sup>261</sup> *ND* 85

<sup>262</sup> Fischbach, 'Adorno and Schelling,' 1177

The relation between Schelling and Adorno here has been more accurately represented by Andrew Bowie.<sup>263</sup> Bowie tells a similar story to the one told above about Hölderlin (3.1.1), but with the aid of the romantic philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel.<sup>264</sup> Bowie also claims that, despite the development of Schelling's thought, the point about the being which is the ground of the separation between subject and object traverses the early and late Schelling.<sup>265</sup> Adorno's resistance to this romantic position is correctly noted.<sup>266</sup> Bowie then goes on to say that Schelling's position vis-à-vis Hegel's idealism is superior to Adorno's. The central reasons offered for this conclusion are: that Adorno merely inverts Hegel and that Adorno fails to find an immediacy which could be saved from the devouring concept.

The fact is that Adorno inverts Hegel's logic of reflection. Whereas Hegel invalidly makes the immediacy of being into a subjectively mediated moment of the dialectic, in order to dissolve it into our knowledge of it, Adorno invalidly makes the mediated object into something immediate, so that it can be shown to be prior to the subject. The only defensible form of such immediacy, though—which Adorno, like Derrida, would not countenance—is the immediacy of being, as the nonreflexive ground of the difference of subject and object that emerges via the failure of reflection to ground itself.<sup>267</sup>

I will now argue that Bowie is wrong to say that Adorno merely inverts Hegel, and I question Bowie's suggestion that we need to maintain the immediacy of a nonreflexive ground in order to challenge Hegel.

The first problem in Bowie's account is that he claims that both Schelling and Adorno think that 'immediacy is the way out of the narcissistic trap of Hegelian reflection.'<sup>268</sup> Even though Bowie has already noted that Adorno is well aware of the romantic option (to defend an immediate nonreflexive being), the suggestion here is that Adorno nevertheless wants something similar. The evidence offered for this is the following quote: 'Immediacy itself,

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<sup>263</sup> Andrew Bowie, 'Non-Identity: The German Romantics, Schelling and Adorno.', in *Intersections: Nineteenth Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory*, ed. Rajan, T & Clark, D. (SUNY Press, 1995), 243–60.

<sup>264</sup> Bowie, 'Non-Identity: The German Romantics, Schelling and Adorno,' 247-49

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 245

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 250

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 257

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 257

however, stands for a moment which does not need cognition, mediation, in the way that cognition does need the immediate.<sup>269</sup> As we saw in the reconstruction of Adorno's criticism of Hegel's hypostatization of immediacy, what Adorno means here is not that there is something which is wholly unmediated, but that the way or mode of mediation found in that which is cognised is not the same way or mode of mediation found in concepts themselves (see 2.4). Adorno is thus quite open about the fact that the immediacy he wants to save from Hegel's idealism *is* mediated, just not completely absorbed in that mediation. Although Bowie is wrong to suggest that Adorno is after a pure immediacy, he is obviously right to say that Adorno's mediated immediacy falls short of the immediacy of Schelling's nonreflexive being. But with this result we can see why it is incorrect to claim that Adorno merely inverts Hegel: Adorno does not make the 'mediated object into something immediate,' but simply shows that the mediated object is not mediated to its core. If Adorno were to invert Hegel then he would need to reduce mediation to immediacy in the way that Hegel reduced immediacy to mediation; but, as we have just seen, Adorno does not do this.

But Bowie need not have introduced this rhetorical flourish to his argument – i.e. claiming the mere inversion of Hegel in Adorno – since it seems that his real concern is to argue that, by refusing to take the romantic position, Adorno has failed to escape the framework of the subject-object relation. It is true that Adorno refuses to go outside the subject-object framework, but Bowie does not give clear reasons as to why this makes Adorno less able to show that Hegel is wrong to completely absorb the immediate into mediation. Instead we get an assortment of criticisms of Adorno: from the failure of materialist accounts of subjectivity to the conflation of social and philosophical problems.<sup>270</sup> I cannot address all these worries, but I have argued that Adorno can successfully criticise Hegel's misuse of the concept without having to take Schelling's strategy. Further, the clarification of the difference between

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<sup>269</sup> ND 172/174 (Bowie's translation)

<sup>270</sup> Bowie, 'Non-Identity: The German Romantics, Schelling and Adorno,' 256-58

Adorno and Schelling should help future debates over the potentials for non-idealist philosophies.

### 3.2.2 Justifiability of history: purposiveness or reconciliation?

The difference between Schelling's and Adorno's responses to Hegel also gives us insight into the standard each believes would have to be reached in order for the world and human history to be considered either meaningful or justified. As we have seen, Schelling has a very high standard: the world must have originated with a free creation and be purposely structured. Adorno's standard is much lower: reconciliation between universal and particular. I now consider how these two accounts might relate to one another.

In the opening of Schelling's Berlin lectures he presents the case that, even on the assumption of the freedom of the will in human beings, we would still be none the wiser about the meaning or purpose of the world.

All of nature toils and is engaged in unceasing labor. Man for his part also does not rest, and it is as an old book says: although everything under the sun is so full of toil and labor, one nonetheless does not see that anything is improved or that something is truly accomplished in which one might truly believe. A generation passes away, and another arises to itself again pass away. In vain we expect that something new will happen in which this turmoil will finally find its goal; everything that happens happens only so that something else again can happen, which itself in turn becomes the past to something else. Ultimately, everything happens in vain, and there is in every deed, in all the toil and labor of man himself nothing but vanity: everything is vain, for vanity is everything that lacks a true purpose. Thus far from man and his endeavors making the world comprehensible, it is man himself that is the most incomprehensible and who inexorably drives me to the belief in the wretchedness of all being, a belief that makes itself known in so many bitter pronouncements from both ancient and recent times. It is precisely man that drives me to the final desperate question: Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?—<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> *GPP* 93-94/SW 13:7

Parts of this passage resonate with Adorno's concern that history has taken a repetitive or cyclical course. But, whereas for Adorno it would seem to be enough to put a stop to this cyclical nature of the time of history so far in order to redeem existence (at least to some extent), for Schelling we need to have some confidence for thinking that there was a purpose at the basis of this history in first place. In other words, Schelling thinks that history can only be meaningful if the source of the world is divine or free.

This already anticipates what we will discover in the following chapter: that the *Freiheitsschrift* will provide more insight into the potentials for the problems of history than the *Spätphilosophie*. This is because the *Freiheitsschrift* will show that it is not just a lack of purposiveness to the world which might cause us concern, but the introduction of a *hostile* purpose into the world (i.e. not just the *lack* of purpose), namely evil. The *Spätphilosophie* does still have a place for the problem 'the fall' and therefore seems to match the *Freiheitsschrift* on this score.<sup>272</sup> But, as I argue in the next chapter, Schelling's primary aim in the *Spätphilosophie* is to provide an a posteriori proof (*erweisen*) of God which consequently is incapable of countenancing history as being unfree or compulsive (see 4.1.3).

Similarly to the *Freiheitsschrift*, Adorno thinks that the problems facing us are greater than a lack of purpose. Adorno is worried about the historical forms of domination which do not just deprive us of meaning, but create suffering and unfreedom also. We will see this in more detail in chapter 5. For now we can note that the kind of freedom which would result from a genuine relation between universal and particular – which would amount to a reconciliation between them which was not the coerced, false reconciliation which Hegel achieves through the primacy of the concept.

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<sup>272</sup> See *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 143.

## PART II PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AFTER HEGEL: FREEDOM AND COMPULSION

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### 4. Schelling's mature philosophy of history

The first chapter established the failure of Hegel's *Logic* to generate extra-logical content from out of the exposition of the concept in pure thought. Schelling is not the only philosopher to have made such arguments, but he is one of the few to attempt to still pursue the philosophy of history, and do so from within a philosophical system. The purpose of this chapter is to see how successful Schelling is in this task.

A core aim of the *Freiheitsschrift* is to show that philosophy can grasp those parts of the world which exceed the grasp of an overly rationalistic form of reason (including Hegel's), including freedom and history, without thereby reducing or doing ill justice to them. This work is pivotal in Schelling's development because of the centrality it gives to human freedom and the radical questioning of idealist philosophies – including his own earlier works – to achieve this aim. In this way, although the *Freiheitsschrift* predates the Munich lectures – which contain the criticisms of Hegel mobilised in the first chapter of this thesis – it is still a relevant place to start for Schelling's alternative to Hegel's philosophy of history. Schelling attempts to make reason compatible with freedom and history by showing how there is a genuine unity of system and freedom. Very briefly, the main strands of Schelling's strategy can be outlined. Firstly, he reformulates pantheism so as to make sense of some elements of contingency and purposiveness in nature. In this way Schelling manages to bring freedom into necessity, or, as it were, soften necessity. Going in the other direction – i.e. to bring systematicity into (human) freedom – is a much more challenging task. Three moments to

this task can be specified: (1) an a priori exposition of the *possibility* of human freedom; (2) an account of human freedom as neither voluntary nor compelled, but as an intelligible and atemporal act; (3) the subsumption of the *actuality* of human freedom under the necessary process of God's self-revelation. I argue that, ultimately, the *Freiheitsschrift* deprives history of its historical character—i.e. of its mutable dimension. The official story in the *Freiheitsschrift* is that history is ultimately a revelation of God (the unfolding of the unconditioned ground). Moreover, in the latter account this history of revelation is held to be the case independent of empirical interpretation of the course of events. Given this unpromising start it might be wondered why the *Freiheitsschrift* should command our attention at all; especially since other aspects of Schelling's philosophy appear more promising. In order to answer this question I give a brief account of these other aspects and why I think they reveal the need to turn back to the *Freiheitsschrift*.

In Schelling's philosophy from 1827 onwards – the so-called *Spätphilosophie* – he looks to have two important advantages over the *Freiheitsschrift*: (1) it holds open the possibility that history could fail to provide evidence for a free origin to the world<sup>273</sup>; and (2) that the ongoing confirmation of freedom is based a posteriori. The *Spätphilosophie* approaches the philosophy of history via a hermeneutical guide. It proceeds on the hypothesis that the world is free, but in such a way that we are always open to the possibility that experience might contradict our hope or expectation of finding freedom. This is one way in which we could understand Adorno's formulation for the philosophy of history: 'universal history must be construed and denied.'<sup>274</sup> This has many appealing features, not least is that it would be a productive position to place in dialogue with contemporary critical theory.<sup>275</sup> Despite these desirable features, I think this does not go far enough in understanding the ways in which

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<sup>273</sup> Although it seems history could not provide positive evidence for the nihilistic account since philosophy would appear to undermine its own activity if it were to search for the proof of a lack of freedom.

<sup>274</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), 320.

<sup>275</sup> See Peter Dews (forthcoming)

history could go wrong. More specifically, the only way that unfreedom or necessity can be said to be the material of history is if it was so from eternity. The *Spätphilosophie* is committed to this because of the exclusivity of the options it pursues in the interpretation of history. If, on the one hand, history is to be understood as compulsive, then it is because there is no God – no free creator of the world – and if, on the other hand, history is to be understood as being created by God, then history must be fundamentally free. In short, there is no way to understand history as compelled in any important respect which is not metaphysically necessitated (i.e. that the cosmos is constituted as unfree).

Despite the epistemic modesty of this approach to the philosophy of history, then, it still rules out the possibility of understanding history as *having gone* wrong (i.e. not metaphysically grounded, but contingently occurring), even when the possibility of the world's *origin* in necessity (i.e. metaphysically grounded necessity: nihilism or the lack of God) is retained as a constraint on its attempt to prove otherwise. In other words, the positive philosophy is a posteriori but limited to the ongoing attempt to prove the existence of God; I want to say that the positive philosophy should be able to understand history as – following terms of the *Freiheitsschrift* – the product of an ‘inverted God.’<sup>276</sup> This would be a history which we assume to have been generated from out of some kind of freedom and therefore would not be nihilistic in the sense of assuming that the world is necessarily determined in a fatalistic way. This would provide the basis for an alternative interpretation of the previously cited epithet from Adorno – ‘universal history must be construed and denied.’ Rather than opening up a universal history of freedom to potential falsification through an increased epistemic modesty (i.e. so that universal history is construed in the sense of letting our interpretation be guided, but denied in the sense of allowing it to be falsified), our universal history is construed in the sense that a compulsive or necessary movement of history is

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<sup>276</sup> FS 263

claimed to be at work, but denied in the sense that this necessity is not itself necessary—or, it is contingently necessary, but not logically necessary. From this starting point the account does not get drawn into certain foundational metaphysical debates about the existence or non-existence of spirit, will, ideality, mentality, or whatever you want to call it. In order to question the dogmatic proponent of the existence of God we do not challenge the existence of the ideal wholesale (in the manner, say, of the reductionist physicalist—or, in our terms, the nihilist). Rather, granting the existence of freedom, we argue that it has been perverted. The threat to the existence of the will is not provided by its other (mechanistic being), but by will's own self-undermining.

First, I spell out the problem with Hegel's philosophy of history in terms of optimism (4.1). Before arguing that Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* fails to adequately escape unwarranted optimism, I also consider the contemporary attempt to reconstruct Hegel's philosophy of history to also avoid optimistic excess in the interpretation of history. Then I elaborate on how the *Freiheitsschrift* elaborates the idea of evil which provides the basis for an account of unfreedom which avoids unwarranted pessimism as much as unwarranted optimism (4.2). Finally, I look at how Schelling attempts to unite this account with his systematic ambitions (4.3 and 4.4). Ultimately, I argue that Schelling's account of history in the *Freiheitsschrift* fails to provide a sufficient alternative to Hegel's, but that the thought of an ontological perversion found in Schelling's idea of evil provides the ground for thinking a proper alternative. In short, this offers the philosophical resources to understand how history has contingently manifested unfreedom, as distinct from understanding history as necessarily manifesting freedom (Hegel), or as only possibly manifesting freedom (Hegelian reconstructions and the *Spätphilosophie*).

#### **4.1 The problem of optimism**

In order to draw out the unique contribution of the *Freiheitsschrift* to the continuing struggle to philosophically interpret history, I present two important competitors: Firstly, a contemporary reconstruction of a Hegelian philosophy of history, and secondly, Schelling's own attempts to interpret history in the *Spätphilosophie*. These are chosen because they both represent significant attempts to formulate a philosophy of history that avoids the danger of promoting an unwarranted optimism. I argue that both succeed in this aim, but that they do so only to a limited degree; that is, they avoid the problems of, what is call, 'strong optimism,' but they still promote a 'moderate optimism,' and a 'weak optimism,' respectively.

#### 4.1.1. Strong optimism

Schelling and Adorno exposed the illegitimate way that Hegel expanded the concept beyond its limits. The result of which was that Hegel closed off his philosophy to the nonconceptual. A further result was that this enabled Hegel to provide an a priori justification of the world. I now argue that this kind of a priori justification accords with 'strong optimism,' where this means something like the view that this world is optimal or best.<sup>277</sup> Of course, Hegel does not make judgments about the concrete world (or anything else which could be considered a *referent* of our discourse) in the *Logic*, nor advance static – or, as Hegel would call them, 'presupposed' – principles which would underwrite such judgments. Instead he offers an exposition of the concept. But, as we have seen, this exposition aims to show that freedom and rationality are guaranteed, and, as a result, there is nothing in principle that can

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<sup>277</sup> Usually, this is seen as the world necessarily being the best, supported by an account of what guarantees this situation. The definitive account obviously being Leibniz's grounding of this situation in the perfection of the creator of the world, found in *Discourse on Metaphysics* I: '...God, who possesses supreme and infinite wisdom, acts in the most perfect manner, not only in a metaphysical sense, but also morally speaking.' Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, Oxford Philosophical Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 54.

undermine this result. Thus, although the analysis of pure thought does not make direct claims about the existing world, it does guarantee how the world will unfold.

If this is an accurate account of Hegel then his philosophy of history has severe limitations from the start. But it should be noted that contemporary commentators and followers of Hegel have themselves responded to this challenge.<sup>278</sup> They largely turn away from the *Logic* and go directly to the philosophy of history or other areas of the *Realphilosophie*.<sup>279</sup> As I will show in relation to a specific example, this move is usually made in the belief that Hegel can be saved from strong optimism (and the historical closure it entails) by curbing or softening the necessity involved in the realisation of freedom or rationality.<sup>280</sup> To anticipate somewhat, the strategy can be briefly sketched. The contingency and particularity of empirical existence is given a more prominent role, to the point where it can block or hinder the realisation of the concept in the world—that is, to the point where the manifestation of freedom is precarious. In this reconstructed Hegel, then, manifest freedom is not guaranteed or necessary and thus can only be known to exist a posteriori. But, as I will show, the capacity or ability for the exercise of freedom is assumed to be an ever present condition and thus latent freedom is still known a priori. The lack of a guarantee of the realisation or manifestation of freedom clearly distances this position from strong optimism. However, the assumed existence of latent freedom means that there is still a confidence or hope that freedom will manifest. For this reason I place this position under the title ‘moderate optimism.’<sup>281</sup> In order to fill out and

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<sup>278</sup> John W. Burbidge, ‘Philosophy and History’, in *Hegel’s Systematic Contingency* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–15; Iain Macdonald, ‘What Is Conceptual History?’ in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi, 2006, 207–26; Sally Sedgwick, ‘Reason and History: Kant versus Hegel’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 84, no. 2 (1 November 2010): 45–59.

<sup>279</sup> It is not always clear what role defenders of a Hegelian philosophy of history give to the *Logic* in relation to the *Realphilosophie*, or the systematic nature of Hegel’s thought in general. Most, however, seem to want to proceed – either implicitly or explicitly – independently of the *Logic* in their Hegelian accounts of history.

<sup>280</sup> In considering different attempts to formulate a philosophy of history which avoids optimism (in Hegelian reconstructions and different periods of Schelling’s thought) I focus on the question of freedom rather than the broader question of the concept as such. This is because the attempts to understand history which I consider base their accounts primarily on the problem of human freedom.

<sup>281</sup> This position is often referred to as ‘Meliorism.’ This position is sometimes presented as an alternative to optimism, sometimes as a nuanced version of optimism. For example, William James characterises meliorism as

substantiate these points I now consider how contemporary Hegelians account for history along these lines.

#### 4.1.2 Moderate Optimism

Iain Macdonald presents a reconstruction of Hegel's account of 'conceptual history' in an attempt to show that the universal or necessary aspects of reason are adequately reconciled with the contingencies and particularities of history.<sup>282</sup> Macdonald admits that some of Hegel's remarks give the impression that there is a heavy asymmetry in favour of the universal in history. Two passages from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* in particular claim that philosophy interprets history by 'look[ing] for a general design' and assuring us that its progressive course is not threatened – it is 'untouched and unharmed' – by the vicissitudes of individual's actions in history.<sup>283</sup> Macdonald believes a more balanced account of the relation of universal and particular in history can be found in Hegel's concept of 'experience' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>284</sup> Experience, in this sense, denotes a very specific kind of activity which, when successfully realised, manifests the freedom distinctive of consciousness. This activity is realised, and freedom is manifested, when an individual exercises her critical capacity to find the world wanting in some respect and remedy it—or, in

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holding a 'better promise as to this world's outcome' because of the commitment to 'design, free-will, absolute mind, spirit instead of matter'. James also says, however: 'Midway between the two [optimism and pessimism—JL] there stands what may be called the doctrine of meliorism, tho it has hitherto figured less as a doctrine than as an attitude in human affairs. Optimism has always been the regnant DOCTRINE in european philosophy. Pessimism was only recently introduced by Schopenhauer and counts few systematic defenders as yet. Meliorism treats salvation as neither inevitable nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become.' William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Auckland, New Zealand: Floating Press, 1907), 89 and 195-96, respectively.

<sup>282</sup> Iain Macdonald, 'What Is Conceptual History?', in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi, 2006.

<sup>283</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, Reason in History*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, trans. H.B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 28 and 89, respectively.

Quoted in Macdonald, 'What is Conceptual History?', 208 and 216, respectively.

<sup>284</sup> Macdonald, 'What Is Conceptual History?', 218-20

Macdonald's terms, when she successfully enacts 'rational self-correction.'<sup>285</sup> The important point is that there are two conditions of success: first, that there is the rationality found in universal consciousness qua capacity – a 'necessary possibility of reason'<sup>286</sup> – and, secondly, that is the realisation of this capacity in actual (i.e. embodied) consciousness of historical agents. I take it that this dual conditionality of success is expressed in Macdonald's following remark: 'reason *only* "happens" when the mere possibility of self-correction becomes a reality for and by historical consciousness.'<sup>287</sup> By clearly demarking these two conditions a space is opened up for the contingencies of history to influence the realisation of consciousness's rational capacity and thus curtail our assurance that reason will necessarily drive history forward.

However, the *existence* of this rational capacity itself is never exposed to the threat of contingency in the way that that the *exercise* of this capacity is. Macdonald is forthright about this issue. He admits that 'nothing in principle can bring a halt to the self-corrective activity of reason.'<sup>288</sup> Although a particular historical individual – or set of historical individuals – may not succeed in manifesting reason, the capacity will always find a way since, as long as there is a world which can be improved, 'in principle *some* individual consciousness will be able to confront it and undertake to negate it'.<sup>289</sup> It is not immediately clear whether this reconstruction is an example of strong optimism or moderate optimism, as defined above. On the one hand, manifest freedom (i.e. enacted rational capacity) is deprived the universal status accorded to latent freedom (i.e. the necessary possibility of enacting this capacity). On the other hand, it seems that the empirical world can never put up enough resistance to obstruct the realisation of reason. This ambiguity is reflected in the fact that Macdonald wavers on exactly the degree to which the strongly optimistic outlook is softened. He claims to have

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 219

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 221

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 220

avoided being ‘unequivocally optimistic about the power of reason’, but concedes that there is still a ‘certain optimism’ at work here.<sup>290</sup> Whether or not Macdonald fails to reconstruct Hegel in a manner which avoids strong optimism need not be decided here. What I want to highlight is that the basic requirements of any Hegelian philosophy of history means that, no matter how much emphasis is placed on contingency or particularity, history is based on the assumed existence of latent freedom.

For instance, if the contemporary strategy is taken to its limit, then particularity can be granted the power to not only temporarily obstruct progress, but also to bring the development of reason to a standstill or even undo its progress—via some pervasive paralysis or deformation of our ability to use our inherent rational capacity.<sup>291</sup> It is true that in this case the assurance that freedom will manifest is minimal, and thus offers less security than an optimism in which the possibility for an indefinite interruption of the realisation of freedom is not on the table. But this is not a difference in kind; only a difference in degree. For whether manifest freedom is believed to be on the ascent, stagnating or in decline, latent freedom is always assumed to be ready and waiting to get to work. But this criticism could be met with a shrug since it seems that a philosophy of history that can account for failures or lapses in the realisation of freedom is as open to negativity as is needed, or wanted. Anything more negative than this would be dismissed as pessimism or nihilism. If history were so terrible as to forestall the possibility of anything getting better there would not be much point to a philosophy of history in the first place. In fact, if there were a complete absence of freedom or meaning in the world, then it is not clear that we could even make sense out of the idea that there is history at all. This kind of response moves too quickly. The point of objecting to

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 221 and 220, respectively.

<sup>291</sup> I take it that dealing with this possibility is an animating concern of Alex Honneth’s development of the concept of ‘social pathology’ (and related concepts) and that he does so, at least in part, so as to nuance his own Hegelian view of history and avoid an unwarranted optimism. For a helpful discussion and critique of Honneth’s development of the concept of social pathology see Fabian Freyenhagen, ‘Honneth on Social Pathologies: A Critique’, *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory* 16, no. 2 (2015): 131–52.

the assumed existence of latent freedom is not to posit its opposite—an assumed non-existence of latent freedom.<sup>292</sup> Rather, the point is to say that the existence of latent freedom needs to be confirmed a posteriori as much as manifest freedom does if we do not want to assume that the substance of history is freedom and therefore predetermine how we can understand history. For the Hegelian, the greatest accumulation of irrationality, unreason, or horror could, at most, only indicate a deficit of (manifest) freedom, never doubt that history’s meaning is the realisation of freedom.

#### 4.1.3 Weak optimism

The challenge, then, is to avoid a priori justification altogether; or, expressed positively, to justify our belief in the existence of manifest and latent freedom through only a posteriori means. It is one of the major strengths of Schelling’s *Spätphilosophie* to have formulated and pursued precisely this task. Schelling has not previously convinced himself of the existence of a free activity—of which we then need only turn to reality to see how well it has manifested. Rather than an a priori assurance, the beginning is made with a ‘wanting’ (*Wollen*) for there to be something like this at the root of things.<sup>293</sup> I say “something like this” because Schelling does not think that the freedom characteristic of the world – if, indeed, the world can be so characterised – would be due to a rational structure unfolding itself in human action.<sup>294</sup> Rather, it must be due to the fact that the world itself is a result of a free act. Now, these different conceptions of freedom fundamentally separate the late Schelling and Hegel. As important as this is, I only flag it to avoid confusion about their respective projects. What matters for the current question – about the receptiveness of a philosophy of history – is the

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<sup>292</sup> Which would be ‘strong pessimism,’ as opposed to the position which holds the non-existence of manifest freedom, that is, moderate pessimism.

<sup>293</sup> *GPP* 154

<sup>294</sup> *GPP* 198

divergence in *how* they try to prove freedom. To return to the point then, since there is not even the minimal assurance that freedom exists in an undeveloped state, our hope for assurance is entirely dependent upon the empirical.

Schelling recognises that this is an unusual thought. For freedom is an example of something not merely empirical in nature; it goes beyond the finite relations of the empirical.<sup>295</sup> So how are we supposed to know freedom purely through the empirical? Schelling draws an analogy with our knowledge of the freedom of individual agents.

It is incorrect to reduce empiricism in general to *mere sensation* as if it had only this as its object, since an intelligence of free will and action, of which each and every one of us is, does not *as such* fall under the purview of the senses and yet this is something empirical and indeed something that can *only* be known empirically. For no one knows what exists within a person until that person expresses himself. His intellectual and moral character exists only a posteriori, which is to say that it is discernible only through his statements and actions. Now suppose that the discussion was about an intelligence in the world, assumed to have a free will for action—this intelligence would likewise not be knowable a priori, but only through its deeds that occur in experience. Although a supersensible being, it will nonetheless be something that can only be known commensurate with experience. Empiricism as such, therefore, hardly excludes all knowledge of the supersensible, as one customarily assumes, and even Hegel presupposes.<sup>296</sup>

So, in Schelling's example, we never directly perceive the freedom of agents, but only take their actions to give us reason to think they are free. Schelling has some difficulties, however, in making sense of this kind of empirical approach since he claims it cannot be a form of inference.<sup>297</sup> In which case he would have rejected both: the attempt to know God through reason alone (in the way that Hegel had done) and the attempt to know God through sensible experience (i.e. through induction). Schelling tries to get around this dilemma by refining what he means by a posteriori knowledge.<sup>298</sup> In any case, we need not dwell on this issue here

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<sup>295</sup> Of course, there are various forms of compatibilism which would not subscribe to this view. But because Schelling is not one of them, the problem with how to explain the experiential proof (*erweisen*) of freedom remains.

<sup>296</sup> *GPP* 168; cf. *HMP* 146

<sup>297</sup> *GPP* 179/*SW* 13:127-28

<sup>298</sup> *GPP* 180-81/*SW* 13:130-31

since our concern is with the degree to which Schelling's philosophy can remain open to the possibility that freedom does not exist.

One of the consequences of Schelling making the philosophical investigation into freedom a matter of a posteriori knowledge is that the investigation is never finished. His version of the proof (*erweisen*) of the existence of God is provisional because, since it is never finished, there could always be some evidence found which threatens the belief in the free source of the world. We can never be sure that the world is not deterministic and purposeless, so we must keep looking to the world for the indications of an intelligence and freedom. This is the reason Schelling calls his proof 'progressive,' and refers to this type of philosophy as 'an always advancing knowledge.'<sup>299</sup>

The epistemic modesty of this approach – based on an a posteriori and continuing proof of freedom – means that we cannot assure ourselves, a priori, of even a minimal freedom (e.g. an inbuilt capacity for rational self-correction as the *ever-present potential* for the realisation of freedom in history, as in Macdonald's reconstruction). It is for this reason that I take this position to not to be a form of modest optimism: i.e. conditionality is not only applied to the conviction that things will turn out as they should, but also to the conviction that there was potential for things to turn out right in the first place. In other words, the freedom of creation *and* creator – development and beginning of the world – are made provisional. But with this advantage comes a disadvantage. Despite the fact that this approach never reaches complete certainty of God's existence, it is not clear how this approach could ever seriously come to doubt God's existence. Edward Allen Beach has struggled in particular with how it could be that some a posteriori evidence could ever come to 'contradict' (*Widerspruch*) the guiding hypothesis that God exists.<sup>300</sup> Beach argues that the root of the problem is the nature of the

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<sup>299</sup> *GPP* 182/SW 13:132

<sup>300</sup> Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 157-62.

object of the proof: if we found evidence for the existence of God in history, then it is difficult to see how subsequent evidence could contradict the previous confirmation.<sup>301</sup>

But this problem runs even deeper than Beach suspects. The inability for the positive philosophy to provide something like a disproof of God (or a provisional disproof) is due to the fundamental disposition that the positive philosopher takes up. The continuing proof cannot be codified into a universally communicable demonstration.

...even this proof is only a proof for those who want to think and move forward, and, thus, only for the wise. It is not like a proof of geometry, with which one can coerce those of even the most limited abilities, and even the dumb, whereas I can coerce no one to become wise through experience if he does not want to<sup>302</sup>

The proof, then, can only be freely taken up, not accepted upon coercion. As noted at the beginning of this section, the positive philosopher begins with a ‘wanting’ (*Wollen*). The search for freedom is an expression of freedom. In this way it makes little sense for the positive philosopher to search for evidence for the unfreedom of existence; they would thereby undermine their own activity.<sup>303</sup> The upshot is that, though there is no a priori assurance of the existence of freedom, the interpretation of history must always be guided by the search for signs of freedom. If history had actually been guided by unfreedom, this could not be known to the positive philosopher. It is for this reason that I refer to this as weak optimism.

#### **4.2 Overcoming optimism: ontological inversion in the *Freiheitsschrift***

I now want to show that Schelling’s philosophy from his middle period – more specifically the *Freiheitsschrift* – has the resources needed to overcome the forms of philosophical

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<sup>301</sup> Beach, *The Potencies of God(s)*, 161

<sup>302</sup> *GPP* 182/SW 13:132

<sup>303</sup> To be clear, this is not meant to indicate that any philosophical enterprise would be self-undermining were it to attempt to prove determinism. This is only the case for positive philosophy.

optimism just considered. The resources are located in Schelling's account of evil. The problem with even weak optimism is that it could not countenance the possibility of a kind of compulsion which would actively threaten an interpretation of history as a free or divine process—the most it could do is bring uncertainty to this interpretation. Evil, on Schelling's account, is a positively opposed force to the good (this is the focus of 4.2.1). If it were a mere lack of the good, the proliferation of evil could only ever give the philosopher of history cause to say that the world is *not* good. This is structurally equivalent to weak optimism—there is only a negation or limitation of the optimum, never an opposed force. The virtue of this account is that it has the power to overcome the limitations of optimism without becoming pessimism. This is because evil is not said to exist necessarily: evil is the result of human freedom. The difficulty in understanding how human freedom can be the source of a kind of compulsion will be the focus of 4.2.2. Understanding a form of compulsion or unfreedom via human freedom means that it is not simply a natural necessity. We could, then, call this a spiritual (*geistig*) unfreedom. In virtue of this, this form of unfreedom would be both positive (not a mere lack of *Geist*) and it would be non-necessary. In this way we would have the ability to understand history as neither divine (the result of the freedom or God) nor nihilistic (the result of an unfree necessity of a world not created by a free being), but as having gone wrong.<sup>304</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The positivity of evil

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<sup>304</sup> For dialectical completeness it should be pointed out that there is a potential fourth option here. Firstly, history can be understood as fundamentally free (divine) or unfree (nihilistic). I am proposing that we see it as incipiently free, but produces unfreedom. The other option would seem to be that it starts unfree, but freedom somehow generates out of it (this is a popular position among so-called 'transcendental materialists' such as contemporary Deleuzians and Slavoj Žižek and his followers). This last option, however, is ruled out by Schelling at least from 1809 onwards (i.e. this conviction stretches from the *Freiheitschrift* to the *Spätphilosophie*). On this point see Peter Dews, 'Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics: Adorno's Relation to Schelling', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (2 November 2014): 1180–1207.

In order to understand how the account of evil in the *Freiheitsschrift* provides insight into the possibility of a compulsive force (a pervasive unfreedom) structuring history – rather than being a mere distraction from the main narrative of the development of freedom – we first need to understand the ‘positivity’ of evil. What is meant by evil being positive is that it has its own nature, force, or power, rather than being defined as a mere lack or privation of another nature, force, or power. Schelling devotes a lot of space to showing how the various representatives of the latter, negative account of evil fail to grasp the phenomenon of evil. Schelling’s motivation for addressing inadequate accounts of evil is manifold. On the most basic level he simply does not want to be deluded about ourselves—that is, he does not want to be part of the contemporary ‘philanthropism’ which makes of evil little more than a regrettable lapse or weakness and thus denies evil proper.<sup>305</sup> He wants us to recognise the true dimension of horror that evil possesses.<sup>306</sup> It might seem strange to be occupied by the task of uncovering an extreme manifestation of humanity. And this strangeness might, in turn, explain why more recognisably philosophical issues are often thought to be the real goal, to which the investigation of evil is a mere means. The supposed main event, so to say, varies from one commentator to the next: a theodicy,<sup>307</sup> a correctly understood pantheism,<sup>308</sup> a cogent moral psychology,<sup>309</sup> a new metaphysics<sup>310</sup>—to name a few. I’m not sure any one

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<sup>305</sup> *FS* 248, 262

<sup>306</sup> *FS* 264

<sup>307</sup> ‘Schelling strives to develop a doctrine of the absolute that will allow for the presence of the evil and the irrational while preserving the goodness and rationality of the whole.’ Alan White, *Schelling: An Introduction to the System of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 137-38.

<sup>308</sup> ‘The central issue in the *FS* is again a non-reductionist account of thinking’s relationship to being.’ Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 94.

<sup>309</sup> ‘Although theodicy might seem to have pride of place in the *Freiheitsschrift*, it is in fact this problem of evil – the moral psychological one – that is Schelling’s main concern.’ Michelle Kosch, ‘Idealism and Freedom in Schelling’s *Freiheitsschrift*’, in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 145–59, 153.

<sup>310</sup> ‘...first, evil makes its appearance just in this essential relation to man’s freedom and thus in relation to man’s nature even more so. Evil is thus not a special topic by itself. Second, evil is not treated in the sphere of mere morality either, but rather in the broadest sphere of the ontological and theological fundamental question, thus a metaphysics of evil. Evil itself determines the new beginning in metaphysics. The question of the possibility and reality of evil brings about a transformation of the question of Being.’ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, Series in Continental Thought 8 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), 87.

philosophical issue can be said to be *the* goal of the *Freiheitsschrift*, but I do not contest the diversity of philosophical issues found therein. It is also the case that, without some philosophical motivation, such an insistence on accounting for human depravity (as opposed to mere animality) might seem a morbid exercise. That said, if we do not take seriously Schelling's emphasis on grasping the positivity of something which actively opposes the proper development of our potential, we will miss important insights.<sup>311</sup>

One of the representatives of a merely privative conception of evil, according to Schelling, is Kantianism.<sup>312</sup> Of the different representatives Schelling considers – including Neo-Platonist and Leibnizian – it is particularly helpful to focus on this one since its proximity to Schelling's own account provides the opportunity to place each of them in relief and, in the process, clarify some of the more obscure points of Schelling's position. The proximity I refer to is found in the fact that both approach the question of good and evil in terms of dual principles—intelligible and sensible, rational and irrational, ideal and real, and so on. Schelling does not think good or evil can be equated with one principle or the other; it is only in a coordination of both principles in different ways that can achieve either (this will be covered in more detail later; see 4.3.2). Schelling claims that the Kantian position is ignorant of this point. Schelling presents the Kantian position thus: evil results from the domination of the intelligent principle by the sensual principle, and good results from the domination of the sensual principle by the intelligent principle. The problem Schelling detects here is that, although there appears to be different ways in which the agent acts – the agent either wills to be good or wills to be evil – there is actually only one way of willing. That is, the good is the only object of will, which can be achieved in greater or lesser proportion.

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<sup>311</sup> Dale E. Snow argues that the reality of evil and our acknowledgment of it is indeed the main concern of the *Freiheitsschrift*. See Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, SUNY (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 149-50.

<sup>312</sup> I do not consider how a Kantian could respond to Schelling's characterization since the purpose is to explore Schelling's position, not evaluate his criticisms of Kantian positions. For this reason I do not engage with Kant's own complicated account of the will, evil, freedom, etc., nor go into the sophisticated moral philosophy produced by Kantian's since Schelling's time.

For while the weakness or inefficacy of the intelligent principle can be a ground for deficiency in good and virtuous actions, it cannot be a ground for positively evil actions and those contrary to virtue. Assuming, however, that sensuality or passive behaviour towards external impression would produce evil actions with a kind of necessity, then man himself would be only passive in doing them, i.e., evil would have no meaning with respect to himself, that is subjectively; and since what results from natural determination cannot be objectively evil either, it would have no meaning whatsoever. But to say that the reasonable principle is ineffective in evil also provides no ground. For why does it not exercise its power? If it wills to be ineffective, then the ground of evil lies in this willing and not in sensuality. Or if it can in nowise overcome the power of sensuality, then mere weakness and deficiency are here, but nowhere evil. Hence according to this explanation there is only one will (if it can be so called), and no twofold will.<sup>313</sup>

What is shown here is that, even if the Kantian can contort the resources of her theory to include space for something which is called evil, there is still only one will which either intentionally (i.e. decides not to exercise its will) or unintentionally (i.e. sensuality is too powerful or intelligence is not powerful enough) fails to meet the good. Schelling claims that the will must be able to actively will evil *as well* as good rather than evil simply resulting from a lack of the will to good. There are different ways to understand why Schelling considers an account evil as the lack of will troubling. Two of the ways to understand this are: (1) that Schelling needs evil to result from a *will to* evil in order to secure human freedom and moral responsibility; and (2) that Schelling needs evil to result from a unity of wills in order to secure awareness of the unique and terrible force of evil. Both are compatible, but I would like to stress the latter. I now unpack each in turn.

The first way to interpret Schelling's worry here is perhaps the most accessible. Schelling was dissatisfied with Kant's (and Fichte's) attempt to understand how there is a *moral* choice for evil. That is, how it is possible for an agent to freely choose evil (i.e. not be merely be evil in virtue of being heteronomously determined) and therefore be responsible. Not only can we find many statements throughout the *Freiheitsschrift* which foreground the concern with

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<sup>313</sup> FS 248

moral responsibility,<sup>314</sup> but even in the passage quoted above Schelling addresses the limitation to our moral activity when evil is considered privatively (we ‘would be only passive’ and thus ‘have no meaning’). Moreover, just before the passage quoted, Schelling states that evil is annulled when it is equated with sensuality because there is no freedom for evil on the Kantian account. However, the fact that this issue does not exhaust Schelling’s concern with the Kantian account can already be seen in the hypothetical line of questioning addressed to the Kantian. Even though Schelling believes that the Kantian account annuls evil, he considers, for the sake of argument, the consequences that a Kantian view of evil would have. First he considers what would be the case if sensuality were sufficient for evil (‘Assuming, however, that sensuality or passive behaviour towards external impression would produce evil actions’) and then he considers what would be the case if reason – in its refusal to work – were sufficient for evil (‘If it wills to be ineffective, then the ground of evil lies in this willing and not in sensuality’). That is, Schelling hypothesizes on both the passivity *and* the activity of the agent in producing evil on the Kantian account. Even though in the latter case the agent would not be merely passive – and therefore evil would presumably have subjective meaning for the agent – and would be acting independently, this would still not capture the true dimension of evil. Thus Schelling cannot be solely motivated by the problem of moral responsibility in the Kantian account of evil.

As suggested, I do not want to dismiss the concern with moral responsibility, only highlight the role of a different aspect. This other aspect is the recognition of the reality and true nature of evil. Up until now it seemed that what made Schelling’s account of evil distinct from other accounts – i.e. what makes it positive, as opposed to privative – was the involvement of the individual agent in the genesis of evil. But, as we have just seen, Schelling’s hypothetical investigation of an evil which results directly from the agent’s

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<sup>314</sup> For example, *FS* 260

activity shows that what makes evil positive is not the ability to hold someone responsible. Although the will is effective or active in producing evil on the assumption that the will can decide to let sensuality determine us, evil would still be equivalent to mere ‘animality,’ albeit an animality *with the added advocacy of reason*. Neither pole genuinely interacts with its opposite and thus both are left unaltered in their fundamental character—the only variations available are quantitative rearrangements, not qualitative influence. In Schelling’s terms, they do not form a unity.<sup>315</sup>

Hopefully this has established the importance for Schelling to provide a philosophy which can give a model of the nature of evil which is not merely a lack of the good. In other words, to be able to interpret human actions and history outside of a “less-or-more-good” scale, as it were (i.e. in weak or moderate optimistic terms). Moreover, the positive model of evil is not susceptible to pessimistic excess since it is not necessarily present in the world. Because it results from human freedom, its possibility to be realised is, in principle, the same as that of good. An important question to ask at this point, however, is: if evil results from human freedom, how can evil itself be a kind of unfreedom? Schelling gives few details. The general way that he distinguishes good and evil is in terms of the type of unity they form between two principles. In the case of the good, the universal will and the particular will form a proper unity via the former putting the latter to use (rather than simply suppressing it, as Kant’s model was accused of doing). In the case of evil, the particular will appropriates the universal will in order to raise its particularity to universality. Schelling calls this a ‘false unity.’<sup>316</sup>

The only substantial account Schelling gives in the *Freiheitsschrift* is where he announces his aim to give a description of evil in ‘its appearance in man’ (*Erscheinung im Menschen*) as opposed to the presentation of evil in its ‘actualization in the individual man’

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<sup>315</sup> FS 247

<sup>316</sup> FS 247

(*Wirklichwerdung im einzelnen Menschen*).<sup>317</sup> The account of the becoming actual, or actualization, of evil (or good) is occupied with the issue of how the choice for good or evil is made (see 4.3.2). As we will see later, this choice is, for Schelling, purely intelligible or eternal—it never occurs in our conscious experience. The account of the appearance of good or evil describes the effect these intelligible choices have for our conscious lives. Schelling’s remarks here are complex, but I interpret them to be centred on the idea that the difference between good and evil in our conscious lives is marked by the different empirical experiences they yield: the experience of freedom in the case of good and the experience of unfreedom in the case of evil.

#### 4.2.2 The unfreedom of evil

To account for the asymmetry between good and evil in terms of the freedom accruing to each, I distinguish between intelligible (or atemporal) and empirical (or temporal) freedom. In terms of their intelligible freedom, they remain symmetrical; but in terms of their empirical freedom, they become asymmetrical. Although Schelling does not present it in this fashion, I think that we can see it at work in the movement of his claims and arguments. That a distinction between the intelligible and the empirical in relation to human action is in play has already been seen in Schelling’s separating the question of the actualization of evil (itself a result of an intelligible essence or deed<sup>318</sup>) and the appearance of evil (which, presumably, is not intelligible). Schelling reaffirms the symmetry between good and evil in terms of their intelligibility when he reminds us of the kind of inner necessity involved in intelligible acts—he claims that ‘voluntary good is as impossible as voluntary evil.’<sup>319</sup> But just as he reminds us of a shared necessity in good and evil, he indicates that there is a divergence in necessity

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<sup>317</sup> *FS* 262/*SW* 7:389

<sup>318</sup> E.g. *FS* 258, 260, 262

<sup>319</sup> *FS* 264

also. Good and evil are now differentiated in terms of the ways in which people are necessitated by the kind of knowledge they possess and how this relates to acting and judging, which only happens in our conscious experience.

In the good, our judgments and action are characterised by ‘the immediate presence of being in knowledge and consciousness,’ ‘conscientiousness,’ and ‘religiosity.’ The kind of immediacy and truth involved here is best understood through the second of these designations. In conscientiousness one acts in accordance with one’s knowledge of the right without any doubt or need of weighing up options.<sup>320</sup> The agent is under a kind of necessity here – dubbed by Schelling a ‘holy necessity’ – but one where we do not feel hounded by our necessity, but can freely affirm it. In other words, having chosen to subordinate our particular selfhood to universal understanding within the intelligible realm, our activity in the empirical realm finds a reliable guide.

In evil, our judgements and actions are characterised as ‘the acceptance of non-being into...imagination,’ ‘false imagination,’ and ‘sin.’<sup>321</sup> These designations are perhaps even more obscure than those offered for the good. It might help to first translate some of the new terminology into the terminology Schelling more commonly uses; namely, the talk of an orientation towards non-being rather than being. So, this is equivalent to the claim that we elevate selfhood in evil and turn our attention to particularity rather than universality; or, we turn to the relative or partial being of particularity (non-being, as Schelling calls it) rather than the absolute being of universality. But we do not just want to merely affirm our selfhood or non-being. As Schelling puts it, the evil person desires to be ‘the creating ground and to

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<sup>320</sup> ‘He is not conscientious, who in a given case must first hold the law of duty before himself in order to decide, out of his respect for it, to do right. Even by its own meaning, religiosity admits of no choice between opposite, no *aequilibrium arbitrii* (the plague of all morality), but only of supreme decisiveness for the right without any choice.’ (FS 265) ‘...belief, not in the sense of holding something for true which might be considered meritorious, or which lacks what certitude requires – a meaning which has been appended to this word in its use for common things – but in its original meaning as trust, confidence in the divine, which excludes all choice.’ (FS 266)

<sup>321</sup> FS 264, 263, respectively.

rule over all things' and succumbs to the 'pride to be all things.'<sup>322</sup> Whether we believe ourselves to be the origin of all things, the master of all things, or to be all things, the point is that we elevate ourselves to universality. The problem is that, although the intelligible deed in evil elevates the particular to the universal, we never succeed once and for all in becoming all things in the empirical realm. But since we have the pretension to truth or universality, we are restlessly in search of a way to present our particularity as universality.

In contrast to conscientiousness then, it could be said that, rather than be guided by our faith or be open to our immediate knowledge of truth, we need to fabricate the truth. What I have called the fabrication of truth – the activity of presenting our particularity or non-being as universality or being – is equivalent to what Schelling means by 'lying.' Lying is the passing off of something for true which is not; or, in Schelling's language, presenting non-being as being through our imagination. The structure of inversion found in evil is on display here. A related point is made in the Stuttgart lectures: 'error is not merely a *privation* of truth. Rather it is something intrinsically positive, not a deficiency in spirit but an inversion of it. Consequently, error may well prove highly ingenious, and yet it is an error.'<sup>323</sup> If evil is our intelligible character, then we are drawn to the empirical task of presenting our particularity as universality—that is, of lying. This is how I understand the complex claim with which we began this section.

We have seen how through false imagination and through knowledge directed towards non-being man's spirit opens itself to the spirit of lying and falsehood, and, soon fascinated by it, loses its initial freedom.<sup>324</sup>

The unfreedom of evil lies in being fascinated or mesmerised (*fascinirt*) by lying, in being drawn into the infinite task of trying to pass off our particularity as universality. The

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<sup>322</sup> FS 263

<sup>323</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars (1810; Based on Posthumous Manuscripts)', in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays*, trans. Thomas Pfau (SUNY Press, 1994), 195–243, 231.

<sup>324</sup> FS 264

necessity experienced by evil persons is fuelled by a desperate search to bring particular and universal together with only the power of the particular, whereas the necessity experienced by good persons is provided by the decisiveness to act in the way which successfully brings particular and universal together. With this we have a model of positive evil or unfreedom. There is not simply a lack of freedom (e.g. being driven by sensible impulse) but a *spiritual* compulsion.

The remaining difficulty Schelling's account faces is how to take this model of a compulsive force and apply it to the interpretation of history. In the case of individuals, the choice for good or evil is unpredictable—whichever choice is made, it could always have turned out differently. But if we remain at this level we must remain silent about history. In other words, we could not locate trends or patterns if the philosopher holds that all choices for good or evil are equally open throughout history. Now, Schelling does try to account for historical shifts in the *Freiheitsschrift*. In the remainder of this chapter I argue that this attempt fails and that, ultimately, this is due to Schelling's desire to retain systematicity in his account. In order to do this I present an account of how Schelling tries to keep a unity between system and freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift* and how he ultimately privileges the former at the expense of the latter. I do not start from the assumption that system and freedom are incompatible. For some it is enough just to identify system in an authors work to bring it into disrepute (like the orthodox Marxist that need do no more than uncover a philosophy as “bourgeois” in order to disregard it). The *Freiheitsschrift* presents a very sophisticated attempt to do systematic philosophy without reducing everything to system. It thus requires careful analysis to see if it succeeds or not.

### **4.3 System and Freedom**

The primary challenge Schelling sees himself as facing is how philosophy can remain a rational system whilst not obliterating freedom.<sup>325</sup> Some difficulties face the reader of the *Freiheitsschrift* when trying to grasp this. The main difficulty, I believe, is that Schelling deals with two very different types of freedom, each of which requires very different approaches to establishing their compatibility with system or reason. The first type of freedom – sometimes called ‘formal freedom’ by Schelling – is a certain capacity for self-determination. Schelling associates this type of freedom with idealism, by which he seems to have in mind Kant as much as later idealist developments.

...it will forever remain a curiosity that Kant, after he had first only negatively differentiated things-in-themselves from appearances by making them independent of time, and later, in the metaphysical discussion of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, actually had treated freedom and independence of time as correlative concepts, did not proceed to think of transferring this solely positive concept of In-itself to things, whereby he immediately would have risen to a higher point of view, above the negativity characteristic of his theoretical philosophy.<sup>326</sup>

Schelling recognises that self-determination is not how Kant characterises freedom, but suggests that this is implicit in his system (at least as regards the first and second *Critique*)—hence, it is ‘curious’ that Kant did not draw this conclusion. As Schelling must be aware, he has paved over some distinction Kant felt important to his understanding of freedom, namely, the distinction between will (*Wille*) and the capacity or power for choice (*Willkür*).<sup>327</sup> Indeed, Schelling notes that the characterisation of freedom as a self-determination which can be attributed to all of nature ends up losing grip on what is specific to human freedom. I cannot settle here whether Schelling does uncover what is really happening in Kant’s philosophy (or if it merely amounts to a misrepresentation). What matters for the current task is to note that

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<sup>325</sup> I went into the intellectual and historical context of this situation (i.e. the pantheism controversy) in the introduction

<sup>326</sup> *FS* 232

<sup>327</sup> One example of Kant distinguishing in this way can be found in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. See Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 374-75.

how Schelling understands the ‘idealist’ conception of freedom (formal freedom). Now, Schelling does not think it is too difficult to reconcile this kind of freedom with system. He sets about the more familiar German idealist strategy of showing its compatibility with system to the extent that system itself is not conceived mechanistically but rather as ‘living,’ ‘dynamic,’ or ‘creative.’<sup>328</sup>

The second type of freedom – referred to as human freedom – is distinct from the idealist or formal type of freedom in at least two important respects which can be seen most clearly by looking at the limitations Schelling identified in the idealist type of freedom. The latter is too general and only formal: too general because it applies to all of nature; and only formal in the sense that it is not directed towards a decision or choice (the content of freedom), but merely towards the independence (*selbständigkeit*) from external determinism or fatalism.<sup>329</sup> Human freedom introduces a certain break in the dynamical or creative process of nature through its decision for good or evil (what these decisions amount to will be discussed in more detail later). The way of making this type of freedom compatible with system is much more complicated (three of the approaches to this task found in the *Freiheitsschrift* were outlined in the introduction).

The reason these approaches do not seem to sit well together is that Schelling specifically advances the latter due to the deficiencies of the former. Although the first approach succeeds in uniting system and freedom, the conception of freedom involved is not sufficient for the task of understanding how things could turn out otherwise—that is, of understanding human freedom and the unpredictable aspect of the world and history. The latter type of freedom is clearly much more difficult to make compatible with systematic reason. And if Schelling can pull this off, then it would seem superfluous for him to go to the effort of establishing the compatibility of formal freedom with system. We need to investigate both if we are to get a

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<sup>328</sup> FS 227

<sup>329</sup> FS 232-33

reliable picture of the merits of the *Freiheitsschrift* for understanding freedom and history. But how does Schelling make sense of dealing with both? We will now attempt to answer that question

#### 4.3.1 The place of the idealist conception of freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift*

Schelling has many reasons to establish the compatibility of formal freedom with system independently of its relation to the establishing of the compatibility of human freedom with system. One set of reasons relates to motivations external to the text and another set relates to issues internal to the text (although there is overlap). Regarding the former, Schelling endorses the idealist model of freedom most unequivocally in those parts of the text where his concern is the reception and reputation of his own earlier philosophy. This is done by affirming the innovations made in his *Naturphilosophie* and showing how those innovations are defensible from the attacks made against pantheism and all systematic philosophy that attempts to grasp freedom.<sup>330</sup> One of Schelling's principle innovations was to avoid the opposed poles of either Kant's dualism or Fichte's subjectivism. The overcoming of the split between knowledge and the object of knowledge – without straightforwardly reducing the latter to the former – was to be achieved by recognising that spirit (*Geist*) was not isolated in knowing consciousness, but animating nature also. Or, in the influential terms in which Schelling put it, the subject is *conscious* spirit and nature *unconscious* spirit. That Schelling is still on board with this is evident already in the forward to the *Freiheitsschrift* where he

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<sup>330</sup> A large part of the introductory debate around pantheism is geared towards defending his *Naturphilosophie* from opponents who might regard it as fatalistic. This motivation seems to only intensify throughout Schelling's life. For instance, in his 1833-34 Munich lectures, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling still expends significant energy defending the advances made by his *Naturphilosophie*, and defending its superiority against its alleged perversion in Hegel's philosophy. See *HMP* 114 *passim*.

proclaims that the opposition between spirit and nature has already been ‘torn up’ and continues to be invalidated by the progress of knowledge.<sup>331</sup>

Although Schelling’s tone here is somewhat dismissive – he seems to be advising us to forget about that old concern and focus on something more important, namely, the opposition between necessity and freedom – he rehearses his formulation of an improved idealism (which extends spirit to nature and gives us access to a ‘higher realism’) in contrast to Fichte’s subjective idealism. Fichte established freedom to be what is truly actual, but we also need to hold ‘that all actuality (nature, the world of things) has activity, life and freedom as its ground, or in Fichte’s words, that not only is the I all, but conversely, all is I as well.’<sup>332</sup> So, despite the fact that Schelling will ultimately claim that – with regard to the core aim of understanding freedom ‘more precisely’ – idealism ‘leaves us perplexed,’ he still finds it important to use the occasion of the *Freiheitsschrift* to preserve the place of his objective idealism in the history of philosophy. Though these contextual insights are helpful, I would now like to argue that the retention of the idealist model of freedom is not simply an attachment to a now redundant view, but plays an important role in how Schelling articulates his improved conception of freedom.

There are several textual or internal reasons for Schelling to retain the idealist conception of freedom. We already know that it serves to show how *one* way of unifying system and freedom is possible. This unity is what is established via Schelling’s defence of a qualified account of pantheism.<sup>333</sup> This version of pantheism is put to use to solve various issues that

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<sup>331</sup> *FS* 217

<sup>332</sup> *FS* 232

<sup>333</sup> The core argument advances a specific understanding of the law of identity, starting at (*FS* 223), and proceeds to present the consequences of this understanding, culminating in the conclusion that ‘the denial of formal freedom is not necessarily implicit in pantheism.’ (*FS* 229) At times Schelling arguments are offered in support of Spinoza’s pantheism – ‘...fatuous is the inference that in Spinoza even the individual object must be equal to God’ (*FS* 223) – at other times pantheism in so far as it is compatible with ‘Spinozism *per se*’ (*FS* 226), and at still other points pantheism in contrast to Spinoza is the preferred defendant – ‘Thus his [Spinoza’s] arguments against freedom are entirely deterministic, and in nowise pantheistic.’ (*FS* 230) For an account of the issue of the extent to which Schelling appropriates, modifies, or overturns Spinoza in the *Freiheitsschrift* see Jeffrey A Bernstein, ‘On the Relation Between Nature and History in Schelling’s Freedom Essay and Spinoza’s

had occupied him in his previous philosophical works. One such issue is that of how the finite world originates and develops. Previously Schelling had been content to trace a continuous process of the generation of the forms of nature from out of an absolute starting point and display ever refining determinations. Schelling increasingly becomes dissatisfied with this for many reasons, but a worry that is in the background of the *Freiheitsschrift* – and already anticipated in the 1804 work *Philosophy and Religion*<sup>334</sup> – is that, if the source of creation simply functions as a mechanical push in relation to the created world, then we could not understand this source as God.

However one might think of the manner of consecution [*Folge*] of beings from God, it can never be mechanical, never a mere effecting of positing, where what is effected is nothing for itself. Nor can it any more be emanation, in which case what flows out remains the same as that from which it flowed, and thus is nothing of its own, nothing autonomous [*selbständigkeit*]. The consecution of things from God is a self-revelation of God. God can reveal himself only in what is like him, in free beings that act by themselves...<sup>335</sup>

This is an interesting passage for current purposes. It brings to a head one of the motivations Schelling has for retaining formal freedom: it allows us to understand a necessary consecution of things without annulling (formal) freedom. But it also already hints at the need for a more emphatic freedom to arise. Although Schelling only talks of formal freedom here (acting independently), he points to the need for the process of the world's unfolding (its revelation) to manifest something which echoes or realizes the kind of force that instigated the process. Further into the essay it becomes clear that this means God's *moral* freedom in creating the world needs to generate a being with moral freedom also. This pinpoints the crucial issue that now needs to be addressed. Some of the reasons for Schelling's continuing

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Theologico-Political Treatise', in *The Barbarian Principle: Merleau-Ponty, Schelling, and the Question of Nature*, ed. Jason M. Wirth and Patrick Burke (SUNY Press, 2013), 77–100.

<sup>334</sup> See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 87-90; and John Laughland, *Schelling versus Hegel: From German Idealism to Christian Metaphysics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 56-58.

<sup>335</sup> *FS* 228/*SW* 7:346-47

interest in formal freedom have been explored, but now we need to see how this is to fit with Schelling's insistence on the need for human freedom. The way of fitting these together – which, I believe, shows the least risk of doing damage to human freedom – is found in Schelling's strategy of making the idealist model to do only some of the work of explaining the non-idealist model of freedom. Despite this rough manner of speaking, the work that the idealist model does is very specific: it explains the ontological structure of human beings and how this is a condition for the possibility to act for the good or to act for evil.

#### 4.3.2 The role of idealism in explaining the *possibility* of human freedom

Schelling divides his account of human freedom into an analysis of the *possibility* of the choice for good or evil and an analysis of the *actuality* of the choice for good or evil.<sup>336</sup> This distinction is methodologically very important even though Schelling does not stress this point in the *Freiheitsschrift*.<sup>337</sup> Evil is possible due to the way that human beings are constituted, as distinct from any other type of being. And, since this constitution is deduced from the necessary structure of the world, the method is therefore a priori.<sup>338</sup> But such a rational construction cannot yet tell us that evil is actually chosen by free beings. Uncovering how or why evil is actually chosen is therefore, at least in part, an a posteriori task. It is important to highlight that Schelling's investigation into human freedom requires *both* methods. For the purposes of this study it is important to highlight this because it shows how Schelling combines the idealist and non-idealist approaches to human freedom. But it is also important because of the way this distinction between the possibility and the actuality of

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<sup>336</sup> I will usually refer to the choice for evil – rather than the choice for good or evil – in the following. Partly for brevity, but also due to centrality of evil in Schelling's account and the relative peripheral place of the good.

<sup>337</sup> Schelling does, however, present the possibility of evil (FS 236-248) in clear distinction to the actuality of evil (FS 249-256) and indicates the methodological as well as the substantive aspect of this distinction when he says 'the possibility of evil does not yet include the actuality, and truly the latter is the greatest object of our investigation.' (FS 249)

<sup>338</sup> Schelling says as much when he claims the approach was 'to derive the concept and the possibility of evil from first grounds'. (FS 249)

freedom – including its methodological implications – anticipates and contrasts with the distinction which Schelling will make fundamental to his *Spätphilosophie*, namely, the distinction between negative philosophy and positive philosophy.

Both in the *Freiheitsschrift* and in the *Spätphilosophie*, Schelling takes the possibility of things to be known a priori (the realm of negative philosophy) and the existence of things to be known a posteriori (the realm of positive philosophy).<sup>339</sup> As Manfred Frank has argued, the increasing centrality of this distinction in Schelling's thought accompanies a return to Kant.<sup>340</sup> I raise this partly as contextual clarification, but primarily for the purpose of putting on the table the issue of both the convergence and divergence of these different periods in Schelling's thought. For now we need only note that the idealist conception of freedom is at work in Schelling's a priori science of how things are constituted (the self-development of the absolute, or self-revelation of God), including human beings, and this constitution explains the *possibility* of human freedom (i.e. the ontological structure in agents needed for them to be the kinds of things that are characterised as free). And when he comes to describe the *actuality* of human freedom is when he departs from the idealist conception of freedom.

As noted, the idealist conception which Schelling advances shows how nature can develop in an ongoing process without being said to be determined mechanistically. The way that Schelling's version of this idea of a self-determination of the absolute proceeds is by showing how we can understand everything as a product of two fundamental wills—or, rather, one twofold will.<sup>341</sup> Being, for Schelling, is most adequately understood as will rather than any inert substance.<sup>342</sup> But this will spits into two: these could be referred to as real and ideal or

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<sup>339</sup> See, for instance, the section 'Kant, Fichte, and a Science of Reason' in Schelling's Berlin lectures (*GPP* 127-39, especially 134 and 137).

<sup>340</sup> Manfred Frank, 'Schelling's Late Return to Kant. On the Difference between Absolute Idealism and Philosophical Romanticism', trans. David W. Wood, *Internationales Jahrbuch Des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism* 6 (2008): 25–58.

<sup>341</sup> '...every being...has a twofold principle within itself, which, however, is fundamentally one and the same, but viewed from two possible aspects.' (*FS* 241)

<sup>342</sup> *FS* 231

irrational and rational. Depending on which stage in the development of nature (or the revelation of God) we are at, the name Schelling gives for each pole changes. The real pole appears as: 'being insofar as it is the ground of existence,' the dark principle, blind will, self-will, and so on. The ideal pole appears as: 'being insofar as it exists,' the principle of light, will of the understanding, universal will, and so on. The real principle strives to particularity or creatureliness. The ideal principle strives to communication or articulation. These are not independent of each other; rather, they require each other in order to actually be what they are. The striving or willing to particularity would fail to affirm itself without the aid of the universal will to bring its desires into sharpness. The striving or willing of universality would fail to bring order and distinction to things without that ground of particularity to work upon. These wills come together in varying ways to produce the diversity of forms in nature.

This is quite abstract and difficult to imagine. However, Schelling offers many different images which might help the reader think about the way these twin forces work together to create something. Perhaps one of the more accessible images Schelling uses is that of the difficulty faced when we are feeling confused by our 'chaotic jumble' of thoughts and struggle to realise them.<sup>343</sup> When faced with these confused thoughts they are not yet fully formed and are mere hunches (referred to as 'the dark longing'). Not really aware of where they are finally heading, we are nevertheless driven to get to their unknown destination. But we can be struck by the worry that we are heading down a wrong road, that our attempts to articulate these thoughts are actually departing from the original inspiration and in risk of losing sight of what first motivated us. If paralysed by this fear we cling to their immediate and embryonic shape and they never arrive.<sup>344</sup> Conversely, without that original impulse,

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<sup>343</sup> *FS* 240

<sup>344</sup> Nietzsche perfectly expresses the worry that the particularity of an embryonic thought (an 'insight') might be forever lost when we try to articulate it in words (universals): 'Sigh – I caught this insight on the wing and quickly took the nearest shoddy words to fasten it lest it fly away from me. And now it has died of these barren words and hangs and flaps in them – and I hardly know any more, when I look at it, how I could have felt so happy when I caught this bird.' Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German*

articulation or communication would have nothing to work upon. So, although each will pulls in a different direction, both are needed to create something distinct (in this case, a coherent thought).

For Schelling this is true of everything, but the configuration is unique in human beings. In all other finite natures the wills are always in a reactionary relation to each other because they are not yet fully differentiated—they overlap and are forced to confront one another and thus are bound by the developmental process of nature. With human beings the particular will and the universal will are not held together in reciprocal interdependence; they have become fully separated and are now held together by something above them: spirit (*Geist*). The relationship these two poles can have to each other is no longer part of an ongoing process of creation, but freely chosen by human beings as spirit. At this point the process constructed in reason ends—no new forms appear through the interaction of the two principles.

The last thing that can be known through reason alone is the two fundamental ways these principles can be configured in human beings. In terms of our moral disposition, it is not a matter of one principle dominating the other, but a matter of one principle being at the service of the other.<sup>345</sup> If self-will is kept at the service of the universal will, then the passions or forces of the individual's selfhood remain in 'divine measure and equilibrium',<sup>346</sup> whilst providing the distinctness and effectiveness of life for the good.<sup>347</sup> But if this relationship is inverted and the individual elevates her self-will in order to take control, then those same forces of selfhood become chaotic and enraged.<sup>348</sup> Which relationship the two principles take is not dictated by a dynamism or tension between them (as it was in the development of nature), but on the free deed of the agent. With this we can see how Schelling retains an

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*Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) § 298.

<sup>345</sup> *FS* 248-49, 275

<sup>346</sup> *FS* 243

<sup>347</sup> *FS* 271

<sup>348</sup> *FS* 243, 263

idealist conception of the free self-development of nature – knowable a priori – in his account of the possibility of human freedom. Freedom and system are united up to this point without degrading freedom. But with the transition to Schelling's account of the actuality of human freedom he cannot continue with the idealist model.<sup>349</sup> So, now we need to see how successful Schelling is at grasping (actual) human freedom within reason without doing damage to it.

#### 4.4 Explaining the *actuality* of human freedom: individual and historical

The centrepiece of Schelling's attempt to show the unity of actual human freedom and system is his account of free action as resulting from the intelligible within us.<sup>350</sup> Schelling is quite explicit on this point.

Intelligible essence can act only in accordance with its own inner nature just as certainly as it acts completely freely and absolutely [...] this necessity must not be mistaken, as still happens, for empirical necessity based on compulsion (itself only disguised accidentalness). But what is this inner necessity of essence itself? Here is the point at which necessity and freedom must be united, if they can be united at all. If this essence were dead being and with respect to man something merely given to him, then since the act can proceed from him only by necessity, responsibility and all freedom would be annulled. But precisely this inner necessity is itself freedom; man's essence is essentially *his own deed*; necessity and freedom are interrelated as one being which appears as one or the other only when viewed from different aspects: in itself it is freedom, formally it is necessity.<sup>351</sup>

This claim for the inner necessity of our own intelligible deed is a remarkable way to overcome the opposition of freedom and necessity within individual action. This also allows Schelling to establish a harmony between the world more generally (i.e. creation) and our intelligible freedom.<sup>352</sup> Whatever merits or deficiencies this answer may have for

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<sup>349</sup> FS 235

<sup>350</sup> FS 258f

<sup>351</sup> FS 259

<sup>352</sup> FS 261

understanding the issues of human freedom from the perspective of moral philosophy, the philosophy of action, and so on, is not my concern here.<sup>353</sup> The main reason for this is that, even if we believe Schelling has succeeded in uniting actual human freedom with reason here, this unity only grasps part of the actuality of human freedom—the part that is exclusively related to the *individuality* of human freedom. The part that causes more trouble for Schelling – and which speaks to the issue of history – is the part that deals with the trans-individual element of human freedom. What I mean by this is those elements which account for the tendencies or patterns of human freedom—that is, whether good or evil is prevalent in the actual world.

Schelling not only addresses this trans-individual aspect in terms of the conditions which precipitate or solicit human freedom one way or another, but even makes it a central question. That is, this aspect is not a supererogatory addition or simply a matter of Schelling conscientiously fleshing out his view for the sake of completeness. Detailing the solicitation to evil is required because it is not sufficient to explain the becoming actual of evil through individuals alone; what is also needed is to explain evil's 'universal effectiveness, or how it was able to burst forth from creation as an unmistakable general [*allgemeiner*] principle, battling everywhere the good.'<sup>354</sup> One problem of focusing exclusively on the actuality of evil in individuals alone is because this would detach the question of the actuality of evil from historical reality. What is meant by this is that, if the predominance of evil in the world – assuming that it does predominate – is explained only in terms of the deed of individuals we are left without a response to the large-scale presence of evil in the actual world. At its extreme this means that we also cannot explain why evil came to prevalence in the first place

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<sup>353</sup> For an account of some of the objections Schelling faces and a defence of Schelling see G. Anthony Bruno, 'Schelling on the Possibility of Evil: Rendering Pantheism, Freedom and Time Consistent', *SATS: Northern European Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

<sup>354</sup> FS 249

and if evil could ever come to an end. These are all important questions for Schelling. The ethical and theological import in particular is evident in the *Freiheitsschrift*.

#### 4.4.1 'General evil' and solicitation to actual evil

For Schelling, the question of 'how evil first arose in the creature' cannot be answered by appeal to a sufficient condition (e.g. an evil principle or an evil spirit) because we would have only pushed the question back a stage—we would then need to explain how this principle or spirit, in turn, itself came into being. But, even though no discrete object or principle – or something similar – can be the sufficient condition of the actuality of evil, there can still be such a source for a 'temptation' to evil. If there is such a temptation, Schelling reflects, then it would make sense to locate it in something like 'Platonic matter,' by which he means a medium in which creation can emerge, but which nevertheless is recalcitrant to that creation in some sense. In short, what resists God. Given this thought, it might seem reasonable to see in the will of the ground something similar to Platonic matter in the sense that 'the irrational principle...resists the understanding, or unity and order'.<sup>355</sup> As we know, this principle cannot be evil in itself. Since evil is defined as a perverted relation between two distinct principles – by selfhood elevating itself through appropriation of the universal will – evil can never be found in a self-standing element.<sup>356</sup> That said, Schelling goes on to show how the will of the ground becomes the soliciting component of evil in human beings insofar as it develops into an intensified form of the self-attracting impulse of the ground in selfhood.

The same principle that was the ground in the first creation is here again the germ and seed, but in a higher form, from which a higher world is developed. For evil is nothing other than the original ground of existence, insofar as it strives towards actualization in

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<sup>355</sup> FS 250

<sup>356</sup> FS 250-51

created beings, and thus is, in fact, only a higher potential of the ground at work in nature.<sup>357</sup>

As is the case with much of the *Freiheitsschrift*, care needs to be taken with terminological variants. Since the evil Schelling speaks of in this passage only ‘strives towards actualization’ it is not yet the evil which results from human freedom; it is only a potential evil or a ‘general evil.’<sup>358</sup> This general evil is a drive to affirm particularity in opposition to the will which aims to universalize. This particularizing will is what accounts for the ‘universal effectiveness’ of actual evil; that is, of the ‘general necessity’ which incites individuals to elevate their particularity to universality.

How are we to understand this general – unrealized – evil that creates the tendency for evil to actualize itself? Is it a tendency that can be changed so as to liberate ourselves from a world predisposed to evil? Is it intrinsic to the kind of being we are and therefore unchangeable? More generally, is this universal temptation to evil a contingent or necessary feature? Schelling suggests that it is necessary. When Schelling claims that general evil is a ‘higher potential of the ground at work in nature’ he gives it a role homologous to the dialectical place ground has in relation to existence in the development of nature: ‘the same periods of creation found in the latter are also in the former, and the one is the likeness and explanation of the other.’<sup>359</sup> At this point Schelling provides a curious account of history in terms of these ‘periods of creation’ where general evil reacts to a counterpoised, correlate force of the good. These forces never bring forth good or evil on their own – only when they are fully distinct from one another and then synthesised in a certain manner can this be achieved – but, as opposed particular and universal forces striving to realized themselves against each other, they generate situations with different combinations of their relative forces. For instance, an earlier age of the ‘omnipotence of nature’ is marked by the

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<sup>357</sup> FS 253

<sup>358</sup> FS 255

<sup>359</sup> FS 253

dominance of the principle of the ground. The understanding is only at work here to the extent that knowledge, art, and science are drawn out of the force of nature. This configuration necessarily gives way to another; and with each subsequent stage the attracting or particularizing force of general evil becomes more distinct from the expanding or universalizing force until each force no longer appear alloyed, but become fully opposed. With the complete dispersion of these forces they no longer work together to produce a certain form of life, but now explicitly conflict with each other. Schelling claims there is a radical break from the previous historical continuity at this point, referring to this as a ‘second creation.’ Schelling’s condensed and high-altitude history ends abruptly here. This conflict of forces is said to mark the ‘present time’ and, although we are not told what may come after this time, it is suggested that the next historical stage will see an end to this conflict.

#### 4.4.2 The necessity of evil for God’s revelation

This abridged sketch of Schelling’s account of certain historical developments shows that general evil is part of the generation of the world, that is, a cosmogony. And, insofar as God achieves full realization through manifestation – or revelation – in the world, the historical movement driven by the intensified force of the ground is also a theogony.<sup>360</sup> Schelling is explicit about the necessity of general evil at various points. One way Schelling explains this necessity is in relation to what is needed for human freedom. For human freedom to have a choice between good and evil the principles which can be made into either a proper unity (i.e. self-will subordinated to universal will) or a ‘false unity’ (i.e. universal will subordinated to

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<sup>360</sup> The nature and the extent to which Schelling’s cosmogony and theogony are related is a difficult and contested issue. For a brief discussion of this problem see Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom*, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 83-85.

self-will) must themselves become completely distinct. As we saw, this becoming distinct is what happens in Schelling's history. Now, the fact that human freedom must choose either good or evil – and therefore, must entail the existence of general evil to enable this choice – does not establish that general evil is necessary of itself. For this we also need to know that human beings must choose, that is, that they cannot remain in indecision. Schelling argues that this is the case.

Man is placed on the pinnacle where he has the source of self-movement towards good and evil equally within him; the bond of principles within him is not a necessary but a free one. He stands at the junction; whatever he chooses, that will be his deed. But he cannot remain in indecision, because God must necessarily reveal himself and because in creation nothing whatsoever can remain ambiguous.<sup>361</sup>

The world, including general evil, is necessarily created because the creator must be revealed. Thus, though actual evil is only realized through free human deeds, the prevalence of human deeds towards evil is necessary. Of course, Schelling is quick to point out that this is not a mere 'logical' or 'geometrical' necessity, but a dynamic one which is ultimately based on 'mind, spirit, and will.'<sup>362</sup> Indeed, Schelling goes as far to say that 'creation is not an event, but an act.'<sup>363</sup> In which case the course history takes may be unavoidable, but the act that launches nature and history in the first place seems to not be. But Schelling goes on to say that God is revealed through a moral necessity and that 'things follow from divine nature with absolute necessity, that all things possible by virtue of the divine nature must also be actual'.<sup>364</sup>

With this Schelling has found a kind of necessity, not just in individual acts of freedom, but also in large scale or trans-individual acts of freedom. Thus he has again secured a unity of freedom and system—but at what cost? The tendencies of human freedom in history have

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<sup>361</sup> *FS* 250

<sup>362</sup> *FS* 268

<sup>363</sup> *FS* 268

<sup>364</sup> *FS* 269

been reconciled with reason but only by reducing history to its anticipatable features. In other words, everything about history can be understood from its *possibility*, leaving no space for its *actuality* to diverge. To use terms from Schelling's later philosophy, it looks as though the prevalence of actual evil is the object of negative philosophy, not positive philosophy. Schelling confirms this point when he adds to this account of the *commencement* of the prevalence of evil his account of the eventual *cessation* of evil. As we know, the only thing that Schelling truly allows to be undetermined by the necessity of revelation is human freedom. And this can ultimately have no effect on the outcome of history since evil is necessarily brought to an end on Schelling's account: evil will be deprived of its force by being reduced to a subordinate role in creation ('cast out eternally into non-being') since this is 'the final intent of creation'.<sup>365</sup> It seems, then, that the factors involved in influencing both the commencement and the cessation of prevalent evil are subsumed into the necessity of self-revelation and, therefore, there is no realm in which human deeds can intervene when it comes to the tendency and shape of history.

#### 4.4.3 A posteriori factors influencing the manifestation of good and evil

This conclusion meets a complication, however, in Schelling's effort to answer the worry that his conception of human freedom disallows the possibility for individuals to change from being evil to being good. Here Schelling seems to give some weight to empirical existence for understanding how the actual world manifests good or evil. Although we are responsible for our good or evil because it results from our own decision, and is not simply pre-given to us in some way (e.g. just a property of the being we are), this deed cannot be located in time as a choice we make at some point, to which we could then be persuaded to change our mind.

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<sup>365</sup> FS 275

Our deed is, according to Schelling, eternal—it happens outside of any temporal experience we may have.<sup>366</sup> If this is the case, Schelling concedes, it looks as though no sense can be made of the phenomenon of conversion (which must happen in time). To this he responds that any aid which may move us to the good is only effective if we *allow* this aid to work on us. And this allowing is only a result of our eternal deed; that is, only if we are already good – albeit in a dormant state<sup>367</sup> – can we be persuaded to be good. Schelling gives a strong priority to our disposition here: although the empirical (temporal) world can effect a conversion, it is only effective if there is a non-temporal condition which allows it to do so. It follows, then, that this non-temporal condition – the eternal deed which only allows the empirical world influence insofar as it agrees with itself – is not itself open to such influence. It is because of this feature of Schelling’s account that I believe he cannot be saved from the conclusion that the temporal world’s effects on actual good and evil is limited to transient manifestations and not the fundamental dispositions of individuals.<sup>368</sup>

The limited role Schelling allows for empirical or temporal factors to play in the appearance of good or evil in the world does not look to make a significant impact on the historical actuality of evil. Moreover, it should be noted that even this minimal role is questionable on Schelling’s own terms in the *Freiheitsschrift*. In Schelling’s account of conversion he implicitly relies upon a distinction between the individual qua her fundamentally good disposition – her ‘inner voice’ – and the individual qua her evil state – how she ‘now is’ in contrast to her ‘own and better...essence’.<sup>369</sup> This implies that either the individual is simultaneously good and evil or else she is good in one respect and evil in another. Simultaneity must be ruled out since good and evil – insofar as they are actual and

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<sup>366</sup> *FS* 259

<sup>367</sup> ‘in the man...in whom the good principle is not completely dead’ (*FS* 262)

<sup>368</sup> For an attempt to save Schelling’s account of human freedom from this kind of problem see Charlotte Alderwick, ‘Atemporal Essence and Existential Freedom in Schelling’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 1 (2014): 115–37.

<sup>369</sup> *FS* 262

not potential or general – are exclusive alternatives for human freedom. But the other option looks no better. If an individual is good through her eternal deed, in what other regard can she *be* evil? It seems that we must be able to perform evil in the empirical (or temporal) world while our intelligible (or eternal) deed is good. Apart from the paradoxical moral dimension, this situation is incompatible with Schelling's ontology of evil. Evil cannot belong to an individual qua temporal or empirical being – in addition to their non-temporal goodness – since evil is not achieved in its actuality through empirical acts alone.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Schelling faces many difficulties in trying to show how the genuinely open part of his account of human freedom can inform a philosophy of history. The ontological inversion that occurs in evil can only be located at the individual level. It is only the intelligible deed of an individual agent that can bring about the elevation of particularity to universality—the deformation of our intelligent or spiritual nature to a mere means for self-affirmation. Schelling dedicated a significant portion of the *Freiheitsschrift* to showing how it is that the free choice for good or evil can be inclined towards evil. But this inclination remains an existential constant (the anxiety faced by all individuals at all times). When Schelling does indicate how this situation might change, it is indexed to a necessary theogonic process. Even if Schelling did not do so, it does not seem likely that he could account for historical variance. If this were possible within Schelling's framework then the principle way that this would be done would be through an account of how human action could produce conditions which produce macro-level influences for the choice for good or evil. The most obvious example of this would be in terms of political or social institutions.

Indeed, in a series of private lectures given in Stuttgart the year following the publication of the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling included a discussion of two central institutions, the modern state and the Church.<sup>370</sup> Schelling argues that the modern state is a large scale attempt to secure a non-divine unity between universal and particular. To understand what this means we should recall that earlier it was pointed out that Schelling takes the unfreedom of evil to be characterised by our empirical attempts to make good on the ‘false unity’ advanced in evil. Once we elevate the particular to the universal in our intelligible deed, we are compelled to achieve this in our conscious lives (see 4.2.2). Schelling gives a structurally equivalent description of this in terms of the ‘temporal and finite bond’ which is struggled to be attained in the modern state.<sup>371</sup> The modern state is presented as little more than an epiphenomenon of a prevalent evil in the world, rather than being a genuine historical condition upon the choice for evil. Schelling refers to the modern state as ‘a consequence of the curse that has been placed on humanity.’<sup>372</sup> Similarly, the Church seems to be allocated the status of a response to the situation of humanity rather than an historical variation introduced by human action. The Church, as an institution, is obviously the work of human action, but, on Schelling’s account, its possibility is based upon a ‘second revelation.’<sup>373</sup> The ‘depraved condition of the world’ is such that humans, being part of this condition, cannot effect a fundamental change in human disposition from evil to good (in Schelling’s terms, ‘redemption’).<sup>374</sup> God needs to intervene in order for the Church to be established. This might be obvious, but it also means that Schelling has not provided an account of how large scale changes can originate from within the non-divine world. Schelling’s comments about institutions are brief in the Stuttgart private lectures, so the success or failure of Schelling’s mature philosophy to cope with the

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<sup>370</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, ‘Stuttgart Seminars (1810; Based on Posthumous Manuscripts)’, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays*, trans. Thomas Pfau (SUNY Press, 1994), 195–243, 227–29.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 227

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 228

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

problem of historical variation cannot be established on these alone. Nevertheless, the prospects do not look good.

The other route that Schelling might want to take is to attribute an ontological inversion to the institutional level or macro-scale itself. This would certainly introduce a historical force which would overwhelm the trans-historical influence of our existential anxiety. But it is difficult to imagine what such a social ontological inversion would look like, even if it would make sense to attribute the requisite freedom to the macro-scale needed for Schelling's philosophical account of evil to work at this level. With these difficulties in mind, I now want to suggest that Adorno's philosophy of history is more promising for understanding the non-necessary occurrence of unfreedom or compulsion on a historical scale.

## 5 Adorno's philosophy of history

In this chapter I reconstruct Adorno's philosophy of history and argue that this can be done in such a way as to meet the demands on the philosophy of history that I have advanced in the preceding chapter – primarily being the need to grasp a compulsive force in history without metaphysical grounding – and answers to some of the core worries often found in response to Adorno—most notably, that his philosophy of history is based on an unwarranted pessimism. Both these issues are connected, and are ultimately addressed through the same means, namely by showing that there is no a priori necessity involved in Adorno's account of historical compulsion.

The main strategy I take for this is to show that some of the most controversial claims made by Adorno, especially as they appear in his co-authored work, with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, are more nuanced than they might first appear.<sup>375</sup> More specifically, that the forms of domination or compulsion found to drive history are not seen to be inevitable results of the kinds of beings we are, or of the kinds of relations we have with nature. In order to make this point I split Adorno's philosophy of history into three different aspects of the consideration of the issue of compulsion. First, I address the origin of compulsion, most famously outlined in the account of the prehistory of the subject in the *Dialectic* (5.2). I draw upon Adorno's later remarks regarding whether or not we can say that antagonism, conflict and domination necessarily result from our need to survive in nature. I argue that self-preservation does not make the reversion of reason to domination inevitable and, further, that the compulsive forms of reason Horkheimer and Adorno discuss, *contra* Habermas, are not made so through necessary entanglements of power and reason. Then I address the way that compulsion is understood to persist in history (5.3). I argue that not only is there no single principle (e.g. an anthropological principle of self-preservation entailing the

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<sup>375</sup> Hereafter referred to in the text as the *Dialectic*.

necessary usurpation of reason for survival) guaranteeing the reversion of reason to domination, but that the compulsive course of history cannot even be restricted to the question of reason qua faculty—thus adding a further diversity to the historical forms Adorno specifies. I also show how Adorno can make this diversity into a coherent historical narrative without falling back into the metaphysical excesses of universal history. In the process I argue against Herbert Schnädelbach's suggestion that the philosophy of history cannot be pursued without thereby making history into a singular object and thus lapsing into an unjustified metaphysics. Finally, I investigate the ways in which historical compulsion might be thought to come to an end (5.4). I defend Adorno against Habermas' criticism that the way the former can envision an end to domination is through a fanciful account of reconciliation.

One of my aims is to show that critical theory should avail itself of a philosophy of history, and that Adorno's is a good candidate towards this end. I also want to show that the *Dialectic* can be usefully approached in light of Adorno's later reflections on philosophy of history. Now, I do think that the *Dialectic* is not as guilty as is often thought regarding metaphysical excess and unwarranted pessimism. And I try to show that this is the case through the reconstruction offered here. However, I sometimes favour Adorno's mature formulations which do not always sit well with the claims of the *Dialectic*. Where it may be worried that the account of Adorno's philosophy of history which I reconstruct would be guilty of anachronism if applied to the *Dialectic*, I am ultimately happy to let the latter fall—my main concern is not to defend that work as such. Nevertheless, I hope to show the *Dialectic* to be a more promising resource for a philosophy of history amenable to the aims of critical theory than is sometimes thought.

## 5.1 How can we do philosophy of history today?

Adorno's reflections on the philosophy of history become more explicit and more worked out in his later works, most prominently in the section of *Negative Dialectics* dedicated to dealing with Hegel's philosophy of history, 'World Spirit and Natural History,' and in the corresponding lectures he gave in 1964-65 on *History and Freedom*.<sup>376</sup> In this section I present some of the general issues which Adorno's philosophy of history broaches and address some of the possible worries that this may face. In particular, I show how Adorno avoids the potential problems of pessimism and metaphysical excess of universal histories. This will provide the lens through which to consider the actual construction of a negative philosophy of history as it is found in both the *Dialectic* and in Adorno's later works.

### 5.1.1 The truth and untruth of Hegel's philosophy of history

Unlike Schelling, Adorno elaborates his philosophy of history in close dialogue with Hegel. This is because Adorno believes that Hegel's philosophy of history is, in a qualified sense, true. As noted in chapter two, Adorno interprets philosophies not only in terms of the claims or arguments made by a philosopher, but also in terms of the way that the texts themselves reflect or manifest truths beyond the explicit intension of the author. Three different respects in which Adorno thinks Hegel's philosophy reveals truth – even as it presents this in untrue or ideological form – can be specified<sup>377</sup>: (1) the identity of subject and object in Hegel's idealism registers the fact that subject and object cannot be completely opposed, otherwise

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<sup>376</sup> *ND* 300-360, *HF* 3-129

<sup>377</sup> For a more dialectically sophisticated presentation of these issues (and a suggestion as to how this relates to the possibility of social critique) see Ute Guzzoni, 'Hegel's Untruth: Some Remarks on Adorno's Critique of Hegel', in *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Simon Jarvis, trans. Nicholas Walker (London: Routledge, 2007), 84–89.

experience would not be possible<sup>378</sup>; (2) this identity bears witness to the hope that the limitations of current experience might one day be overcome<sup>379</sup>; and (3) Hegel's idealistic way of explaining things primarily through the subject or the universal – especially as found in his account of spirit – is not just a philosophical delusion, but actually reflects a primacy of the universal or the subject in the world, albeit of a different character than Hegel thought, namely, that it is not a genuine expression of freedom.<sup>380</sup> It is the last of these claims which I will focus on here.

In the third of Adorno's lectures on *History and Freedom*, he addresses the issue of the relation between facts and trends in historical explanation.<sup>381</sup> Adorno recalls his experience of having his house searched under the National Socialist regime.<sup>382</sup> He points out that the immediate experience of this event is not reducible to its socio-political analysis (he gives the examples of the awareness of the ascent of the National Socialists and the granting of certain powers to the police).<sup>383</sup> But, he argues, the real cause of this situation is due to those factors which stretch beyond the immediate experience. The problem with 'false immediacy' is that it takes the immediate cause (e.g. that police officers knock on the door at six a.m.) to be the proper explanation, rather than the 'total historical context and its direction.'<sup>384</sup> Adorno credits Hegel with a similar insight: 'In Hegel we find that these ideas have at least been registered – in the shape of objective idealism. Because of its identification of all existence with spirit, objective idealism has as its object the freedom to concede to existence the actual power that existence has over us.'<sup>385</sup> The insight is thus distorted by its transfiguration of social mediation into an apparently rational context.

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<sup>378</sup> *HTS* 40

<sup>379</sup> *HTS* 41

<sup>380</sup> *HTS* 17, 20, 27, 31-32, 87; *LND* 9, 19, 20, 40.

<sup>381</sup> *HF* 19f

<sup>382</sup> This is anonymised in the equivalent passage in *Negative Dialectics* (*ND* 301).

<sup>383</sup> *HF* 19-20

<sup>384</sup> *HF* 25

<sup>385</sup> *HF* 25

It is here that Hegel's philosophy becomes untrue. We saw in Adorno's criticism of hypostatization that Hegel attempted to show that the nonconceptual was reducible to the concept because immediacy turns out to be mediated. This is where the fact of the dominance of mediation in the world is given legitimacy through the attempt to establish its rationality in a priori philosophy. But the dominance of mediation can be ideologically presented as the prevalence of spirit without such philosophical aids (although it will not have the same pretence to ironclad truth).

The ideology of the idea's being-in-itself is so powerful because it is the truth, but it is the negative truth; what makes it ideology is its affirmative reversal. Once men have learned about the preponderance of the universal, it is all but inescapable for them to transfigure it into a spirit, as the higher being which they must propitiate. Coercion acquires meaning for them. And not without all reason: for the abstract universal of the whole, which applies the coercion, is akin to the universality of thought, the spirit. And this in turn permits the spirit, in its carrier, to be reprojected on that universality as if it were realized therein, as if it has its own reality for itself. In the spirit, the unanimity of the universal has become a subject, and in society universality is maintained only through the medium of spirit, through the abstracting operation which it performs in complete reality. Both acts converge in barter, in something subjectively thought and at the same time objectively valid, in which the objectivity of the universal and the concrete definition of the individual subjects oppose each other, unreconciled, precisely by coming to be commensurable.<sup>386</sup>

The contrast between the ideologically presented preponderance of the universal and its non-ideological form is given more detail here. We can legitimately refer to the social totality as spirit because it does have its source in human activity, in the real practice of exchange.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> *ND* 315-16

<sup>387</sup> Adorno also points out that Hegel's account of spirit contains truth in the further sense that it is fully immanent:

It is important, I say, that you should realize that this is a process in which what prevails always passes not merely over people's heads, but through them. One of the most widespread misunderstandings of Hegel, in my opinion, is what I have recently termed 'the priority of the subject'. This is a misunderstanding that must be eliminated if we wish to gain a proper appreciation of the problem we are discussing. It is essential that where such things as spirit or reason are under discussion you should not imagine that we are faced with a secularization of, let us say, the divine plan that floats above mankind, but minus the person of God. There is no suggestion here that there is such a thing as providence, but no provident Being, and that the divine plan is somehow fulfilled independently of mankind. Matters are not so simple. I believe that, if you want to understand what I am saying and what I think of as the real task of these lectures, you should not start thinking about such independent

But this practice – according to Adorno, and the Marxist tradition more generally – imposes its own function at the expense of the individuals to whom it was originally meant to serve. As Adorno puts it to another opponent (Spengler): ‘He fails to realize that institutions have become so independent that individuals are scarcely in a position to impinge on them.’<sup>388</sup> Without the genuine involvement of particular individuals in the universal, it loses its right to be properly called spirit. In short: ‘The world spirit is; but it is not a spirit.’<sup>389</sup>

With this Adorno believes he now has the resources to interpret history in a way that can go beyond the mere facts, but without giving history a meaningful or affirmative appearance. He goes as far to say that his philosophy of history can understand its object as ‘meaningless’ due to ‘the dreadful antagonistic state of affairs’ described in this standoff between the universal and particular. Even if Adorno is successful in giving an account of history that goes beyond the mere discontinuity of facts without making history meaningful, there is still the question of whether or not he ends up providing a metaphysics of the meaninglessness of history as a mere inverse of the metaphysics of the meaningfulness of history. In other words, does it end up putting an unwarranted pessimism in the place of an unwarranted optimism?

I will be arguing that Adorno is not guilty of doing this. Two ways that a philosophy of history could be found guilty of unwarranted pessimism are: (1) downplaying the particular in the account of history in favour of the (negative) universal; and (2) making meaninglessness or unfreedom a metaphysical necessity. I think Adorno’s philosophy of history avoids both these potential pitfalls. I briefly address these points generally before going on to the more detailed analysis of Adorno’s philosophy of history.

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embodiments of the spirit separate from human beings, but quite simply about such things as what is meant by the spirit of the age. (*HF* 25-26)

<sup>388</sup> *HF* 9

<sup>389</sup> *ND* 304

### 5.1.2 The relation between universal and particular

Two aspects of the first issue need to be distinguished: methodological and substantive. Methodologically, the philosopher of history must be open to understanding the role of the particular or individual whilst tracing a pattern or trend. If they fail to do so their interpretation may well be defective because metaphysically prejudiced (i.e. imposing the universal on a historical situation). But we should be on guard against this methodological desideratum slipping unnoticeably into a substantive claim that a philosophy of history would be defective if it observed the real predominance of the universal over the particular in history. I think there is a risk of misunderstanding Adorno by seeing his arguments for the real predominance of the universal in history as a methodological failure of privileging the universal.

Adorno is explicit on his commitment to the methodological issue when he summarises, in the lecture following the one describing the irreducibility of the immediacy of facts to social context (even where they depend on that context), the importance of interpreting the relation between the particular and the universal.

In short you need to grasp the complexity of the pattern, by which I mean the overall process that asserts itself, the dependence of that global process on the specific situation, and then again the mediation of the specific situation by the overall process. Furthermore, in addition to understanding this conceptual pattern, you need to press forward to the concrete, historical analysis I have hinted at and that goes beyond the categories I have been discussing.<sup>390</sup>

This methodological balance should not, however, be assumed to mean that we also need to say that a justified philosophy of history cannot claim that the universal and the particular are unbalanced in the world.

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<sup>390</sup> *HF* 37

Along with the methodological requirement, a superficial understanding of the needs of a critical theory could also lead us to be suspicious of Adorno's philosophy of history. Critical theory is fundamentally concerned with human emancipation and tries to discover what the real possibilities are for this. Now, if we thought that critical theory should primarily be occupied with motivating action (broadly construed) towards achieving the goal of emancipation, Adorno's philosophy might be seen as lacking.<sup>391</sup> But the aim of critical theory cannot simply be to motivate action, irrespective of the real possibilities for action. Adorno's claims about the preponderance of the universal over the particular have the consequence that the options for the particular or individual are curtailed; the corresponding relative lack of resources in Adorno's thought for motivating action is thus not a flaw in his critical theory, it is a flaw in reality. Indeed, a philosophy that, with the good intentions of motivating action, claimed there were more potentials than there really are would actually be oppressive.<sup>392</sup>

I have stressed that Adorno retains a desirable methodological balance between universal and particular; and that the lack of balance between them in his substantive claims about history is not to be regarded as a problem for a philosophy of history. A further issue that occurs here, however, is that the predominance of the universal does require a further distancing from the illegitimate appearance it has in other philosophies of history. Adorno has argued that the universal or trend he discovers in history is negative rather than affirmative (meaningless rather than meaningful) and that he follows the requisite attention to the particular to avoid imposing an interpretation on history. But he also needs to show that the

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<sup>391</sup> Adorno notes the objectively 'weak position' of critique, for example, at *HF* 55. Also see Adorno's response to these kinds of worries in 'Resignation,' in Theodor W Adorno, *Critical models interventions and catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 289-93.

<sup>392</sup> This concern is present in the more general issue of demanding people to be free where the possibilities for freedom are limited: 'The more freedom the subject—and the community of subjects—ascribes to itself, the greater its responsibility; and before this responsibility it must fail in a bourgeois like which in practice has never yet endowed a subject with the unabridged autonomy accorded to it in theory. Hence the subject must feel guilty.' (*ND* 221)

negative universal is not metaphysically necessary, for then it would be a mere inversion of Hegel's philosophy of history.

### 5.1.3 Contingency of compulsion

Adorno argues that Marx and Engels were at their most idealistic in the conviction that the universal which forms a totality is inevitable.<sup>393</sup> The idealism involved here is akin to the kind of worry about metaphysical excess in philosophy of history which we have been considering so far. Marx and Engels are said to have made economics prior to domination and with this made the conflict and suffering of that domination a necessary result of humans need to secure the means to sustain life. In this way a metaphysical speculation about humanity's origins provides a pattern to interpret history: the philosopher must see antagonism as a universal feature of history. There are two problems Adorno seems to be highlighting here: firstly, there is the issue of metaphysical speculation as such; secondly, there is the issue of the content of that speculation, namely making conflict a necessary result of self-preservation. These two issues are complexly intertwined so I will try to deal with them together.

The section of *Negative Dialectics* where these points are raised is titled with a question (in notable distinction from the more programmatic titles of most sections): 'Antagonism contingent?' Although Adorno does not think it desirable to say whether antagonism (i.e. the universal form of conflict in history) can be historically specified in the manner of Marx and Engels, he suggests that this is an important question anyway.

It is not idle to speculate whether antagonism was inherited in the origin of human society as a principle of *homo homini lupus*, a piece of prolonged natural history, or whether it evolved *θέσει*—and whether, even if evolved, it followed from the necessities

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<sup>393</sup> ND 321/315; cf. HF 50f.

of the survival of the species and not contingently, as it were, from archaic arbitrary acts of seizing power.<sup>394</sup>

No definitive answer is given to the question about the origin of antagonism. Indeed, in the more elaborate discussion found in the lectures on *History and Freedom*, Adorno points out that it is not possible to answer it: ‘It is hardly possible to reconstruct the primitive conditions that form the object of this dispute.’<sup>395</sup> However, it is clear that the last option – the contingency of conflict based on ‘archaic arbitrary acts of seizing power’ – is favoured. One reason is that the philosopher of history is then forced to renounce the necessity of the universal in history—and with this to lose metaphysical assurance about their interpretation.<sup>396</sup> But there are also consequences for critical theory more broadly.

In short, if conflict is made necessary, then there is no space for critical theory to oppose that conflict. Adorno elaborates:

Only if things might have gone differently; if the totality is recognized as a socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken—only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might be different some day. Theory cannot shift the huge weight of historic necessity unless the necessity has been recognized as realized appearance and historic determination is known as a metaphysical accident. Such cognition is frustrated by the metaphysics of history.<sup>397</sup>

If we are to avoid pessimistic view of history as a necessary descent – or the optimistic view of history as a necessary ascent: Marx and Engels were guilty of ‘deifying history’ by making

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<sup>394</sup> ND 321

<sup>395</sup> HF 53

<sup>396</sup> ‘...it is here that we see that unquestioned *parti pris* for the prevailing universal’ (HF 51)

<sup>397</sup> ND 323

the historic necessity end in revolution – we need to hold that historic necessity is not itself necessary—i.e. it is contingent. Modal complexities aside, this should offer some clarification to the suggestion in the above quote that the totality in history should *not* be conceived as absolute. Adorno’s account of social totality puts many people off precisely because it appears to make our situation hopeless (I address this in relation to Habermas in more detail below). But here Adorno is trying to retain hope by arguing that this totality is not absolute in the sense that it is not necessary.

Now, in the previous section I warned against allowing requirements of critical theory to shape our view of the real negativity of the situation and our belief in the potentials for emancipation. It may look as though I have forgotten just that warning. But in the previous case it was a matter of how the universal overwhelms the particular in a way which can, in principle, be open to philosophical (and social, psychological, etc.) interrogation. But now we are considering the primitive conditions of humanity which is on much shakier ground. Thus emancipatory desideratum’s have more leeway in this case. We should keep these considerations in mind when considering Adorno’s own account of the role of self-preservation and self-assertion in the philosophy of history.

## 5.2 Origin of compulsion

The claim that history forms a compulsive totality is probably known more through the earlier co-authored work, with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. More specifically, through the summarization of the critical part of the work: ‘Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.’<sup>398</sup> This captures a core part of the insight of the *Dialectic*, but – like all pithy summaries – it has its limits. Most notably, it

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<sup>398</sup> *DE* xviii

seems to level out the differences between enlightenment and myth. That is, if we see reason as the primary characteristic of enlightenment and power as the primary characteristic of myth, then reason and power are run together. And this in two ways: reason might seem to be simply reduced to expressions of power (i.e. a synchronic levelling out); and the way that reason and power are entwined at a specific historical moment could be thought to be equivalent to how they are entwined at all other historical moments (i.e. a diachronic levelling out). I argue that neither is the case.

I agree with Herbert Schnädelbach that we cannot conceive of history as a ‘singular object,’ since this would flatten out history into a seamless totality.<sup>399</sup> I disagree, however, with Schnädelbach that this means we need to abandon the philosophy of history in order to avoid this error.<sup>400</sup> I argue that the twin claim – ‘Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology’ – does not pick out a singular process which the critical theorist finds in any phenomena she wishes to turn to. Rather, I think we need to take seriously Horkheimer and Adorno’s statement that this is merely a summary.<sup>401</sup> I think this should already point us in the direction of recognising that this summary merely names a general *pattern*: distinct types of practices have, *in fact*, set up forms of compulsion. That history has mostly consisted in compulsion is not guaranteed by some underlying principle or phenomenon (e.g. self-preservation, instrumental reason, etc.). Rather, the varying forms of compulsion, from self-preservation and instrumental reason to technical rationality and exchange relations, do not have any strict necessity to form a unity. It just so happens that they have been connected in history. This is not to say that there is not a tendency for certain forms of compulsion to lead to others. But a tendency is not a necessity, and with this

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<sup>399</sup> Herbert Schnädelbach, ‘The contemporary relevance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,’ in *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Simon Jarvis, trans. Nicholas Walker (London: Routledge, 2007), 137-54, 144.

<sup>400</sup> Schnädelbach, ‘The contemporary relevance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,’ 147

<sup>401</sup> I will frequently refer to the twin claim as the ‘summary’ for brevity.

distinction we can start to see how the account of history offered in the *Dialectic* can be understood to not impose a narrative.

### 5.2.1 Prehistory of the Subject

When used to speculate on the possible origins of humanity, the summary points us towards the specific way that the domination of nature helped to liberate ourselves from the immediacy of nature's blind force, but also introduced a further compulsion. More specifically, Myth is already enlightenment in the sense that practices of ritual, rites, and magic were employed to combat our fear of nature and thus represent an early attempt to gain independence from compulsive forces. These early attempts in the prehistory of the subject were still in thrall to nature since the method of understanding nature and predicting outcomes was in fact secured by imitation; although a certain gap had been introduced between nature and us, we were still firmly in nature's compulsion. It is with the refinement of mythic practices that, instead of sacrificing ourselves directly to nature, we sacrifice our own nature itself so as to pass through the rhythms and cycles of nature alive. The famous example is of Odysseus' navigation and manipulation of mythic forces where a congealed subject properly arises in the use of 'cunning'—and thus enlightenment is already achieved in myth. Odysseus only manages to preserve himself at the cost of sacrificing his bond with nature (he must engage in renunciation of both his impulses and even his free movement in order to pass through Scylla and Charybdis with his life). The compulsion of nature, which self-assertion was to oust, returns in the compulsive relations which the self establishes.

The self wrests itself from dissolution in blind nature, whose claims are constantly reasserted by sacrifice. But it still remains trapped in the context of the natural, one living thing seeking to overcome another. Bargaining one's way out of sacrifice by means of self-preserving rationality is a form of exchange no less than was sacrifice itself. The identical, enduring self which springs from the conquest of sacrifice is itself

the product of a hard, petrified sacrificial ritual in which the human being, by opposing its consciousness to its natural context, celebrates itself.<sup>402</sup>

Although the theme of exchange announced here is one of the few features that the authors perceive in most of the phenomena investigated in the *Dialectic*, we should still take this opportunity to point out that the character of the dialectical reversion in the pre-modern setting is fundamentally about the coming into existence of a substantial subject through more or less direct entanglements with nature. The way in which reason succumbs to blind domination in this setting is through the formation of the self. The faculty of knowledge just happens to be utilised in these early attempts to liberate ourselves from nature, but the complicity of reason with power here is not the source of all future forms of domination.

This last point needs to be understood in two ways: the form of dominating reason found in this setting is not exhaustive of reason as such,<sup>403</sup> but neither is this form of dominating reason exhaustive of historically effective domination or compulsion.<sup>404</sup> The latter highlights what was said in comment to the above quote. Horkheimer and Adorno may draw a parallel between self-preservation and exchange, but it is just that: a parallel. The universal exchange relations in capital are not just self-preserving bargaining writ large. They are structurally similar practices which can be illuminated through the lens of the summary. But even if this is accepted, and we recognise that an account of the compulsive course of history can be provided without underwriting it with an anthropological account of the complicity of reason and power, we might still think that this speculation on the prehistory of the subject is suspect as an account of the genesis of the subject.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> DE 42.

<sup>403</sup> For example: 'Thought forms tend beyond that which merely exists, is merely "given." The point which thinking aims at its material is not solely a spiritualized control of nature.' (ND 19).

<sup>404</sup> I will focus on this point at 5.3. Schnädelbach stresses the first of these two points, but not the second. 'The contemporary relevance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,' 151.

<sup>405</sup> For a sustained argument for the problems of Adorno's (materialist) account of the genesis of the subject see Peter Dews, "Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics: Adorno's Relation to Schelling," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 1180–1207. As will become evident here and in the conclusion, I think that this is the wrong place to focus our attentions on Adorno.

As noted above (5.1.3), Adorno comes to think that the origin of humanity is not a proper object for philosophy. It would be anachronistic to claim that this goes for the *Dialectic* also. But the point I want to make is that the fundamental project contained in the *Dialectic* is not dependent on such prehistorical speculations. The summary still does its work even without an account of the genesis of the subject. That is, in order to understand history as forming a compulsive course, we do not need it to be grounded in the necessary emergence of power from the need to preserve ourselves. In fact, maintaining a critical consciousness about history inclines us to the hypothesis that violence preceded our self-preserving activity—which would mean the fusion of power and reason at this point would be contingent.

### 5.2.2 The reflection of blind nature in reason

To further illustrate the point that a compulsive form of history can be traced through distinct forms of domination without reducing them to a singular object of narrative (the necessity of reason to dominate for self-preservation), I now want to disentangle two specific claims: one the one hand, there is the claim about the persistence of the context of nature in the self's very domination of it, on the other hand, the claim that enlightened reasoning, especially in bourgeois society, has largely remained in a blindness of its own, which is comparable to the blindness of nature. If these are conflated then it is easy to see why so many have thought that Horkheimer and Adorno are guilty of a pernicious pessimism about enlightenment.

The most influential expression of this criticism is provided by Habermas. In the fifth lecture of the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* titled *The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment*, he presents an account of Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of compulsive forms found in the *Dialectic* and, crucially, reduces the significance of their position to a

critique of instrumental reason as such.<sup>406</sup> He claims that the procedure there is essentially a form of ideology critique: this is said to consist in a ‘suspicion’ that power lies behind every claim to validity, that all exercise of reason actually serves a heteronomous force. This is said to then turn in on itself since the privileged position from which critique unmasks the complicity of power and validity is thought to be lacking—that is, reason has not left itself any secure vantage point.<sup>407</sup> This way of reconstructing the argument of the *Dialectic* – as a self-defeating ‘suspicion of ideology [that] becomes *total*’ – gives us insight, according to Habermas, as to why the authors must necessarily ‘oversimplify its image of modernity so astoundingly.’<sup>408</sup> Habermas’ argument is that, since they can only see the various manifestations of reason in modernity as instrumental, they couldn’t appreciate that with progressive rationalisation (or demythologisation) came also the positive effect of rational spheres liberated from traditional authority. Following Weber, Habermas presents us with different spheres that have become differentiated in cultural modernity: science, morality, and art. We are correctly told that new forms of rationality occur here which are not simply at the service of other interests (external to reason). Therefore, it would seem that Habermas is justified in claiming that, since there exist forms of rationality that can engage in substantial discrimination (rather than merely express power), Horkheimer and Adorno are guilty of a blindness to any possible progression due to an illegitimate totalizing critique.

But the flaws of enlightenment rationality are not merely contained in the concept of self-assertive subjectivity. Horkheimer and Adorno do often claim that the objectifying tendencies of enlightened reason is a kind of purified form of self-preservation in the form of calculation, but the crucial point is that the continuation of blind power in reason is not solely due to non-cognitive interests infiltrating the sphere of reasons, but, more importantly, that

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<sup>406</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 106-30.

<sup>407</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 116

<sup>408</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 112-13

where reason has lapsed into a positivistic function it has become a kind of autonomous power. An immediate objection, however, could be placed simply by quoting the various passages where Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the compulsion found in thought is in fact related to the compulsion of self-preservation.<sup>409</sup> But in order to follow the argument properly it is not enough to lift out assertions of the existence of a link between the compulsion of enlightened thought and the compulsion of self-preservation. To start with, those statements themselves are ambiguous when lifted from the argument, not least because of the indeterminate and changing definition of this very link: for example, we find ‘stems...ultimately’<sup>410</sup>, ‘reflected’<sup>411</sup>, ‘entanglement’<sup>412</sup>, and various talk of *shared principles*, such as the principle of immanence<sup>413</sup> and the principle of exchange. Thus the variability and vagueness of some of the relations expressed in these connections cannot, of themselves, carry the weight of such a crucial part of interpreting the *Dialectic*. What we need to look to, then, is not the claims about how thought and self-preservation are in some sense coextensive, but at the claims which tell us in what fashion they diverge from one another. For if this divergence can be established, we can even admit that the cultivation of reason was originally a response to the need to manipulate nature without thereby saying that manifestations of reason in modernity must also be so reduced.

The following passage provides the occasion to see how, even where the theme of self-preservation and the source of reason therewith is clearly present, the compulsion of reason spins free of its original function

The exclusivity of logical laws stems from this obdurate adherence to function and ultimately from the compulsive character of self-preservation. The latter is constantly magnified into the choice between survival and doom, a choice which is reflected even in the principle that, of two contradictory propositions, only one can be true and the

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<sup>409</sup> See *DE* 23, 28, 30.

<sup>410</sup> *DE* 23.

<sup>411</sup> *DE* 23 and 30.

<sup>412</sup> *DE* 30.

<sup>413</sup> *DE* 8.

other false. The formalism of this principle and the entire logic established around it stem from the opacity and entanglement of interests in a society in which the maintenance of forms and the preservation of individuals only fortuitously coincide.<sup>414</sup>

The ultimately binary choices we face when survival is at stake is said to have been the source of the need for thought to perpetuate such laws. Although such an account of the genesis of a bivalent theory of truth is very contestable, we do not need to defend this aspect of the claim. This is because Horkheimer and Adorno do not go on to say that this ‘formalism’ exerts its force by being an expression of self-assertion; in fact, the complicity of logical laws in the maintenance of the course of society is implicitly shown to not coincide with the force of self-preservation (they ‘only fortuitously coincide’). Once this has been established, other claims about the source of thought’s compulsion in nature can be shed of its illegitimate reductive or sceptical appearance. Take the following: ‘Precisely by virtue of its irresistible logic, thought, in whose compulsive mechanism nature is reflected and perpetuated, also reflects itself as a nature oblivious of itself, as a mechanism of compulsion.’<sup>415</sup> We can now see that the ‘reflection’ involved here is not a relation of equivalence or expression, but of homology.

### **5.3 Persistence of compulsion**

Not all forms of compulsion, then, can be said to be mere expressions of the need to survive. Thus such a drive to self-preservation cannot function as the guarantee that enlightenment must return to myth. We saw that the objectionable element of formalistic reason was not that it was an expression of power, but that it establishes a distinct form of compulsion which merely mirrors that of the compulsion of nature or of the domination of nature in the self-assertion of the subject. By making this distinction I have tried to show that the claims about

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<sup>414</sup> *DE* 23.

<sup>415</sup> *DE* 30.

the social totality cannot be understood to be metaphysically grounded. I would now like to point to a further form of compulsion not reducible to either the compulsive form of formalistic reasoning or self-preserving practice, before finally addressing the question of how these can be said to form any kind of unity.

### 5.3.1 Irreducibility of compulsion

Reason can become detached from ‘the individuals who are concerned with self-preservation’ which, according to Adorno, means reason ‘degenerates into unreason.’<sup>416</sup> Up till this point I have tried to specify the distinctness of forms of compulsion by opposing the crude reading of the *Dialectic*—that all forms of domination are expressions of self-preservation. If we now turn our focus to Adorno’s lectures on *History and Freedom*, we can add another nuance to this negative philosophy of history which is not necessarily to be found in the *Dialectic*. Implied in the above quote is that the undermining of reason is not only achieved at certain points by being appropriated for the direct domination of nature (i.e. in the prehistory of the subject), but it can also be undermined through its actual separation from our needs.

...on the one side, reason can liberate itself from the particularity of obdurate particular interest but, on the other side, fail to free itself from the no less obdurate particular interest of the totality. How this problem is to be resolved is a conundrum that philosophy has failed to answer hitherto. Even worse, it is a problem which the organization of the human race has also failed to solve. It is for this reason that I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that it is a problem of the greatest possible gravity.<sup>417</sup>

Adorno does not elaborate on what he thinks the particular interests of the totality are here (instead he gives an historical example of ‘fascist race theory’). But we can guess that what he had in mind was the interest which society has in its own reproduction over and above the

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<sup>416</sup> HF 43

<sup>417</sup> HF 45

interests that individuals have in its reproduction. In other words, the profit motive which demands valorisation and accumulation of capital for its own sake.

Now, we need to be careful here. This should not be taken to mean a free floating subject it at work. As Adorno puts it: 'To this day history lacks any total subject, however construable. Its substrate is the functional connection of real individual subjects.'<sup>418</sup> It is only because humanity owes its continuation to it in some sense that it is propped up by real individuals. But the functional context itself cannot be exhaustively explained in terms of individual's own interests. This is because the interests of the totality frequently conflict with those of the individual. The basic model for this is found in the Marxist analysis of wage-labour. The worker sells their labour-power as a commodity in order to gain access to the means of subsistence. In this way the worker's livelihood is secured by the purchaser of their labour-power (the capitalist). But this very situation is also responsible for systematic exploitation. This antagonistic or contradictory position is what leaves critical theory in such a desperate situation.

The infinite weak point of every critical position (and I would like to tell you that I include my own here) is that, when confronted with such criticism, Hegel simply has the more powerful argument. This is because there is no other world than the one in which we live, or at least we have no reliable knowledge of any alternative despite all our radar screens and giant radio telescopes. So that we shall always be told: everything you are, everything you have, you owe, we owe to this odious totality, even though we cannot deny that it is an odious and abhorrent totality.<sup>419</sup>

The particular interests of the totality, the formalistic calculation, and the immediate domination of nature all are ways that reason can be compulsive. But they do not form a seamless narrative; they do not follow on from one another necessarily. If they did proceed necessarily then all historical possibilities would not be able to depart from historical reality. And it is just such a conflation of possibility and reality that Adorno claims plagues idealist

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<sup>418</sup> *ND* 304

<sup>419</sup> *HF* 47

philosophies of history, and that his aims to avoid.<sup>420</sup> Adorno goes as far to say that, at different historical points, there was always the possibility of ‘doing things differently.’<sup>421</sup>

### 5.3.2 Unity of continuity and discontinuity

If it is accepted that reason can take a compulsive form without simply being a direct expression of our immediate need to survive, the next question to ask is: how are these distinct forms of compulsive reason related to each other? This question is especially pertinent because without some account of this relation a philosophy of history would lack the ability to tell a history. In one of Adorno’s most quoted passages we find an answer.

Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history—the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men’s inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. It ends in the menace which organized mankind poses to organized men, in the epitome of discontinuity. It is the horror that verifies Hegel and stands him on his head. If he transfigured the totality of historic suffering into the positivity of the self-realizing absolute, the One and All that keeps rolling on to this day—with occasional breathing spells—would teleologically be the absolute of suffering.<sup>422</sup>

This is one of the favourite passages to call upon to confirm the suspicion that Adorno presents an inverted universal history every bit as necessary and teleological as Hegel’s. In response to the defence that Adorno insists on the possibility of breaking this history, it is sometimes thought that this is just a ‘utopian *deus ex machina*,’ thus leaving the original

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<sup>420</sup> HF 68

<sup>421</sup> HF 68

<sup>422</sup> ND 320/314

claim in tact.<sup>423</sup> But I think we have seen plenty of evidence to show that Adorno does not simply add in the possibility for an exception to a dominant course of history. Rather, he insists that the maintenance of this course is not guaranteed: the genesis of the subject need not have glued reason and violence together at the start of history; calculating reason produces a unique compulsion long after it finishes serving self-preservation; and the ‘obdurate particular interests’ of the totality, though responsible for the reproduction of the species, is not propelled by individual’s need for survival. They each control nature in different ways and are thus unified in the sense of sharing this characteristic control. But, unfortunately, Adorno does not say much more about how this unity works, or, more specifically, how the discontinuity of history is supposed to precisely relate to the continuity of history.

Brian O’Connor has recently addressed this issue. In order to make sense of this he proposes that we should keep in mind a tension between two different ‘moods’ in Adorno’s thought: first there is Adorno as the hermeneutically guided philosopher and then there is Adorno as the critical theorist preoccupied by barbarism.<sup>424</sup> O’Connor suggests that the best Adorno can do to escape the excesses of universal history is to remain alert to moments within the historical continuity of domination which can be interpreted as exceptions to the narrative of universal history (and that even this results in the meaning of these exceptions being differentially determined by that narrative).<sup>425</sup> But I think the reason this appears as the best available option is due to a too rigorously polarised account of what continuity and discontinuity could mean in the context of offering a philosophy of history.

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<sup>423</sup> Martin Jay attributes this view to Siegfried Kracauer and cites the memoranda of August 12, 1960 and July 27-28, 1964 in the Kracauer *Nachlass*. See *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 264.

<sup>424</sup> Brian O’Connor, ‘Philosophy of History’, in *Theodor Adorno: Key Concepts*, ed. Deborah Cook (Acumen, 2008), 184.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*

O'Connor quotes Adorno's claim that the unity of history is provided by 'the unity of the control of nature,' and then argues that this unity would damage the discontinuous moments of history by making each one 'commensurable' with each other.<sup>426</sup> It is not completely clear what it means for each moment to be commensurable in this context. But the meaning seems to be that each moment is reduced to the point where its meaning is nothing more than a continuation of what came before or an anticipation of what is to come.<sup>427</sup> If the control of nature is supposed to form this kind of extreme continuity – i.e. where each moment of history is just an expression of one and the same process – then Adorno would be left with an imposing narrative which left any account of discontinuity to be side-lined into sensitivity to what is not narrated, but hermeneutically attended to.

I want to suggest that we can give an account of the trajectory of history without transfiguring history into a seamless continuum. I have already argued for the specificity of the different forms of domination and that there is no strict necessary transition from one to the other. This introduces a discontinuity into the narrative of history itself. We do not need to assume that a narrative of domination must solely be characterised as the continuity in a philosophy of history, and that discontinuity must be completely other to any account of trends, patterns, or tendencies in history. To have a non-idealistic account of history does not mean having to either abandon the construction of objective trends in history or offsetting such constructions with something completely opposed to it (i.e. abstractly discontinuous). Rather, what is needed is the materialistic understanding of that objective trend itself. What this amounts to is understanding how the trend is formed in and through the particular elements rather than the latter being interpreted as mere emanations of a pure concept. As

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> I take this to be what O'Connor means by the commensurability of continuity by contrast to how he describes the incommensurability found in discontinuity: 'The notion of discontinuity tries to capture the idea that events and their actions are not intelligible simply as moments of time would be, that is, as transition points in the space between past and future. Events possess a significance – a structure – that is not made intelligible by reading them as either as the explication or development of earlier events, or as embryonic versions of later ones.' 'Philosophy of History,' 182

Adorno puts it, ‘the awareness of discontinuity goes hand in hand with the growing doubts about the possibility of understanding history as the unified unfolding of the idea.’<sup>428</sup> Continuity is not the problem as such, but a continuity that is interpreted as a homogenous continuum. To correct this we do not need to reject continuity, or abstractly oppose it to discontinuity, but understand continuity in a non-idealistic way: ‘we should not think in alternatives: we should not say history *is* continuity or history *is* discontinuity. We must say instead that history is highly continuous *in* discontinuity, in what I once referred to as the permanence of catastrophe.’<sup>429</sup>

In the reconstruction I have given this would mean that the discontinuous forms of domination produce a continuity in that they form a trend in history—a trend of increasing control of nature. But this continuity is not secured a priori, and thus there is no metaphysically objectionable positing of a universal history beyond the realities of particular conflicts (though, of course, this would still be too speculative for many). And with this there is no unwarranted pessimism—i.e. an assumption that things *must* turn out badly. This goes against the prevailing view that the commitment to the repeated reversion of reason into domination – or enlightenment into myth – is necessary. Brunkhorst expresses the prevailing view succinctly when he claims that the thesis regarding the reversion of enlightenment to myth in the *Dialectic* understands this reversion as ‘enlightenment *must* decay. This thesis expresses an a priori necessity that enlightenment must return to mythology once it is developed completely. It is not clear how we can know when we have reached this state of negative perfection. If the second thesis is true [i.e. that enlightenment reverts to mythology], enlightenment never has the chance to get rid of the original barbarism of history.’<sup>430</sup> Insofar

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<sup>428</sup> HF 91

<sup>429</sup> HF 92

<sup>430</sup> Hauke Brunkhorst, *Adorno and Critical Theory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 74. Brunkhorst goes on to say that the meaning of the reversion should be ‘simply that it *can* happen, but it must not.’ (76) He also claims that this reformulation (if it is one) is based on ‘postmetaphysical grounds.’ I cannot go into detail here about how this postmetaphysical reading relates to the interpretation of Adorno’s philosophy of history I

as my reconstruction of Adorno's philosophy of history can be attributed to the *Dialectic*, we can oppose the prevailing view of that work.

Now, it might be wondered that, if there is no necessity to the continuing history of domination, why has it been the case that the domination of nature has continued throughout history? If there is no necessity, would it not be the case that history would have broken the chain of domination at some point? These kinds of questions can initially be assuaged by noting two points: firstly, there need be no necessity for history to have followed a certain course and the requisite weaker modality is what is indicated by terms like 'trend' and 'pattern'; secondly, Adorno argues that history could have broken off into a genuine freedom, but that it just so happens that humanity has not yet managed it.<sup>431</sup> This suggests that we can think of an historically effective force which is not *self-sufficient*, that requires the support or at least acquiescence of the individuals through which it does its work. Early in the lectures on *History and Freedom* Adorno asserts that the spirit which Hegel's talks of does not simply go 'over the heads' of the individuals, but that it also goes through them. Later in the same lectures he gives some more concrete detail as to how this might be the case by stressing the role that psychological mechanisms play in reproducing the conditions which give history its shape. Even though psychology is a secondary phenomenon compared to the 'objective necessity of history,' Adorno claims that it still has a crucial role to play.<sup>432</sup> One phenomena called upon to illustrate this is a 'particular socio-psychological mechanism' whereby oppressed citizens react in a counter-intuitive way to the recognition that objective possibilities for social improvement are suppressed. Rather than anger being directed at the institutions or public figures responsible, 'people choose to identify with the inexorable

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advance here. But my hunch is that there is something between bad old metaphysics and postmetaphysics, and that what I am offering is just that. This will be an important issue to pursue, but would take me beyond the scope of the current investigation (i.e. to show that there is the possibility for a non-pessimistic view of history which rejects the optimism of idealistic accounts of history).

<sup>431</sup> *HF* 67-8

<sup>432</sup> *HF* 78

course of the world as it is.’<sup>433</sup> Now, it is true that Adorno thinks these kinds of psychological mechanism, which induce individuals to affirm the current state of things, have immense force because the course of the world has all but completely deprived us of the detachment from the world needed to resist such mechanisms. But it is clear that Adorno does not think that there is no possibility for such detachment—the very fact that the critical theorist can identify such mechanism indicates this much. So, the individual is needed for the universal to take full effect in the course of the world. There is an asymmetry in the dialectic between them, but the dialectic is not closed off entirely. ‘Psychology has become the cement of the world as it exists; it holds together the very conditions that would be seen through rationally, if this irrational cement did not exist.’<sup>434</sup> Although this ‘cement’ is engendered by the objective course of history, it does not complete its role in the continuation of this compulsive course without some agency involved. In principle, the individual or particular can resist the universal.

This is only a hint as to how a model of historical compulsion can be attained where the modality is less than strict necessity. This shows that Adorno’s philosophy of history can be committed to tracing a continuity, without falling foul of the methodological strictures outlined above (5.1.2) or asserting a pessimistic account of history. There is much more that needs to be said about how a convincing picture of the interweaving of diverse forms of domination have worked throughout history to form a narrative in absence of a metaphysical principle to underlie it. However, I believe I have at least made the possibility of this kind of philosophy of history more plausible than even the more sympathetic commentators will allow. In particular, I hope to have shown that the project of the *Dialectic* – namely, that the different forms of domination can be analysed as forming a fateful or compulsive history – can be followed. And thus, contra Schnädelbach, we need not ‘renounce all philosophy of

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<sup>433</sup> HF 77

<sup>434</sup> HF 78

*history and turn instead towards social theory.*'<sup>435</sup> It is true that the way reason or universality comes to be oppressive is not necessary and that this 'only transpires under specific conditions.'<sup>436</sup> But such conditionality does not mean that we must restrict the scope of critical theory to the social-theoretic task of 'trying out hypothetical structures'<sup>437</sup>: that is, of isolating a discrete object or phenomenon (e.g. reason qua faculty) and showing that, *if* it takes on a specific form (e.g. instrument for the domination of nature), then it will be a principle of domination. The only alternative to this, according to Schnädelbach, is a 'grand narrative' of the kind I have been arguing against in my reconstruction of Adorno's philosophy of history. This reconstruction has shown that there can be a unity to the historical process, but one which requires concrete conditions in order to keep reproducing itself.

#### **5.4 End of compulsion**

Even if it is accepted that the model of a philosophy of history I have outlined here manages to do justice to both the continuity and the discontinuity required of Adorno's account, it might still be worried that enlightened rationality is not given a fair hearing. That is, although we can see that, for instance, Horkheimer and Adorno are not guilty of claiming that reason, *qua the faculty that it is*, is only ever a tool for self-assertion, it looks like the rationalisation that occurred in modernity is still denounced as completely in the nets of historical compulsion. If this is the case then all the hard work of showing that the construction of a negative philosophy of history can proceed without metaphysically worrying commitments will have been for naught since pessimism would be reintroduced.

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<sup>435</sup> Schnädelbach, 'The contemporary relevance of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,' 147

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 151

#### 5.4.1 The possibility for emancipation

As Habermas puts it, it seems as though the ‘ambivalent’ content of modernity is levelled out due to a view of the ‘flat and faded landscape of a totally administered, calculated, and power-laden world’.<sup>438</sup> We have already shown that Horkheimer and Adorno have not committed themselves, in principle, to totalised critique since they do not claim that reason necessarily disguises power, but that certain manifestations of reason have instantiated a new form of compulsion. Thus they have not epistemologically paralysed themselves since it is possible within this framework to say that reason is not exhausted by its compulsive mode. This point is made more explicitly here:

However, while real history is woven from real suffering, which certainly does not diminish in proportion to the increase in the means of abolishing it, the fulfillment of that prospect depends on the concept. For not only does the concept, as science, distance human beings from nature, but, as the self-reflection of thought—which, in the form of science, remains fettered to the blind economic tendency—it enables the distance which perpetuates injustice to be measured. Through this remembrance of nature within the subject, a remembrance which contains the unrecognized truth of all culture, enlightenment is opposed in principle to power [*Herrschaft*]<sup>439</sup>

Reason, logic, or the concept has been at the service of a ‘blind economic tendency’, but there is the possibility of the ‘self-reflection of thought’ which not only can escape force or compulsion, but is actually ‘opposed in principle to power’. Moreover, this hope for reason is located firmly in the enlightenment, thus repudiating Habermas’ accusation that Adorno is guilty of levelling out the potentiality of modernity through ‘the diachronic comparison of modern forms of life with pre-modern ones.’<sup>440</sup> The discontinuity of modern forms of life with pre-modern ones is clearly proposed here.

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<sup>438</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 338.

<sup>439</sup> *DE* 30-32

<sup>440</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 338.

However, the emancipatory moment which Horkheimer and Adorno recognise as distinctive of modernity might still be found wanting. The emancipatory moment is characterised by the capacity of the concept to remember nature; that is, even though rationalization installs compulsive thought-forms, this process also brings the possibility that ‘nature [is] made audible in its estrangement’.<sup>441</sup> The worry with this account might be that it seems like we don’t find a genuine affirmation of the qualities of enlightenment (e.g. autonomy, the value of rationality as such), but only that we have stumbled across a by-product that can help us heal nature. Thus the modernist aim of securing autonomy seems to be abandoned in favour of the counter-enlightenment aim of a state or experience which is in principle opposed to enlightened subjectivity—only now we have the token gesture that the self-reflection of the concept can help us back to this desirable situation. This is not the case. First, the aim of this emancipatory moment is not to return to a lost state or to atone for a harm rendered (as though justice as such is desirable—this will be addressed in the next section) but to oppose *blind force*; second, nature is not idolised in this manner—the ‘harmony’ of nature is not a better situation than the ‘diremptions’ of modernity. I will now substantiate these claims.

#### 5.4.1 Nature and reconciliation

Nature does seem to occupy an ambiguous position in the argument of the *Dialectic*. It is true that the mythic relation to nature is said to have not yet succumbed to the alienation we find in bourgeois society. Horkheimer and Adorno do stress the damage done to nature by the strengthening of the subject, which plays a significant role in their diagnosis of our increasingly reified world and continues to inform Adorno’s later ethical aims of how to

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<sup>441</sup> DE 31

avoid genocide.<sup>442</sup> However, if the cost of a less damaged nature is a ‘weaker’ subject, the result would be a just as unsatisfactorily compulsive situation as in advanced technological society. Or, as Adorno puts in, in a slightly different context in *Negative Dialectics*: ‘If any harmony of the subject and object should have prevailed in those [past] days, it was a harmony like the most recent one: pressure-born and brittle.’<sup>443</sup> This indicates that the elevation of nature, or a harmony with nature, cannot be what is supposed to be brought about by the ‘remembrance’ of nature. The problem brought about by the compulsive form of reason is not the damage done to nature qua nature, but the compulsive form as such. Moreover, nature is not a contrast case to the compulsion of rationalisation but is just another mode of it.

Any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion. That has been the trajectory of European civilization. Abstraction, the instrument of enlightenment, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates: as liquidation.<sup>444</sup>

So, if there is ultimately no hierarchy proposed between a more immediate (e.g. mimetic) nature and the alienated nature of enlightenment – since both are blind force – then how are

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<sup>442</sup> Although I cannot go into detail here, I would like to suggest the ethical aspect of Adorno’s critical theory be distinguished from – what can inadequately be called – the theoretical aspect of Adorno’s critical theory. The latter is concerned to analyse and criticise large scale conditions (e.g. society, history) in their function of reproducing domination curtailing the possibilities for change (and our role in such possibilities). The former is concerned with the problem of the psychological structures of alienated subjectivity which are the condition of possibility of our cruelty to nature and others (i.e. small scale conditions). It seems to me that the wide-spread acceptance of the presupposition that critical theory is primarily about normative grounding and related questions of motivating critical activity, goes hand in hand with the overemphasis on the individual or ethical level. Adorno gives us good reason to be cautious about this move. For instance, in ‘Education After Auschwitz’: ‘I wish, however, to emphasize especially that the recurrence or non-recurrence of fascism in its decisive aspect is not a question of psychology, but of society. I speak so much of the psychological only because the other, more essential aspects lie so far out of reach of the influence of education, if not of the intervention of individuals altogether.’ ‘Education After Auschwitz’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 191-204, p. 194. In *Negative Dialectics*, published in the same year as this radio presentation, Adorno also affirms that ‘reified consciousness’ is merely an ‘epiphenomenon’ of ‘false objectivity’ (i.e. the socialized totality) (*ND* 190).

<sup>443</sup> *ND* 191

<sup>444</sup> *DE* 9

we to understand the references to nature here. To answer this brings us to the question of reconciliation.

Again, Habermas gives a very strong expression to the worry with this aspect. This time it is in the 1969 essay ‘Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity – Self-Affirmation Gone Wild’.<sup>445</sup> Here Habermas contemplates Adorno’s outline, in *Negative Dialectics*, of what the reconciled state would be. Habermas claims that appeal to reconciliation is the place where Adorno is forced to address the problem of how we can justify critique. Further, it is claimed that the model of autonomy which is anticipated in our everyday communication provides the content of reconciliation and is available to ground critique, but that Adorno chooses to remain ‘inconsistent’ (i.e. practice critique without meeting the ‘demand that the reasons for the right of criticism be made explicit’<sup>446</sup>) and instead cling to a more ‘extravagant’ version.

If the idea of reconciliation were to “evaporate” into the idea of maturity, of a life together in communication free from coercion, and if it could be unfolded in a not-yet-determined logic of ordinary language, then this reconciliation would not be universal. It would not entail the demand that nature open up its eyes, that in the condition of reconciliation we talk with animals, plants, and rocks. Marx also fastened on this idea in the name of a humanizing of nature. Like him, Adorno (and also Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Bloch) entertained doubts that the emancipation of humanity is possible without the resurrection of nature. Could humans talk with one another without anxiety and repression unless at the same time they interacted with the nature around them as they would with brothers and sisters? The “dialectic of the enlightenment” remains profoundly undecided as to whether with the first act of violent self-assertion (which meant both the technological control of external nature and the repression of one’s own nature) a sympathetic bond has been torn asunder that has to be re-established through reconciliation, or whether universal reconciliation is not a rather extravagant idea.<sup>447</sup>

I have already argued that what Adorno means by reconciliation cannot be a re-establishment of a lost sympathetic bond – and thus does not hold the extravagant view – but neither does

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<sup>445</sup> Habermas, ‘Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity – Self-Affirmation Gone Wild’ (1969), in Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-political Profiles* (MIT Press, 1985), p. 99-109.

<sup>446</sup> Habermas, ‘The Primal History of Subjectivity’, 106

<sup>447</sup> Habermas, ‘The Primal History of Subjectivity’, 107-8

he want the moderate or tamed version. So, Habermas' insinuation that the reason we would be inclined to reject his version is if we were stubbornly attached to a fanciful account should be rejected. Adorno need not accept this forced choice.

To start with, the problem with the model of communicative reconciliation is not that it is not 'universal' enough but that it only aims to create a kind of fairness where every one can have their say. Even if this were extended to allow nature to have its say also (and become more 'universal') this would still not answer the problem which reconciliation is supposed to answer. Adorno does actually recognise aspects of modernity which Habermas takes to provide the ground with which to critique power, such as autonomy, political maturity, and self-reflection.<sup>448</sup> But, although these progressive aspects of modernity can mitigate manifestations of coercion in the world, they can be perfectly complicit in the repetitive course of the world more generally.

But how are we to understand the difference between the form of force that is resisted in the modest form of reconciliation qua autonomy, and the form of force that Adorno's reconciliation aims to address. As suggested, Adorno does think that securing fair exchange would be an admirable task but that this does not exhaust our problems. For a fair exchange does not, *prima facie*, address the power that the merely existent has over us in the enlightened world—the force of the status quo to maintain itself. That this expresses the problem Adorno is motivated by – and not the fanciful aim of talking with nature – has already been suggested via the argument that our immersion in the bloody force of nature would not be any better than the brutal domination we have; now we should also add that the force in question is not the force of one partner over another, but the *blind* force of the ceaseless repetition of the existent. 'The suppression of instinct which constitutes them as selves and separates them from beasts was the introverted form of the repression existing

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<sup>448</sup> For example, see 'Free Time,' in *Critical models interventions and catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 167-75.

within the hopelessly closed cycle of nature'.<sup>449</sup> Although I have distinguished the problem of the constitution of the self in prehistory from the positivistic rationality prevalent in bourgeois society, the point made in this quote stands: the problem is not that of the harm rendered when one party in the conversation imposes themselves on another (whether that party is nature, the self, or positivistic rationality) – and that what is needed is a correct balance – but that when one predominates we have a repetitious, fateful, or compulsive development. The overcoming of the hitherto compulsive form of history is not, then, achieved in a fanciful reconciled state. Rather, it would be achieved when the universal trend in history no longer suppressed the particular, but was responsive to it.

## 5.5 Conclusion

I have offered a defence of Adorno's philosophy of history in terms of its ability to construct an account of the role of the concept or universal in history without succumbing to either optimism or pessimism. The primary way this was achieved was by showing that Adorno can trace a continuity in history without thereby positing a 'singular object' which would mean the critical theorist is faced with the task of idealistically fitting in the facts to suit the metaphysical model advanced.

Because I have limited myself to showing that this kind of philosophy of history is possible (or at least plausible), I have not elaborated a comprehensive interpretation of history on the basis of Adorno's insights. It is obvious that this would be a large undertaking on its own. But there are more modest tasks that might be expected to be tackled which I have not had the space to pursue. Perhaps most obviously, the task of showing that there really is prevalent compulsion in the world which would require the philosophy of history I propose. I

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<sup>449</sup> DE 55

have mainly justified the negative account of history by showing how other available philosophies of history are necessarily incapable of perceiving pervasive unfreedom or a history propelled by compulsion. That is, I have argued that if we do not want to be deluded about the state of human history we must, at the least, find a way of understanding history that can be sensitive to the possibility that history has been compulsive rather than using philosophical frameworks which rule out this possibility before we even get started interpreting the realities of history.

Since I have also argued that the negativity which Adorno's philosophy of history identifies is not metaphysically grounded, this account is open to falsification in a way that is not possible for Hegel's philosophy of history; nor is this possible for the reconstructed Hegelian philosophies of history or for Schelling's *Spätphilosophie*—although the latter case is more complicated because its claims for the divinity of history are epistemically open to an extent, but not enough to be able to perceive pervasive unfreedom. In this way, even before we turn to a substantive interpretation of history, Adorno's account has the upper hand due to the methodological advantage of not imposing illegitimate a priori constrictions on what kinds of phenomena can be found.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Schelling and Adorno are insightful critics of Hegel's idealism and that the results of their interrogation of the concept led them to understand the dangers of unwarranted optimism when philosophy turns to our historical situation. The alternative accounts of history Schelling and Adorno advance was seen to take seriously the problem of the role of the concept both in the philosophers activity of thinking history and its reality in the philosopher's object, in historical reality itself. Ultimately, I have argued that Adorno's conception of historical compulsion is better able to face the challenges of constructing a philosophy of history without metaphysical restrictions on how we can interpret the course of history. A more general result of this research has been to unearth the ways in which idealism and unwarranted optimism can covertly and persistently enter into philosophy; and to show the strenuous effort that is needed to uncover and oppose idealism and unwarranted optimism. I would like to discuss the consequences of this before turning to remaining questions regarding Schelling's and Adorno's philosophies of history and broader worries about the philosophy of history.

At first sight Hegel might not seem like the best example of subtlety in this regard, but my reconstruction of Schelling's and Adorno's criticisms have hopefully shown that we should question this first impression. The subtlety revealed was found in the nature and scope of Hegel's claims themselves, and in the way Hegel tries to get to those claims. With the aid of Schelling's distinction between positive and negative philosophy we were able to see how the animation of the concept gives Hegel part of what he needs for his theological aims—and without needing a pre-critical or obviously excessive metaphysics. The subtlety of the critical metaphysical position which Schelling helps us identify in Hegel's thought would still be considered quite robust or bold however. It is because of this that I went on to show how much more modest Hegelian accounts of history end up securing an unwarranted optimism

nearly as robust as Hegel had intended. These accounts managed to give an important role to the empirical, contingent, and the individual for the understanding of the development of history. It is precisely these kinds of concerns which Adorno claimed that Hegel was disinterested in, and which philosophy must turn to in order to combat idealistic prejudices.<sup>450</sup> Yet the manner of inclusion of these elements into the reconstructed Hegelian account was shown to have not escaped an a priori assurance that these elements could not fundamentally challenge the continuing progress of freedom. Thus we find great subtlety in the way that unwarranted optimism is snuck back into philosophy.

The type of overextension of the concept Adorno grappled with was less obviously metaphysically excessive than the one Schelling was concerned by. The type of unwarranted optimism entailed by it was accordingly less robust also. Rather than the guarantee of the development of freedom, it was an a priori assurance that universal and particular, concept and nonconcept, will always have a harmonious relation. This does not already offer the ground for substantive claims about the development of freedom or the realisation of God, but it does give us the minimal reassurance that things can never get too bad. I showed how we do not need to sign on to many of Hegel's most robust claims in the *Logic* in order to allow this a priori assurance infiltrate out thinking. I argued that the 'non-metaphysical' readers of Hegel even enlist the argument for complete mediation, and that this is perfectly compatible with the declaration to be keeping their hands clean of the most obviously objectionable metaphysics (for instance, the non-metaphysical readers could retain their neutral or agnostic stance on questions of existing entities and thus avoid many of the egregious metaphysical positions often attributed to Hegel—reduction of world to mind or the bestowal of mind-like qualities on the world). So, many contemporary Hegelian's have not managed to avoid an implicit, unwarranted optimism, even where they marshal powerful

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<sup>450</sup> ND 8

interpretative and reconstructive resources to establish a position free of many of the traditionally excessive parts of Hegel's metaphysics.

The subtlety was not only present in the type of claims Schelling and Adorno found in Hegel's (and Hegelian's) thought; it was in the philosophical operations utilised therein. Both Schelling and Adorno exposed the illicit means Hegel used to secure his claims. Schelling helps us see an important problem in the exposition of the concept in the *Logic* and has consequences for future research into the possibility of a presuppositionless science in the way that Hegel intended. Previously Schelling contribution to this area was seen as insignificant, but hopefully this widespread view can begin to be altered. Even though this is an important result, I think Adorno's uncovering of a form of transcendental illusion in a fundamental mode of Hegel's thinking as such has a much broader significance and a potentially greater impact on our understanding of how philosophy can perennially end up affirming the priority of the concept. Outside of the ambitious aim of providing an immanent and presuppositionless exposition of the pure concept, very few are going to make the mistake of surreptitiously enlisting the split between the observer and the observed in the transcendental realm in order to generate movement.

But the general error of mistaking the fact that everything known must pass through the subject in some fashion, for the grounding role of the subject in knowing is not so limited. Adorno believes most philosophy to have fallen into this error, but, famously, he specifically targets phenomenology and ontology—which Adorno largely treated as synonymous with Husserl and Heidegger. There has often been a danger of miscommunication between the parties of this debate; indeed, there has not been much of a debate at all.<sup>451</sup> The polemic and political tenor of Adorno's engagement here is often identified as the major barrier. This may be true, but I think that one way to cut through this potentially off putting aspect is to focus

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<sup>451</sup> See the editors introduction to a recent collection of essays on Adorno and Heidegger for a helpful account of the problems of a debate between these two: Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, eds., *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions* (Stanford University Press, 2008).

on the substance of Adorno's claims about the problem of the relation between the concept and the nonconceptual and his reinvention of Kant's diagnosis of transcendental illusion. In combination with the more nuanced account I give of Adorno's understanding of identity philosophy this should hopefully offer one way to stage a genuine confrontation between the claims of materialist philosophy and that of the ontological philosophies. In other words, this might give new direction to a dialogue which is not limited to comparison of these thinkers (i.e. pointing out their similarities and differences), but neither consigned to a stalemate where there is no shared ground for discussion. What I have in mind here is to drop the insults that Adorno levels at Heidegger – e.g. irrationalism, jargon, 'the leader principle' – and the dismissals that Heideggerians direct at Adorno – e.g. not real philosophy, mere sociology – and pursue an ongoing investigation into whether or not it is possible to meaningfully talk about something beyond the subject-object relation in philosophy without succumbing to illusions.<sup>452</sup>

Hopefully this shows that Schelling's and Adorno's target is not as narrow as it might appear. I would now like to suggest that the problem with idealism and the way that unwarranted optimism can sneak into philosophy is even broader. Adorno was conscious of the fact that his relentless criticism of idealism and identity philosophy seemed to have been left superfluous by the progress of thought. It is worth quoting Adorno's following remarks at length as he puts this issue into sharp focus.

...dialectics as critique implies the criticism of any hypostatization of the mind as the primary thing, the thing that underpins everything else. I remember how I once explained all this to Brecht when we were together in exile. Brecht reacted by saying that these matters had all been settled long since – and what he had in mind was the materialist dialectic – and that there was no point in harking back to a controversy that had been

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<sup>452</sup> This would be a way to frame a philosophical debate between Heidegger and Adorno with a minimal amount of presuppositions from either side. Brian O'Connor has provided a clear and helpful account of Adorno's criticism of Heidegger, but ultimately the substance of that account amounts to saying that 'Heidegger fails to conform with the thesis of mediation.' Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 164.

superseded by the unreal course of history. I am unable to agree with this. [...] I believe...that at present a true philosophical critique of the hypostasis of mind is fully justified because this hypostasis is proving irresistible to philosophy, which after all operates in the medium of the intellect, which thrives exclusively and at all times in the mind. I believe that everyone who has ever learnt to appreciate what great philosophy is will have experienced the force of this thesis of the primacy of the spirit that is to be found in every so-called first philosophy. And a form of thinking that simply retreats from this experience instead of reacting, once it has come to be thought dubious, by measuring itself against it and setting it in motion with the aid of its own power, any such thinking will be doomed to impotence. Do not forget that the very fact that thinking takes place in concepts ensures that the faculty that produces concepts, namely mind, is manoeuvred into a kind of position of priority from the very outset; and that if you concede even an inch to this priority of spirit – whether in the shape of the ‘givens’ that present themselves to the mind in the form of sense data or in the shape of categories – if you concede even an inch to this principle, then there is in fact no escape from it.<sup>453</sup>

Two important points come out of this passage: first, that the error of hypostatization is much more powerful than is usually understood; second, that the explicit orientation of a philosophy (e.g. empiricist or rationalist) is not enough to ward off this error. I will briefly elaborate on each.

Adorno points out that hypostatization is ‘proving irresistible to philosophy,’ and he cites the fact that philosophy’s home is precisely in the intellect and that its native instrument is the concept. As I suggested in chapter 2, it makes sense to understand this as a part of a doctrine of transcendental illusion. Both Kant and Adorno hold that this illusion is inevitable, even if they propose strategies for how the philosophy can be on guard to limit the damage they can do. The central distinction I drew between Adorno’s and Kant’s account was that fact that, on Adorno’s account, hypostatization can occur even without the claim to know about a transcendent entity. Thus we do not need to be involved in the dubious task of claiming to know about certain objects which are widely held to be invalid for philosophy or any other discipline; in this way the illusion is not only inevitable, but its affirmation is likely to be affirmed with less resistance than we might think. This brings us to the second point. A philosophy need not even contain any of the claims or doctrines that we usually associate

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<sup>453</sup> LND 21

with positions which aim to posit the primacy of mind or the identity of concept and the nonconceptual. Unwarranted confidence in the power and scope of thought can appear in the guise of its opposite. Even where a philosophy proposes doctrines which privilege matter, for instance, idealism can still be found in the way that this philosophy proceeds. If this philosophy is presented as a system where the philosopher upholds the ability of thought to grasp everything, the content is in effect evaporated into thought and thus ‘proceeds idealistically advancing any arguments for idealism.’<sup>454</sup> Adorno also says something similar about philosophies which posit something as primary—i.e. first philosophy.<sup>455</sup>

Of course, not many philosophers today would claim to be doing systematic or first philosophy. But, according to Adorno, just as idealistic ways of thinking are found outside of philosophies which promote identifiable doctrines of idealism, systematic thinking is not restricted to system builders.

Traditional thinking, and the common-sense habits it left behind after fading out philosophically, demand a frame of reference in which all things have their place. Not too much importance is attached to the intelligibility of the frame—it may even be laid down in dogmatic axioms—if only each reflection can be localized, and if unframed thoughts are kept out. But a cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects *à fond perdu*. The vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inconclusiveness, the negative as which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is untrue for untruth only.<sup>456</sup>

The common sense habits Adorno highlights here are an example of the way that the idealistic error of identity philosophy can persist well beyond the realm of specific philosophical systems. Hopefully this indicates that the problems of Hegel’s idealism I have been dealing with are of concern to non-specialists. The problem of the illusion of making thought primary can extend to less obviously metaphysically excessive thinking and, with

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<sup>454</sup> ND 24

<sup>455</sup> ND 40

<sup>456</sup> ND 33

this, optimism can covertly guide our interpretations without signing up to naive views about progress.

There are many things I could not address in the course of this study. I would now like to touch upon some of the further questions raised by the results of the current research. First, some of the outstanding differences and tensions in Schelling's and Adorno's understanding of history will be addressed; specifically regarding the scope for understanding meaning in history. Then I give further consideration to the possible responses that a Hegelian could offer to the judgment that Hegel's philosophy of history cannot escape unwarranted assumptions because of Hegel's idealist arguments for the reach of the concept. This primarily entails considering the view that Hegel's pure theoretical philosophy need not underwrite his practical philosophy.

Although I have argued that Adorno's philosophy of history shows more promise for opposing unwarranted optimism, the case cannot be closed quite yet. Schelling's *Spätphilosophie* may not be able to countenance the possibility of an oppressive course of history, but Adorno's philosophy cannot countenance the possibility of a meaningful history beyond human freedom. This might not trouble the philosopher of history that much since, if Adorno's hopes for the transformation of 'unreflecting rationality'<sup>457</sup> into a truly reflective and human rationality were satisfied, it could be asked: what more do you want? As Schelling's despairing remarks make clear at the beginning of the Berlin lectures, we could want a purposeful existence. For Schelling this means a purpose beyond free activity or self-organising societies since meaning can only be supplied ultimately by answering the question: 'Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?'<sup>458</sup> No reason can be offered which would finally answer this question, if by reason we mean a self-sufficient or self-grounded concept. Schelling ends up making a central role for revelation in his thought

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<sup>457</sup> HF 13

<sup>458</sup> GPP 93-94/SW 13:7

in order to approach these overarching questions. The extent to which Schelling succeeds in bringing philosophy and religion into a dialogue without reducing one to the other is a problem for another study. But we can point out that, at the least, Schelling does not want to replace the authority of reason with that of revelation. Instead he claims that it is only if reason can appropriate revealed truths that we can have a genuine and free relation to truth. This indicates that there must be a dialectic between reason and revelation. But very few are willing to take Schelling's theology or philosophical religion seriously today.<sup>459</sup> Of course, it is not just the apparent weaknesses in Schelling's philosophy on this score which would generate this response, but the fact that such topics or concerns are far outside the mainstream of ethical concerns in political philosophy, moral philosophy, or indeed critical theory.

It has often been noted that theological themes are to be found in Adorno's thought.<sup>460</sup> But there can be little doubt that Adorno never signed up for the kind of philosophical religion Schelling proposes. Whether or not Adorno should have paid more attention to religion in his understanding of history is a question which ultimately converges on the question of the role of religion and theology in emancipatory thought as such. In order to further explore Adorno and Schelling on these issues, then, it would be interesting to see how they fit into the current prominence of political theology, partly brought into the mainstream of critical theory through the work of Giorgio Agamben.<sup>461</sup>

I argued in chapter 4 that reconstructed Hegelian accounts of the philosophy of history, although making the concept face the empirical or contingent, still distort history by retaining

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<sup>459</sup> A typical response to this issue is to claim that we can salvage insights from Schelling's mature thought without needing to take on the religious or theological baggage. For instance, see Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 129.

<sup>460</sup> Some of the most prevalent theological or religious themes commentators find in Adorno's thought include messianism, the ban on images (*Bilderverbot*), and negative theology. For attempts to understand what the appearances of these themes might mean outside their theological context, see Rebecca Comay, 'Materialist Mutations of the *Bilderverbot*', in *Sites of Vision: The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, ed. David Michael Levin (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997), 337–87; and James Gordon Finlayson, 'On Not Being Silent in the Darkness: Adorno's Singular Apophaticism', *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 1 (2012): 1–32.

<sup>461</sup> For a recent comparison between Adorno and Agamben see Christopher Craig Brittain, 'Political Theology at a Standstill: Adorno and Agamben on the Messianic', *Thesis Eleven* 102, no. 1 (8 January 2010): 39–56.

a residual unwarranted optimism. Moreover, I argued that this residue cannot in principle be excoriated without failing to be Hegelian in any recognisable sense. Now, some contemporary Hegelians, like Fredrick Neuhouer, argue that philosophy can gain insight into social and political reality through Hegel's thought independent of the baggage that comes with the *Logic*.<sup>462</sup> Critical responses to this line of thought have argued that this cannot be the case. However, for arguments sake, I would like to briefly consider what might be the upshot if Neuhouer is correct.

If Hegel's social and political thought has a claim beyond any problems that the theory of the concept – laid out in the *Logic* – might face then this is all well and good. This would mean that Hegel's texts express insight beyond the idealistic machinery of the self-knowing concept. It will be recalled that Adorno's held a similar hope: that Hegel's dialectic contained experiences incompatible with the idealistic justification he gave to it. The question to be addressed then is: in what sense does the mining for these kinds of insights or experiences wed us to Hegel's philosophy? Neuhouer claims to be faithful to the letter of Hegel's texts.<sup>463</sup> But this faithfulness is limited to the texts which he considers—not Hegel's system as a whole. Adorno is suspicious of this kind of approach to the truth in Hegel's thought. He thinks that the reason Hegel's philosophy does express truth is precisely because of its idealistic excess.

At the present time Hegelian philosophy, and all dialectical thought, is subject to the paradox that it has been rendered obsolete by science and scholarship while being at the same time more timely than ever in its opposition to them. This paradox must be endured and not concealed under a cry of "back to. . ." or an effort to divide the sheep from the goats within Hegel's philosophy. Whether we have only an academic renaissance of Hegel that it is itself long outdated or whether contemporary consciousness finds in Hegel a truth content whose time is due depends on whether that paradox is endured or not. If one wishes to avoid half-heartedly preserving what people praise as Hegel's sense of reality while at the same time watering down his philosophy, one has no choice but to

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<sup>462</sup> Frederick Neuhouer, 'On Detaching Hegel's Social Philosophy From His Metaphysics', *The Owl of Minerva* 36, no. 1 (2004): 31–42.

<sup>463</sup> Frederick Neuhouer, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom*, (Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.

put the very moments in him that cause consternation into relation to the experiences his philosophy incorporates, even if those experiences are encoded within it and their truth is concealed.<sup>464</sup>

Whether or not we accept Adorno's point here depends on how we understand the relation between the pure and non-pure sides of Hegel's philosophy. I said at the beginning of the introduction to this study that one of Hegel's biggest challenges lies in explaining how these two sides to his philosophy relate. We could just give up on that problem all together—we could save the non-pure part and neglect the pure part. But this would be to assume from the start that Hegel's conviction that the concept as it is in the world and as it is analysed by the philosopher is one and the same. Hegel's conviction might be wrong; indeed a large part of the current study argues that it is. But if we *assume* that it is wrong we would never discover the truth that lay hidden in this untruth. Of course, to be worried about the latter issue is already to sign on to Adorno's understanding of Hegel. In this sense I have meanly sharpened the different approaches we can take to Hegel. But, if I have managed to show how Schelling and Adorno elaborate important philosophies through their struggle with the relation between the pure and non-pure parts of Hegel's philosophy, then I have at least given enough weight to this approach that those wanting to continue working with or through Hegel should take this problem seriously.

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<sup>464</sup> *HTS* 55-56

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