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Heidegger and German Idealism

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Heidegger's early relationship to the German Idealists has its ups and downs. Late in life he recalls how, in the "exciting years" between 1910 and 1914, he had developed a "growing interest in Hegel and Schelling" (GA 1: 56). A decade later he had clearly soured on both thinkers, especially Hegel, whom he accuses of "confusing us with God" (GA 21: 267). At the conclusion of his Habilitation in 1916, after pleading for investigation of "the living, historical spirit" out of which categories emerge, he does call for critical engagement with Hegel's system, "the most powerful in its fullness as in its depth, reach of experience, and conceptual formation" (GA 1: 410ff). However, in his initial lectures after the war, presenting himself as a phenomenologist for whom the future of philosophy consists in a "non-theoretical science" that breaks with traditional ontology, Heidegger finds himself squarely at odds with German Idealism, which he saw as the "acme" of theoretical consciousness. Convinced that "the idea of the *system* . . . was illusory," he speaks of forming a "front against Hegel." He takes Natorp's system and Rickert's philosophy of value to task as descendants, respectively, of Hegel's "absolutizing of the theoretical" and Fichte's doctrine of the primacy of practical reason (Strube 2003: 94ff).

Schelling is not mentioned in this context, probably because Heidegger considered him merely a "literary figure," or at least he did until 1926 when, prodded by Jaspers, he began reading Schelling's writings – especially his *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom* (hereafter "Freedom Essay") – in earnest. In a letter to Jaspers from this period, Heidegger writes: "Schelling ventures much further philosophically than Hegel, even though he is conceptually less orderly" (Heidegger and Jaspers 1990: 62; Gadamer 1981: 432). Though Heidegger offers an early seminar on Schelling's Freedom Essay in 1927–8, his reading of Schelling does not bear fruit that Heidegger deems worthy of publication for another decade or more.

Toward the end of *Being and Time*, Heidegger does discuss Hegel's attempt to explain how the human spirit and time are related and, thereby, how the history of the human spirit can transpire in time. Yet, while part of Heidegger's motivation is to call attention to Hegel's under-appreciated concept of time, his main aim is to drive home the distinctiveness of his interpretation of human existence in terms of temporality by contrasting it with Hegel's conception of the relation of time and spirit. In this light, he chides Hegel for taking the bearings for his analysis of time from an overly simplified

("vulgar"), albeit traditional, concept of time as an ever-present sequence of nows. In addition, he makes the controversial point that, contrary to Hegel's "construction" of a connection between spirit and time, the existential analysis of Dasein begins in the "concretion" of factically thrown existence "in order to reveal temporality as what originally enables it [existence]" (SZ: 435–6; Sell 1998: 76ff).

This discussion of Hegel's concept of time and its connection with spirit, while highly critical, marks the beginning of a basic change in attitude toward the German Idealists (hereafter simply "Idealists"), as Heidegger's early dismissal of them gives way to ever-mounting respect and critical engagement. From this point on, Heidegger repeatedly challenges conventional wisdom by arguing that the aftermath of German Idealism marks not its collapse, but rather a deterioration of philosophical thinking to a level far below it. The philosophical creativity, radicalness, and raw metaphysical ambition of Schelling, Hegel, and Fichte increasingly become a cause of wonder to him and, more importantly, a challenge he cannot ignore. Taking the time finally to read the Idealists for himself (as he puts it in a letter to Jaspers; Heidegger and Jaspers 1990: 123), Heidegger could not help but recognize a series of similarities with his own ambitions: resisting the untested presuppositions of scientific naturalism, religious dogmatism, a worldless, ahistorical subjectivity and the philosophically ungrounded worldviews engendered by them – and resisting them in favor of a thoroughgoing attempt to think things through completely, radically, and concretely. Not surprisingly, many aspects of their thought can be and, indeed, were read – to Heidegger's dismay, in some cases – as anticipating his thinking in *Being and Time*. Yet whether critics provided the spur to Heidegger's rediscovery of the Idealists or not, this first serious reading of their works also helped him to appreciate not only that the critics had a point but also that the Idealists command an essential place in the history of Western metaphysics and, hence, in his project of deconstructing it (thereby considerably expanding the originally planned second part of *Being and Time*). Moreover, after Heidegger moves away from the transcendental phenomenology and fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*, his thinking incorporates issues and insights introduced in the context of Idealist metaphysics, a fact that, at the very least, raises questions about his allegedly post-metaphysical turn. For all these reasons, Heidegger lectures and writes frequently on works of the Idealists, seizing each interpretation as an opportunity to clarify his own thinking by comparison and contrast.

Following the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's relationship to the Idealists passes through four principal phases (though the third and fourth phases overlap for a time). The first phase, his awakening to the significance of German Idealism, coincides with his initial efforts, in the first few years following the publication of *Being and Time*, to elaborate fundamental ontology as a "metaphysics of Dasein." In this first phase, dominated by lectures on "German Idealism," given in 1929, Fichte figures more prominently than do Schelling or Hegel. In the second phase, the major turn in Heidegger's thinking after 1929 away from fundamental ontology begins to take shape precisely as Heidegger lectures on the "crossroads" of his thinking with Hegel's (Sell 1998: 26ff; GA 32: 113). While this second phase is transitional, the same cannot be said for the last two phases, each dating from the mid-1930s, as Heidegger attempts to prepare for a new, non-metaphysical beginning for philosophy, what he deems "thinking being historically," i.e. thinking being as an event in which human beings play an

essential role (GA 65: 422–3, 431). In the third phase Heidegger lectures twice (1936 and 1941) on Schelling's Freedom Essay as "the pinnacle of the metaphysics of German Idealism," which nonetheless makes some "individual thrusts" in the direction of Heidegger's new beginning, indeed, "driving German Idealism from within beyond its own basic position" (GA 42: 6/Heidegger 1985: 4). In the fourth and final phase of Heidegger's encounter with the Idealists, he clarifies his post-metaphysical turn by distinguishing it from Hegel's metaphysics as the culmination of Western metaphysics (Heidegger 2003: 89ff). In the series of studies from 1936 to 1958 that mark this fourth phase, Heidegger is concerned with establishing Hegel's trenchant elaboration of the modern conception of being, yet as a legacy of Greek thinking. The import of the exercise is to provide an indirect argument for a new beginning, one that takes its bearings not from metaphysics' leading question ("What is?"), but from the basic but forgotten question of being ("What is being?" or, alternatively, "What does it mean to be?").

Earlier I mentioned the overlap between the third and fourth phases, dominated respectively by Schelling and Hegel. Although Heidegger early on found, as noted, a particular resonance with Schelling's thinking, he increasingly takes pains after 1940 to compare and contrast Schelling's and Hegel's thinking, a move which probably facilitated the change in focus from Schelling to Hegel after 1945 (GA 49: 181–5). In any event, after 1930 Heidegger does not lecture again on Fichte nor after 1945 on Schelling; but extended references to Hegel and treatments of his works can be found from 1916 to 1958.

There is much to be said for the charge that Heidegger's readings of the Idealists are in various respects tendentious, a point ably made even by authors highly appreciative of Heidegger's thinking, e.g. Walter Schulz, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Otto Pöggeler, David Kolb, Annette Sell. The following study attempts not to address these various criticisms, but to help to lay the groundwork for assessing them. Its aim is to highlight Heidegger's central contentions in each phase of his engagement with German Idealism and to do so with a view to their significance for his own thinking.

The First Phase: Fichte's "Metaphysics of Dasein" and Its Systemic Betrayal

Heidegger's brief initial engagement with the Idealists demonstrates to him just how much his fundamental ontology, especially in its deliberate appropriations and departures from Kant's transcendental philosophy, coincides with their efforts to develop a post-Kantian metaphysics. In their reconfigurations of Kant's theories of imagination and judgment in particular, Heidegger recognized unmistakable anticipations of his own Kant-interpretation (GA 28: 108–13, 163–71, 260–3). Not surprisingly, the last chapter of Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, published the same year that he delivered the lectures on German Idealism, essentially overlaps with the opening chapter of the published lectures.

In both settings Heidegger presents his project of fundamental ontology as the only legitimate inference to be drawn from the two basic tendencies of contemporary philosophy at the time, namely philosophical anthropology (the search for a unified conception of humanity in the face of a proliferation of approaches and findings) and a

new metaphysics (the effort to overturn a one-sidedly epistemological orientation and to renew questions about the totality and ultimacy of things). Heidegger appreciated the inseparability of these two tendencies, but located their unity, not (like Scheler) in philosophical anthropology, but in fundamental ontology. Heidegger's fundamental ontology holds that a human being's most basic determination (prior to its place in the cosmos) is its understanding of being. There is, he accordingly stresses, "an inner connection" between the basic question of metaphysics and the metaphysics of Dasein (GA 28: 18–23, 46). In other words, Heidegger attempts to drive home that inner connection through his readings of the Idealists, just as he had in his interpretation of Kant (as the substitution of essentially the same material in both the lectures and the Kant-book already suggests). Indeed, the issue had become more pressing in the wake of recent critics' anthropological misunderstandings of *Being and Time*, some of which he addresses in these lectures. Thus, he reads Fichte's *Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Science* as a "metaphysics of Dasein" and "foundation of metaphysics" (GA 28: 103, 132–9, 241).

At one level this reading appears counterintuitive since Fichte is working toward an absolute system. But Heidegger turns to Idealist systems precisely to demonstrate the supposedly ineluctable finitude of human understanding of being and, thus, human existence itself (the "always already" factual, historical contextuality of being-here: *Da-sein*). Accordingly, one of his strategies is to demonstrate how the dialectical method of these systems, first introduced by Fichte, presupposes not only what it sets out to prove, but also what it does not set out to prove yet gives the proof whatever trenchancy it has. In this way Heidegger finds corroboration for his conception – at the time – of the fundamental convergence of the basic question of metaphysics and a hermeneutically circular metaphysics of human existence.

The 1929 lectures on German Idealism have been dubbed "the Fichte lectures," because well over two-thirds of them, following the opening chapter just discussed, are taken up with the three parts of Fichte's "Doctrine of Science" (*Wissenschaftslehre*): (a) its presentation of the basic principles of the entire doctrine, (b) its foundation of theoretical knowing, and (c) its foundation of a science of the practical. In each part Heidegger finds treatments of themes that accord strikingly with his own thinking, though most of his focus is directed at the first part. There Fichte introduces the judgment "I think" as the first principle of the *Doctrine of Science* with the argument that it is the supreme and unconditioned condition of all judging because it expresses an action that consists in nothing other than bringing forth the thought of the ego. This account of the ego amounts, Heidegger remarks, to a "self-positing" that is "the essence of the ego's being" (GA 28: 65). The remark is approving because Heidegger sees affinities here with the discipline and the content of his existential analysis, i.e. a refusal to appeal to something outside human existence itself and a recognition that human existence defines itself in its own projection. Fichte's account of this first principle also reveals in Heidegger's eyes a genuine understanding of the distinctiveness of being a self in contrast to being something merely "on hand" (*vorhanden*) (GA 28: 53, 65, 68). In view of this discovery of Fichtean subjectivity, as Jürgen Stolzenberg notes, Heidegger would have to revise his previous sweeping indictment of the Western tradition for treating human existence as something simply "on hand" (Seubert 2003: 80ff).

Fichte's second principle, not derivable from the first, is the necessary positing of the "not I," i.e. of something opposed to the ego. As Heidegger reads this principle, it does not refer to an entity or collection of entities standing opposite the ego, itself construed as an entity. Instead, that "not I" in Fichte's second principle, posited as it is in and for the ego, is essential to the ego. It is the *horizon* and *elbow room* within which the ego comports itself as ego. Obviating the contradiction that obtains between the first two principles, Fichte's third principle – a "decree of reason" (Fichte 1982: 106) – posits not their mutual exclusion, but their mutual limitation. In this principle, together with the second, Heidegger finds an appreciation for understanding human existence as whole yet as inherently finite, two central themes of his own existential analysis. Invoking a crucial notion of that analysis, Heidegger characterizes this finitude as the contextual "facticity of the I" (GA 28: 77, 79n.8, 90ff).

But this factual finitude and the decree introducing it, Heidegger also urges, are incompatible with the certainty and "absolute ideal of a science" that Fichte otherwise claims for his system and its deductions. In fact, in a patent inversion of Fichte's idealism, Heidegger claims that this finitude drives the entire first part of the *Doctrine of Science*. In other words, on Heidegger's reading, the first and unconditioned principle in Fichte's *presentation*, i.e. the self-positing ego, has its seat in the finitude expressed by the third principle. But Fichte systematically betrays this insight because of the priority that he – following Descartes – attaches to method over content and certainty over truth, "the basic character of metaphysics as science of knowledge" (GA 28: 91). In this same connection, echoing the joint concern of his readings of Kant and the Idealists at this time, Heidegger makes the critical observation:

> In the dominance of the dialectic within German Idealism, the basic conception of the I as absolute subject makes itself known, i.e., this is ultimately grasped *logically* and that means that this metaphysics severs itself from the basic question in which all metaphysics, as far as its possibility is concerned, is grounded: the question of the being of human existence [*Dasein*] from which alone the universal and fundamental question of being can be posited at all. . . . Precisely here in the most resolute endeavor at metaphysics, being is not present at all! (GA 28: 122)

The criticism is vintage Heidegger with its charge that *being is forgotten* – and by no means coincidentally – in the Idealist epitomization of metaphysics, the science supposedly concentrating on being. But the similarities between the Idealists' metaphysical project and his own undoubtedly helped him to appreciate the pitfalls of the metaphysical horizons in which he couches his own project toward the end of the 1920s. Indeed, it is not hard to imagine that this appreciation contributed to his abandonment of the project of a "metaphysics of Dasein" and helped to usher in the next phase in his thinking and ongoing conversation with the Idealists.

The Second Phase: Onto-theo-ego-logy and the Question of Infinity at a "Crossroads" with Hegel

Heidegger's lectures on the opening chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1930/1 contain his first sustained treatment of the work that he considers the heart

and soul of Hegel's philosophy. The lectures are transitional, both for Heidegger's own thinking and for his engagement with the Idealists. Though Heidegger continues explicitly to clarify the project begun in *Being and Time* (this time by way of contrast with Hegel's thinking), these lectures are no longer in the ambit of the metaphysics of Dasein. Thus, after characterizing the science of the phenomenology of spirit as "the fundamental ontology of the absolute ontology and, that means, the onto-logy in general," Heidegger immediately adds that it is at the same time "the endstage of any possible justification of ontology" (GA 32: 204).

The difference that Heidegger's thinking has undergone between the first and second phases is also evident in one of the initial contrasts that he draws between his thinking and Hegel's. In the course of arguing for the fundamental importance of Hegel's system of science in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (as opposed to Hegel's Frankfurt, Jena, and *Encyclopedia* "systems"), Heidegger contrasts the Greek conception of philosophy as science, "radically completed" by Hegel, with his own claim that philosophy is not a science – a clear departure from his portrayal of philosophy as phenomenology and phenomenology as the science of being, i.e. ontology, just a few years earlier. Hegel manages to consummate the Greek conception of a science of being because the meaning of being is determined from the beginning by an absolute that is already with us. "One must say it to oneself again and again: Hegel already presupposes what he gains at the end" (GA 32: 43). Heidegger interprets the genitive "science of experience" in the original title of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an appositive genitive (like "city of Boston"), indicating that the experience in which absolute knowing comes to itself (or, alternatively, in which the spirit appears as a relative phenomenon in the process of coming to itself) is precisely the science (the knowledge of being) in question. Heidegger introduces the term "absolvent" to characterize the way in which the absolute "frees itself" from the limitations of a merely relative knowing (consciousness) by "dissolving" and "replacing" it (GA 32: 71–2). This absolute knowing (subjectivity) that is presupposed at every juncture of the *Phenomenology* is thus infinite, when matched against the finite perspectives of consciousness charted in the work.

This infinity marks one of the ways in which Heidegger finds himself in these lectures at a crossroads with Hegel. The talk of a "crossroads" and "crossing" seems to serve more than one purpose. It indicates, even if only rhetorically, Heidegger's acknowledgment of the intersection of his thinking with Hegel's, particularly in the similar ways that they take up yet distance themselves from Kant's transcendental philosophy (GA 32: 92, 113–14, 151–2). At the same time, to the extent that crossroads call for a decision, the image accords with Heidegger's claim that there is something irreducibly finite about being. Thus, Heidegger's attempt "to fashion *the* kinship, that is necessary in order to understand the spirit of his [Hegel's] philosophy," amounts to an insistence on considering both his concept of finitude and Hegel's concept of infinity in connection with the question of being (GA 32: 55). Though this approach is clearly self-serving, it allows Heidegger to draw some basic distinctions between him and Hegel regarding the problem of being. While Hegel conceives being as infinite, a conception that becomes accessible to absolute knowing only at the cost of time, Heidegger conceives time as "the original essence of being" (GA 32: 17, 210ff). Further evidencing the turn but also the continuity in his thinking, Heidegger distinguishes his time-oriented questioning as "ontochrony" from ontology (GA 32: 144). In this connection

Heidegger also faults Hegel not so much for the claim of the superiority of an infinite, absolute knowing over the finite knowing considered in the *Phenomenology* as for the inadequacy of his inherited (even if dialectical) grasp of the finite (GA 32: 55, 101–14).

One of Heidegger's final encounters with Hegel is his much-touted 1957 essay, "The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics." Yet the concept of onto-theo-logy and, with it, that of onto-theo-ego-logy already figure prominently in the lectures of 1930/1. At times Heidegger employs the term "onto-theo-logy" to designate a traditional way of thinking and knowing (*logos*) beings (*onta*) by inquiring into their ultimate ground, the supreme being (*theos*). This linking of ontology to theology, introduced by Aristotle, is a paradigmatic expression of what Heidegger understands as Western metaphysics' obliviousness to being – paradigmatic because the question of what being is gives way to the question of what beings there are and how they are related to one another (e.g. creating and created). But Heidegger also uses the expression "onto-theo-logy" for how specific conceptions of what is (ontology), what is primarily (theology), and what it is to determine something as something (logic) serve as "mutually determining perspectives of the question of being" (GA 32: 182). Emphasizing this mutual determination is especially relevant in Hegel's case since his science of logic is at once an ontology and a theology as he makes his case that being is, in the final analysis, the absolute spirit, "the absolute self-conception of knowing" (GA 32: 142).

Heidegger's aim in portraying Hegel's (and, later, Schelling's) thinking as onto-theo-logy is to demonstrate how the basic question of philosophy gets sidetracked by the leading question of metaphysics. Onto-theo-logy is thus another way in which Heidegger marks the crossroads at which he stands with Hegel. For Heidegger, the *basic* question is the question of the sense of being and the answer, at least in part, lies in time (later, time-space). Traditional ontology, by contrast, allegedly forgets this basic question in its pursuit of the *leading* question of metaphysics, the question of what is, which it frames not in terms of time, but in terms of a certain kind of talk (*logos*: concepts, statements, inferential grounding, theoretical cognition) about beings. So, too, Hegel is said to pre-empt the question of whether being is essentially finite by reconfiguring all finitude in terms of the infinity of absolute knowing, indeed, to such a degree that philosophy itself becomes equated with this reconfiguring (*Aufheben*, *Dialektik*). Yet the very distinction between finite and infinite being, Heidegger submits (albeit with far too little argument), is evidence of Hegel's indifference to the basic question of being (GA 32: 106).

If Heidegger exploits the term "onto-theo-logy" to expose the Aristotelian roots of Hegel's thinking, the expanded term "onto-theo-ego-logy" is meant to indicate its distinctively modern character. In Heidegger's commentary on the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he applies the expression "ego-logical," borrowed from Husserl, to characterize the justification for the transition, i.e. the claim that consciousness of things and thinghood is only possible as self-consciousness. Hegel himself, it bears recalling, characterizes self-consciousness as "the native realm of truth," adding that in it "the concept of spirit is already at hand for us" (Hegel 1977: 104, 110). In the transition to self-consciousness, Heidegger accordingly submits, lies Hegel's appropriation and revision of the modern grounding

of beings in subjectivity, from the Cartesian *cogito* to Kant's apperception and Fichte's absolute ego. The self in self-consciousness is the ego of the "I think" that, by positing itself, enacts the infinite identity of identity and difference, itself as subject and its object. On this account, being (i.e. spirit which first makes its appearance in self-consciousness) is infinite and its infinity is inseparably logical and subjective, inasmuch as the absolute identity of the "I think" coincides with the mode of conceiving it. Reminding his students that the absolute for Hegel is the spirit, Heidegger sums up Hegel's "onto-theo-ego-logical" approach to being with the observation: "The spirit is knowing, *logos*; the spirit is I, ego, the spirit is God, *theos*; and the spirit is actuality, beings purely and simply, *on*" (GA 32: 183). Each of these dimensions of Hegel's absolute conception of being expands beyond any previous philosophical pretensions the scope of what is considered to be (e.g. history, objective spirit, art). Yet Heidegger's critical point is that, precisely in this process of realizing metaphysics' claim to utter universality and explicability, the *basic* question of what is meant by saying that these various entities exist is not posed. Instead, in the last analysis, i.e. in the constant and complete presence of the development of things, an old, refurbished answer is presupposed. But Heidegger also recognizes that he cannot make this same criticism, at least not without much further ado, of the "system" of Hegel's leading contemporary critic and one-time friend: Schelling.

The Third Phase: Schelling on the Basic Distinction, the Primal Being of the Will, and the Existence of Evil

Schelling's "Freedom Essay" is, Heidegger declares, "the pinnacle of the metaphysics of German Idealism" in the sense that Idealist metaphysics can climb no higher yet from its heights the shape and necessity of another beginning, i.e. Heidegger's own project, can be seen. For this reason, with the exception of a brief review of Schelling's early writings in the 1929 lectures, the Freedom Essay is the primary focus of Heidegger's engagement with Schelling. "The genuinely philosophical reason" for working on this essay, Heidegger tells his students, is that "it is at its core a metaphysics of evil and with it a new essential impulse enters into philosophy's basic question of being" (GA 42: 169/Heidegger 1985: 98; see GA 65: 202). In perhaps the strongest statement of the extent of Schelling's capacity to break through the metaphysical tradition that reaches back to the Greeks, Heidegger maintains: "The genuinely metaphysical accomplishment of the Freedom Essay [is] the establishment of an original concept of being," a concept that no longer makes the onhandness or presence of things the measure of being (GA 42: 145/Heidegger 1985: 85; GA 42: 213–14/Heidegger 1985: 122).

In the essay, Schelling initially frames the question of freedom's fit within a philosophical system, but the systematic fit in question involves not freedom and nature, but freedom and God. The answer to the question of freedom's fit is to be found in a "correctly understood pantheism" in which the ground of the dialectical identity of God and everything else requires freedom. Yet everything turns on the sort of freedom entertained here since the Idealists, including the young Schelling, had already posited a freedom-centered pantheism. For while the Idealists' dynamic concept of being has, in

Schelling's opinion, the better of a "one-sided realism" (Spinoza's fatal assumption of the inertness of things), the formal conception of freedom in Idealist systems ("self-determination") still leaves us "clueless" because it fatally overlooks what is distinctive about human freedom, namely a capacity for evil. Moreover, in the process it renders God irrelevant. In these ways, Heidegger stresses, Schelling identifies the basic limits of idealism (Schelling 1936: 20–5, 61ff; GA 42: 156–72/Heidegger 1985: 90–9).

Schelling's key to reconciling the human capacity for evil with God is a distinction between ground and existence. Though the distinction refers to two inherent aspects of each being, it is not a merely logical or useful distinction but, Schelling submits, "a very real" one that he first uncovered in his philosophy of nature. The distinction is rooted in the observation that all things are in the process of coming to be, eternally in case of God, finitely in the case of created things. Only in and as this becoming are they what they are. Thus, every being, God included, comes to be, i.e. to exist from a ground. Though distinct, ground and existence are inseparable, like darkness and light. The ground is contracting, chaotic, self-centered; existence is expansive, orderly, universal. The ground is the ultimate power for evil and it is *in* God yet distinct from God's existence (Schelling 1936: 33ff, 51). In this way, Schelling sets the metaphysical stage for explaining God's creation of the possibility of evil, i.e. of human nature.

Heidegger regards the introduction of this distinction as the "centerpiece" of the essay. Employing his own terminology, he characterizes the distinction as "the fit of being" (*Seynsgefüge*), adding that, for the conception of being that the distinction entails, "the determination of entities in the sense of the presence of something on hand [*Anwesenheit eines Vorhandenen*] . . . no longer suffices" (GA 42: 191/Heidegger 1985: 109; GA 42: 211/Heidegger 1985: 121; GA 42: 236ff/Heidegger 1985: 136ff). For the ground remains ever "incomprehensible" in every being since being itself is the movement to the "light" and "intelligibility" of existence, a creative event in which "the ground and the existence, the self-concealing and the determining" strive toward one another in their "clearing unity" (GA 49: 84–9). These remarks are telling since they betray no qualms about recasting Schelling's thinking in the very terms that Heidegger is using to pose and address the basic question of being. In any case, if Fichte's conception of the dynamic process of the subject begins to break the ontological mold in Heidegger's eyes, Schelling's distinctive elaboration of this dynamism and extension of it to the entire creation and to the Creator Himself raises this newfound ontological sophistication to new heights.

These new heights can be gathered from the human imagery invoked by Schelling to capture the crucial relation between ground and existence. Thus, in the course of marking the advance of idealistic over Spinozistic systems, Schelling contends: "There is in the last and highest instance, no other being at all than willing. Willing is primal being" (Schelling 1936: 24). He accordingly calls the ground in God the unconscious will and the longing for existence and understanding. Corresponding to the longing, "an inner reflexive representation" is produced in God, by means of which God sees himself in His own image, an image that he also equates with the understanding, "the word of that longing." The "eternal spirit" is said to be the unifying unity of ground and existence, longing and word, a unity that, motivated by love, unifies without collapsing them, in effect "letting the ground ground." More precisely, this spirit is "the

breath of love," leading Schelling to posit love as higher than the spirit (Schelling 1936: 35ff, 51ff). But this act of love is also God's self-revelation via creation of His Other (in His image and likeness): humanity. Hence, far from manufacture, creation for Schelling is, Heidegger stresses, a kind of individualization and stratification in which at once the ground is deepened and existence expanded (GA 42: 224–38/Heidegger 1985: 129–37). But in this process of divine self-differentiation motivated by love, humanity's difference from God is precisely its capacity to dissolve the loving unity of ground and existence. Evil is the substitution of one's own will for the universal will, the perversion of the divine harmony of the universal will with the will of the ground. In the loving act of letting the ground ground, God wills not evil but human existence and human existence is a freedom for good *and* evil.

Heidegger's lectures on Schelling coincide with his efforts to think being as the self-concealing yet revealing event between humans and God, in which the contest between a recalcitrant earth and a malleable world is waged. Being, so conceived, is in need of Dasein, the time-space of its "concealing clearing," as much as Dasein is in need of it. As already suggested, Schelling's account of being (creation) in terms of the dynamics of ground and existence and, not least, their groundless unity parallel Heidegger's efforts too closely to be coincidental (GA 42: 230ff/Heidegger 1985: 133ff; Sikka 1994). The parallels, which can only be suggested here, underlie Heidegger's positive statements, cited at the outset of this section, about Schelling's "original concept of being." They also form the backdrop for his defense of Schelling against charges of anthropomorphism, charges advanced, Heidegger points out, from the presumption of an adequate understanding of human existence. Here again, the parallel with Heidegger's own project is patent as he argues that being, grounding and grounded in Dasein, first grounds human being (GA 42: 283ff/Heidegger 1985: 163ff; GA 65: 317–18).

Perhaps because of the parallels mentioned, Heidegger's criticisms of Schelling are less sharply developed than his criticisms of the other Idealists. Still, he faults Schelling for falling prey to the same onto-theo-logical tendencies and subordinating the question of being to a conception of a supreme and all-encompassing being as an absolute subjectivity (GA 28: 90–122). But Heidegger's criticisms are directed at Schelling's thinking even as it departs from Idealism. He addresses, for example, Schelling's observation that, while there is a system in the divine intellect, "God Himself is no system, but a life" (Schelling 1936: 78). Though the observation is probably directed at the Idealistic conception of the absolute as intelligence, it places the ground outside the system, thereby vitiating, Heidegger contends, the universal pretensions of the system itself. So, too, struggling to identify what is determined by the first (albeit eternal) distinction of ground and existence ("what was there before the ground and the existing (as separated) were, but was not yet as love"), Schelling calls it "the primal ground [*Urgrund*] or much more the *nonground* [*Ungrund*]" – a notion that verges on Heidegger's own discussion of the abyss (*Abgrund*) of being (Schelling 1936: 87; GA 65: 379–88). But in this crucial respect, Heidegger claims, Schelling fails to see "the necessity of an essential step," namely the inference from the fact that being cannot be predicated of the absolute to the conclusion that "finitude is the essence of all being" (GA 42: 279ff/Heidegger 1985: 161ff). Thus, in Heidegger's view, Schelling fails to answer the questions that he poses for himself because he is unable to resolve how the difference

and the unity of ground and existence relate to the system. But given the "individual thrusts" that Schelling makes at the same time toward a new concept of being, his "failure" is anything but insignificant in Heidegger's eyes.

What makes this failure so meaningful is the fact that Schelling thereby merely brings out difficulties posited already in the beginning of Western philosophy and posited as insurmountable by this beginning, given the direction it takes. For us that means that a second beginning becomes necessary through the first, but one that is possible only in the complete transformation of the first beginning, never through merely letting it stand (GA 42: 279/Heidegger 1985: 161).

The Fourth Phase: Hegel's Completion of Western Philosophy and "Getting over" Metaphysics by Thinking Its Forgotten Ground

Whereas Heidegger initially reads the Idealists in view of the broadly conceived "Kantian" project of fundamental ontology, his later engagements with Hegel and Schelling have a more "Nietzschean" accent, not least because he views all three of them as "finalizers" of Western metaphysics (Heidegger 1985: 184ff; GA 65: 203–4). In the 1930/1 lectures on Hegel, Heidegger had already set for himself the task of elaborating the "inner motivation of the Hegelian position as the completion of Western philosophy" (GA 32: 183). But this theme looms even larger in his final, lengthy encounter with Hegel. In this encounter, ranging over two decades, Heidegger is intent on elaborating the underlying continuity of Hegel's modern version of metaphysics with its Greek beginnings and, in the process, plumbing the forgotten ground of metaphysics. But Heidegger pursues this task with the express aim of demonstrating the need not merely to negate but to "get over" (*verwinden*) metaphysics and make a new, post-metaphysical beginning.

Accordingly, in order to appreciate Heidegger's observation – "The completion of metaphysics begins with Hegel's metaphysics of absolute knowing as the will of the spirit" – we have to look both back to the origins and forward to the completion of metaphysics, as Heidegger views it (Heidegger 2003: 89). By the Greek origins of metaphysical thinking, Heidegger has in mind their propensity to equate an entity's being with its presence, a primarily temporal designation (though not recognized as such) that, because of the inseparability of time and space ("time-space"), is also a spatial and relational term in the sense of the placement of something before someone (itself or another). In short, being is conceived as the present presence of something, a presence that is potentially present to someone. By raising the pervasive look or appearance (*idea*, *eidos*) that something gives of itself, to the status of something constant and common, Plato allegedly crystalizes this conception of being as a standing presence. Heidegger claims that the modern appropriation of this conception (the conversion of Platonism into idealism) occurs when the idea is equated with the perception or representation that includes, along with the perceiving and the perceived, one's certainty, in perceiving, of their connection. Hegel culminates this development with his conception of the idea as "the absolute self-appearing of the absolute," an idea which necessarily includes, as Heidegger puts it, "being-present-with-us, the parusie" (Heidegger 1970: 30, 48ff; GA 65: 202–3, 208–22). Thus, what the Greeks single-mindedly associated

with the nature of objects and the moderns (at least Descartes and Kant) just as single-mindedly identified with a subjectivity irreducible to nature, Hegel synthesizes in terms of a historical, yet ever-present, absolute. As a result, the Greek conception of being as presence achieves an unprecedented systematic universality and historical concreteness as Hegel extends it to the objectivity of objects, the subjectivity of subjects, and their developing, self-mediating relation. What it means for an object or a subject or anything else to be is determined by the presence of this absolute subjectivity.

To understand Hegel's place in the history of metaphysics, however, it is necessary, as noted, to look forwards as well as backwards. Given that his metaphysics of absolute knowing first surfaces publicly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to which Schelling's metaphysics of evil is in part a response, Heidegger's comment about Hegel marking the beginning of the finalization of metaphysics by no means excludes Schelling. Indeed, Heidegger emphasizes the convergence of Hegel's thought with Schelling's (and Nietzsche's) by insisting that the dialectical movement of thought is an expression of the "will" of the absolute (Hegel 1977: 47; Heidegger 1970: 34ff, 40). Yet the completion of metaphysics begun by Hegel reaches beyond the work of Schelling and Nietzsche and coincides with the very dispensability of philosophy, i.e. its replacement by sciences ultimately in the service of technology. Thus, while Hegel's notion of absolute subjectivity represents the beginning of the completion of metaphysics and Nietzsche's will to power its penultimate stage, "technology" constitutes its utter completion (Heidegger 2003: 89–96). It is this alleged connection between technology and a metaphysics of absolute subjectivity that, in this fourth and final phase of Heidegger's engagement with the Idealists, explains Hegel's particular importance for him and his argument for a new beginning for thinking.

This connection underlies Heidegger's repeated rejection (mentioned earlier) of the commonplace about the collapse of Hegelian philosophy after Hegel's death. "In the 19th century," he contends, "this philosophy alone determined the reality of things," albeit not in the form of a heeded doctrine, but "as metaphysics" (Heidegger 2003: 89; 1998: 327; GA 65: 213ff). The alleged boundlessness of human thinking and production, the *presentability* and manageability of everything that is, is secured by the self-certainty of an absolute subjectivity for which nothing – or, more precisely, no object, let alone no subject – is alien. Referring to this moment when the technological devastation of the earth is first willed but not known, Heidegger comments: "Hegel grasps this moment of the history of metaphysics in which absolute self-consciousness becomes the principle of thinking" (Heidegger 2003: 110). Heidegger makes a similar point after observing how Hegel identifies "the innermost movement of subjectivity" with the speculative dialectic, referring to the latter as "the method." The method is "the soul of being," the production process through which the web of the absolute's entire realty is fabricated. This talk of method as the "soul of being" might seem like fantasy but, if so, Heidegger remarks, "we are living right in the midst of this supposed fantasy" (GA 9: 432/326). The remark testifies to Heidegger's considerable confidence in metaphysical thinking's ability to elaborate an epoch's basic (albeit unprobed) understanding of being, a feat that he praises even as he sees the need to supersede it with another kind of thinking. Yet, the connection that he is proposing here, however provocative, is forced to a fault. Far more argument than he provides is required to demonstrate the "inner" connection of the method of modern physics ("the being of

beings dissolved into the method of total computability") and Cartesian method with Hegel's conception of method in the sense of speculative dialectic as the fundamental trait of all reality (Heidegger GA 9: 431ff/326ff).

This "indictment" of Hegel's philosophy might also seem far-fetched, given the basic roles played by negativity and history in his thinking. These roles suggest a sensitivity to the supposedly forgotten dimensions of being, e.g. the absence, loss, hiddenness, and so on that, no less than an entity's presence, define its being. Heidegger himself recognizes that "genuine negativity" is for Hegel something absolute, "the 'energy' of what is absolutely actual" (GA 68: 22; GA 28: 260). He further observes that we need "to begin a conversation with Hegel" because he thinks "in the context of a conversation with the previous history of philosophy" and is "the first who can and must think in this way" (Heidegger 2002: 43ff). Nevertheless, Hegel's way of relating negativity and history reinforces in Heidegger's mind his contention that Hegel's metaphysics epitomizes Western obliviousness to the basic *question* of what it means to be. (This obliviousness means that Western metaphysics has an understanding of being but does not place it in question.) Hence, with the aim of demonstrating the "incomparability" of metaphysics and his own project of thinking being historically, Heidegger differentiates Hegel's approaches to both the history of philosophy and the concept of negativity from his own. Though "entering into the force of earlier thinking" is, for both thinkers, the criterion for a dialogue with the history of philosophy, Heidegger claims to seek this force not, like Hegel, in what has already been thought, but in what is not thought, "from which what is thought receives its essential space" (Heidegger 2002: 48; GA 68: 4, 34). According to Heidegger, what is unthought by Hegel is the origin of his conception of negativity (not unrelated in Heidegger's eyes to a supposed lack of seriousness in Hegel's treatment of death).

Heidegger specifies that origin in two ways. Metaphysically speaking, it is the ontological difference between being and entities (being is *not* an entity; entities are *not* being) (GA 68: 14ff, 20–5; Heidegger 2002: 47, 70ff). Yet this way of elaborating the negativity not considered by Hegel but underlying his conception of negativity is metaphysical, according to Heidegger, since the distinction posits on the same level what it distinguishes, thereby reducing being to the status of an entity. Hence, his preferred, post-metaphysical expression for it is a clearing or original time-space, an abyss (*Abgrund*) that, far from being any thing or entity, is removed from any ground among entities (GA 68: 43–8; Heidegger 2002: 67, 71ff). This abyss is the difference from – that also allegedly makes all the difference to – Hegel's concept of being as the actuality of an all-embracing, self-referential totality (spirit).

Here the similarities and dissimilarities with Heidegger's Fichte-interpretation are noteworthy. In 1929, as noted above, Heidegger stresses how an unthought finitude (the "facticity of the I") carried Fichte's argument, lending it whatever trenchancy it possesses, yet ultimately undermining its pretensions to "absolute certainty and derivation" (GA 28: 92). So, too, a decade later Heidegger contends that what is decisive but unthought in Hegel's argument is the clearing in which entities come to light, a clearing that is not itself inexplicable by or grounded in any entity, and, indeed, is not any entity at all. This clearing is "nothing and yet not *nil* [*doch nicht nichtig*] . . . the abyss as ground . . . the event" – all metonyms for what Heidegger understands by "being" (GA 68: 45ff). Instructively, in this same context, he cautions against talk of the

finitude of being (the centerpiece of his Fichte-interpretation) for being too easily misinterpreted and too pejorative. What is meant by it, he advises, is the essential inherence of this "nihilating dimension" (*Nichten*) in being (GA 68: 47). Hegel's concept of being, despite its recognition of the "power of the negative," fails in Heidegger's eyes to appreciate this basic opacity of being, the concealment, absence, inaccessibility that are as essential to it as overtness, presence, and accessibility are. "Hegel's negativity is no negative because it never takes 'not' and 'nihilating' seriously – having already cancelled and taken them up in the 'yes'" (GA 68: 47).

Accordingly, while "Hegel thinks the being of beings in a speculative-historical fashion" that gathers up (*legein*) what has been thought into an absolute presence, Heidegger is bent on thinking what it leaves unthought. With a confidence in the power of thinking, unrivaled even by Hegel, Heidegger draws a further contrast that is reminiscent of his earliest misgivings with Hegelian theorizing. Heidegger claims that thinking being historically – in contrast to speculative metaphysical thinking – sets the stage for a decision and transformation of human beings into *being-here* (*Dasein*) as guardians of being (Heidegger 2002: 45, 72ff; GA 9: 428–9/324–5; GA 65: 232ff, 242).

In sum, Heidegger came to appreciate that German Idealism makes a genuine advance in understanding the concrete and historical manifoldness of beings and conceiving being itself as more than the perceptible onhandness of things or, in Kantian terms, the objectivity of objects. Still, Heidegger contends that being itself, as the eventful interplay of presence and real absence, is not merely "unthought" and obscured, but completely closed off by the ways in which the Idealists, despite their differences, incorporate the ancient metaphysical identification of being as presence into a modern understanding of the ineradicably subjective dimension of reality (Heidegger 1970: 69ff; GA 9: 441–4/333–5). But therein lies their very importance for Heidegger. For while the overlooked sense of being itself is, in his view, the most pressing matter for thinking, it is so only for a thinking that has struggled with and transformed the quintessentially metaphysical, i.e. the Idealist conception of being.

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