

# From Autonomous Subjects to Self-regulating Structures: Rationality and Development in German Idealism

*Thomas Pfau*

## The Sociality of Reason: Rationality, Autonomy, and Community in Kant

Responding to a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical projects (Cartesianism, Leibnizian theories of preformation, Lockean empiricism, and Humean skepticism), the writings of German Idealism develop fundamentally new, emphatically *systematic* conceptions of subjectivity. In their own diverse and progressive pursuit of this project, the main representatives of German Idealism (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) thereby also bring about a transformation of the very meaning of “system” and, ultimately, of philosophy itself as it evolves from Kant’s “critical” to Hegel’s “speculative-historical” modeling of reason. Notwithstanding its highly specialized, ostensibly hermetic discursive profile, German Idealism remains embedded within much broader shifts that drastically alter the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century understanding of agency (*Subjektivität*), sociality (*Öffentlichkeit*), and (self-)cultivation (*Bildung*). A sociological sketch of these wider currents will indicate how and for what reasons the emphatically dynamic, mobile, and developmental conceptions of agency unfolded by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel took on such rigorously technical characteristics and why in particular these writers chose to place emphasis on the formal criteria – that is, on the “conditions” of evidence, explicitness, and justification always in play when we speak of a subject. Seen within a broader sociological analysis of modernity, German Idealism constitutes but one of numerous “expert systems” (such as the emergent disciplines of legal theory, hermeneutics, aesthetics, linguistics, or probability theory), all of them rapidly consolidating themselves as quasi-autonomous, “professional” languages at the end of the

eighteenth century (see Giddens 1990: 55-63, Ziolkowski 1990: 3-17, 218-308, Sheehan 1989: 145-73). While the philosophical arguments of German Idealism have long been understood to represent a major break with Cartesian rationalism or Humean skepticism, their Weberian (Protestant) work ethic of a self-generating subject axiomatically tied to a developmental model of rationality and, by that very token, to its own progressive socialization, also situates the technical expertise of a Kant or a Hegel in the broader plot of modernity.

The canonical texts of German Idealism – from Kant's three *Critiques* (1781-90) via Fichte's various drafts of the *Science of Knowledge* or his *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (1808), Schelling's versions of a *Philosophy of Nature* (1797-9) and his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) to Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1807), *Logic* (1815), *Encyclopedia* (1817), and his *Philosophy of History* (1822-3) – can be read as *reflexes* of a particular phase (late Enlightenment and Romanticism) within the evolving story of modernity. For a long time, that story itself was told as one of progressive secularization, as "a vision of an ultimate end, as both *finis* and *telos*, . . . provid[ing] a scheme of progressive order and meaning, a scheme which has been capable of overcoming the ancient fear of fate and fortune" (Löwith 1949: 18). Against Max Weber's and Karl Löwith's influential portrayal of modernity as such a process of secularization – a thesis often thought to have received its first and most consummate articulation in the philosophy of Hegel – Hans Blumenberg has urged a reading of post-Reformation modernity as a series of "reoccupations" of original Judaeo-Christian problems. On this reading, the Cartesian *cogito* does not so much amount to a secular break with Ockham's nominalism. Rather, Descartes is read as offering a more fulsome rearticulation of the problem of a dualism that Ockham himself had already inherited from the Gnostics (Blumenberg 1983: 37-76; see also Taylor 1989: 143-58, Pippin 1999: 22-8). For Blumenberg, Judaeo-Christian thought and secular modernity remain connected by a set of fundamental questions; what differs are primarily their strategies of how to shape answers to these questions – less in an effort to settle them once and for all than, pragmatically, to legitimate their own, obviously changed historical situation.

In this barest outline, Blumenberg's thesis would ask sensibly that we read the conceptual innovations of Kantian and post-Kantian Idealism as a distinctive phase in a larger and ongoing struggle with defining a legitimate and internally cohesive model of agency, a narrative whose beginnings may at least date back to St Augustine. Not coincidentally, beginning with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the framework within which Idealist philosophy seeks to locate the reception of its specific narratives is always that of a full-scale *conversion* of the reader's sense of his or her self and its relation to the world. To read the philosophical narratives of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel within post-schismatic modernity's overall quest for self-legitimation is not, however, to approach the principal texts of German Idealism as mere *reflexes* of a particular set of social, economic, and cultural forces. Rather, the objective will be to articulate Idealism's specific contribution of new and especially plausible languages of self-description and self-legitimation. We should give due weight to the fact that,

beginning with Kant, the philosophical legitimation of a new type of agency is no longer the exclusive province of a narrow scholarly elite, nor indeed does it unfold as a recondite, scholastic inquiry deemed safe by hereditary political elites. Instead, the group seeking and attaining legitimacy through the discursive and conceptual projects of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel are the liberal-democratic, professional, middle-class communities and nation states of Western Europe as they consolidate themselves between 1780 and 1830. Kantian "autonomy," Fichtean "vocation" (*Bestimmung*), and the Hegelian "state" all aim to secure the intrinsic rationality and vicarious sociality of the modern, disaggregated individual. In one way or another, the philosophical systems in question all aim to provide a materially altered subject with both the impetus and a logical trajectory for transforming itself into a legitimate and progressively more self-conscious *social* agent. Hence, far from being hemmed in by extrinsic (socioeconomic and political) forces, German Idealism itself constitutes such a force in its own right, a particularly sophisticated idiom within a broad network of innovative discourses and, thus, as part of a variegated conceptual armature marshaled by the emergent middle-class, liberal-democratic, and bureaucratic nation state so as to understand its historical epoch and legitimate its own standing within it. Not coincidentally, the following brief glimpse into Kant's critical method at work shows several of its key concepts – such as transcendental reflection, transcendental aesthetics (space/time), and a strictly formal concept of moral agency – intimately entwined with much broader socioeconomic transformations of the late Enlightenment.

Kant's 1781 *Critique of Pure Reason* opens not so much with an outright rejection of the concept of experience but with the curious hypothetical statement that "experiential knowledge might quite possibly be already something composite [*ein Zusammengesetztes*] of what we receive by way of intuition and what is spontaneously furnished by our cognitive faculties [*Erkenntnisvermögen*]." The involvement of the latter, meanwhile, is said to constitute "an additive [*Zusatz*] that we cannot distinguish from the basic matter of experiential data until extended practice has drawn our attention to this circumstance and has schooled us to make discriminations in this manner" (Kant 1969: 41-2). Kant's opening remarks already advance *two* claims that reciprocally confirm one another: first, that the possibility of knowledge rests on something logically prior to the deceptive primacy of experiential data and also prior to our intuitive mechanisms for the reception of such data; and, second, that in order to grasp such a counterintuitive theory of knowledge, we must effectively abandon all hope for speedy proof and submit to the "extended discipline" (*lange Übung*) of transcendental reflection. Ultimately, Kant's *Critique* proposes itself as the only available manual for this new type of cognitive proficiency. For Kant's *Critique* "constructs theoretical entities that serve his purpose. There is no empirical confirmation of Kant's hypothesis, however, since what counts as experience, and also as confirmation, is created by our acceptance of that hypothesis" (Rosen 1987: 25). In this manner, the Kantian project of a "critique" of reason, of setting limits to the kinds of claims that can responsibly and autonomously be made by and for the

modern individual, comes at the expense of a pervasive disorientation that, in the domain of empirical, socioeconomic phenomena a sociologist like Anthony Giddens has called "disembedding," a "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990: 21).

In his "transcendental doctrine of elements" for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously asserts that time and space do "not represent any property of things in themselves" but, in fact, constitute solely "the form of all appearances of outer sense... [or] the subjective condition of sensibility, under which alone outer [or, in the case of time, inner] intuition is possible for us" (Kant 1969: 71). Such a position both reflects and reinforces a transformation – fueled by increasingly abstract and complex forms of economic production and legal-bureaucratic administration – already well advanced in England yet also, if more slowly, underway in Germany. Just as the clock came to express "a uniform dimension of 'empty' time," we can observe the concurrent "separation of *space* from *place*," with the latter becoming "increasingly *phantasmagoric*... [as] locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them" (Giddens 1990: 17-19; on time, see also Sheehan 1989: 799). With time and space conceived as abstract or, in Kant's language, "transcendental" conditions of possibility for intuition, the definition of rationality shifts from Cartesian self-awareness to a logic of strictly equivalent measures. Time is no longer rhythmic in ways so eloquently captured at the opening of Johann Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages*. Rather, once divided into strictly abstract and equivalent chronological measurements, this new, abstract time exemplifies a rationality that everywhere "excises the incommensurable; not only are qualities dissolved in thought, but men are brought into actual conformity" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 12).<sup>1</sup>

For another example, we turn to the conception of the "public sphere" that Kant sets forth in his political essays of the mid-1780s, and that he was to develop in greater detail and at the level of "transcendental" argument in his 1790 work *Critique of Judgment*. His advocacy of "*sapere aude!*" ("Have courage to use your own understanding!") pivots above all on "the freedom to use reason *publicly* in all matters." Kant's division of the modern individual into a private *subject* and a public *citizen* institutes a potentially schizophrenic split between the subject's nonnegotiable private obedience to institutional demands and its equally nonnegotiable "freedom" and "civic duty" as a public "scholar [to] make use of reason before the entire *literate* world" (Kant 1983: 42, 43). Kant's affirmation of subjectivity as inherently autonomous and self-determined in its "public" sense presages the transcendental concept of moral agency that he was to set forth a year later in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). Here the use of reason is not predicated on a dogmatic or metaphysical assertion of independence. Rather, inasmuch as it is an object of "critique," reason in Kant at all times is to be understood as a complex developmental project. A first step of philosophy's agenda thus will be "to realize what has been involved all along in thinking, judging and acting. [It is only] by realizing how much of the shape of our

experience and action is 'up to us,' not 'determined' by what we find in the world or by the passions or human nature, that the modern insistence on autonomy can be best defended" (Pippin 1999: 49).

At the same time, Kant's apparent conjunction of "public," "scholar," and "literate" also reveals the domain of rationality to be fundamentally comprised of disembodied published writing as it operates within and steadily reinforces the modern definition of the "public sphere" as that of an anonymous print culture. Yet the seemingly recondite, because highly specialized, language associated with "expert systems" (Giddens) such as Kantian moral and political theory can be easily misconstrued. For even as Kantian "scholars" remain obedient to the quotidian demands of political and institutional authorities, their manner of conveying to the public rational reflections as printed matter reveals "abstraction" to point less to the recondite technicality of Kantian discourse than to its covert claim for universal authority. Implicitly, Jürgen Habermas remarks, "the issues discussed became 'general' not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate" (Habermas 1994: 37).<sup>2</sup> The subterranean universalism of Kant's critical philosophy is thus matched, in his political writings, by a hypothesis concerning the gradual dissemination of rational patterns throughout political and social life. Such patterns – which, like the transcendental claims of Kant's critical philosophy, remain equally beyond verification or falsification – are no longer driven by a conscious intentionality but manifest themselves as a self-regulating, structural movement or development. As Kant puts it, "what strikes us as complicated and unpredictable in the single individual may in the history of the entire species be discovered to be the steady progress and slow development of its original capacities" ("Idea for a Universal History," in Kant 1983: 29). This "structural transformation of the public sphere" (to borrow Habermas's titular phrase) as a dialectical progression and development (with coemergent disciplines of demography and probability theory as just two of its conceptual entailments) is particularly in evidence in the rise of literacy, itself a sociological premise for Kant's hint at "a strange, unexpected pattern in human affairs" whereby the world of conceptual innovation and free, rational exploration "gradually reacts on a people's mentality (whereby they become increasingly able to *act freely*) and . . . finally even influences the principles of government" ("What is Enlightenment?" in Kant 1983: 46).<sup>3</sup>

Pivotal for any understanding of German Idealism is the notion of "autonomy," which Kant defines as "the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature" (Kant 1981: 41). Arguably, evidence for a truly self-determining, autonomous agency can only be achieved *ex negativo*, that is, by excluding any empirical objects or intentional objectives (outcomes, motives, desires, etc.) from the moral evaluation of an action. "In every case where an object of the will must be laid down as the foundation for prescribing a rule to determine the will, there the rule is nothing but heteronomy. The imperative is then conditioned . . . [and] hence can never command morally, i.e., categorically" (1981: 47). Having posited the modern subject's spontaneous (free), quasi-legislative authority over all empirical phenomena

in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had also, at least implicitly, asserted the intrinsic *universality* of his subject's representations of phenomenal experience and the moral good. Behind the formal austerity of the categorical imperative – that is, the demand that the maxims informing a specific action must be imagined as valid principles for universal legislation – lurks a radical, as it were “leveling,” theory of community. Homologous with “reason” (*Vernunft*) itself, community serves both as the distant *telos* to whose realization all individual practice (if it is to count as “moral”) must be committed *and* as the (seemingly present) source of legitimation for moral agency. Kant's reconceptualization of moral agency succinctly dramatizes how philosophy itself establishes a new understanding of “modernity” around 1780 yet, in so doing, also compels its new, “disembedded” subject to experience all the more acutely its precarious situation. “Human life has become, in a collective sense, completely self-determining, but . . . in a way that is thereby completely contingent” (Pippin 1999: 35). In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant acknowledges as much when, in an aside often ignored by readers today, he expressly rejects the consideration of happiness from his theory of moral agency: “The principle of one's own happiness is most objectionable,” not only because “experience contradicts the supposition that well-being is always proportional to well-doing” but, more importantly, because “this principle contributes nothing to the establishment of morality, inasmuch as making a man happy is quite different from making him good” (Kant 1981: 46). To the contingent and hence specious good of happiness, Kant opposes the “ontological concept of perfection” as the rational principle of morality. It is a notion subsequently amplified as the “postulates” (God, freedom, and immortality) in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The production of the highest good in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law. But in such a will the *complete conformity* of dispositions with the moral law is the supreme condition of the highest good. The conformity must therefore be just as possible as its object is, since it is contained in the same command to promote the object. Complete conformity of the will with the moral law is, however, *holiness*, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an *endless progress* toward that complete conformity, and in accordance with principles of pure practical reason it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will. This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing *endlessly* (which is called the immortality of the soul). (Kant 1997: 102; see Pinkard 2002: 60-1).

Far from a metaphysical creed or dogma, Kant's shrewd introduction of such a postulate (“a theoretical proposition . . . not demonstrable as such”) reveals how finite subjects must at all times *construct* those theoretical notions that will motivate and direct them (in their capacity as moral agents) to advance and implement the objective of reason. Postulates of “pure practical reason” thus seek to confer a certain

measure of intuitive specificity on the underlying ontological idea of "perfection," even as Kant readily concedes that the idea of "perfection" necessarily "presuppose[s] the morality that it has to explain." Still, man-made postulates such as perfection remain preferable to a "divine concept" of the moral good, simply because "we cannot intuit divine perfection" (Kant 1981: 64-7).<sup>4</sup> By conceiving of "perfection" as the highest, "ontological" objective of life, and through its autonomous "construction" in the modality of "postulates," individuals afford themselves a categorical (noncontingent) motive for positively aspiring (rather than incidentally conforming) to the status of a disinterested moral agent. Kant's transgenerational conception of reason *qua* "immortality" thus exemplifies his overall position that moral agents must construct such theoretical notions as will induce them, as empirical and necessarily imperfect beings, to merge their contingent inclinations with the project of reason.

### Probing the Grounds of Rationality: Self-consciousness as Process in Fichte and Schelling

It is this position – mirrored by Kant's insistence on the "communicability" of aesthetic judgments in the *Critique of Judgment* – which throws into relief the intrinsically developmental logic of Kantian thought and which, more than anything else, shaped virtually every philosophical and literary project of the Romantic period.<sup>5</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) radicalizes above all Kant's notion of reason as autonomous and self-generating. Decisive for Fichte proved a dispute regarding the legacy of Kant's critical philosophy that unfolded in 1792. It featured, on one side, Karl Leonard Reinhold, whose *Elementarphilosophie* sought to distil from Kant's *Critiques* a widely applicable philosophical method predicated on what Reinhold called "the fact of consciousness." On the other side, much to the surprise of Fichte (then a committed Kantian), G. E. Schulze, a professor of philosophy at Helmstedt (and writing under the pseudonym "Aenesidemus") developed an incisive critique not only of Reinhold's premises but, to a certain extent, also of Kant's own system. Of the entire Reinhold–Aenesidemus debate, which has received ample critical attention, only one aspect can be taken up, and in so doing I follow Terry Pinkard's succinct account.<sup>6</sup> G. E. Schulze exposed "a massive inconsistency in Reinhold's account of self-consciousness, since Reinhold required all consciousness to involve representations, and a self-conscious subject therefore had to have a representation of itself, which, in turn, required a subject to relate the representation of the subject to itself, which, in turn, implied an infinite regress" (Pinkard 2003: 106). So as to recover from the apparent refutation not only of Reinhold's "fact" of self-consciousness but, by implication, the suddenly unsustainable distinction between conscious representations and things in themselves (*noumena*) at the very heart of Kant's first *Critique*, Fichte concedes that self-consciousness cannot be explained as a self-relation or Kantian synthesis at all. Self-awareness cannot originate in reflection, and the self can never be anchored in any reflexive comparison of the knowing subject with an

objectified representation (*Vorstellung*) or image (*Bild*) that it has produced of "itself." For to seek self-awareness and self-confirmation through "reflexive determinations" (*Reflexionsbestimmungen*) presupposes that the reflecting self can recognize the *unity* of the knower (subject) and the known (self) and, moreover, that it is capable of repossessing that very recognition as affirming its very own (and not someone else's) *identity*. In response to this impasse, as Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank have shown, Fichte shifts the conception of self-knowledge from one of relation to one of *production*, with "the act of production . . . taken to be a real activity, while the product is taken to be the knowledge of this act."<sup>7</sup>

Fichte's strictures on the scope and reach of reflection, which can never lay foundations but only clarify appearances *a posteriori*, was to be significantly extended and intensified by Novalis (Novalis 2003).<sup>8</sup> Already Fichte's performative model of self-consciousness as the supposed center and circumference of all philosophical knowledge encounters difficulties. Both the conversion of a subjective act of positing (*Tathandlung*) into an actual knowledge of the product (consciousness) and the further recognition of that product as identical with the producer's "self" succumb to a circular logic; for each step effectively presupposes that the original act of positing be transparent unto itself. As Fichte puts it, "the self is to posit itself, not merely for some intelligence outside it, but simply *for itself*; it is to posit itself *as* posited by itself. Hence, as surely as it is a self, it must have the principle of life and consciousness solely within itself" (Fichte [1794] 1970: 241).<sup>9</sup> As Helmut Müller-Sievers puts it in his fine account of the ascendancy of "epigenetic" over "preformationist" models of theory: "To the Kantian fallacy of a preformed I that can never get at its own origin Fichte thus opposes the reciprocal structure of an intellectual intuition in which the totality of the I is given while its constituent parts are still distinguishable" (Müller-Sievers 1997: 68).<sup>10</sup> And yet, even within the closed circuitry of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* as one of autoproduction, the progressive determination of the "I" as self still entails an element of difference. "Since in . . . reflection the self is not conscious of itself, the reflection in question is a mere feeling" (Fichte 1970: 261).<sup>11</sup> Even an epigenetic "I" conceived as capable of generating from within itself the distinct qualities of intuition and reflection, as well as its own knowledge of them, presupposes a certain awareness of its own unity by the positing "I" or, in Fichte's words, premises all "determination" (*Bestimmung*) on a certain "feeling of determinability" (*Gefühl von Bestimmbarkeit*). For the formal unity of the self's performative self-generation must itself be mediated, that is, *recognized* and *reclaimed* by the resulting subject *as its own* identity.

The *identity* of the Fichtean "I" – that is, the predication of the individual on an absolute foundation, of contingent self-awareness on humanity as a shared condition and destiny – requires that that "I" recognize the formal *unity* of its constitutive materials (namely, intuition and concept) as the very foundation of its own being and so recognize itself as part of the greater plot of rationality in its unfolding. It is this experience of its own "determinability," according to Fichte, which manifests itself at first in affective form. That is, what philosophy calls an "intellectual intuition" attains

phenomenal distinctness only in the subject's "feeling" of its own potential determinability (*Bestimmbarkeit*). Novalis puts it most succinctly: "Philosophy is originally a feeling." Aside from having anchored the subject in an "immediate" and seemingly indisputable ground – of transcendental function in Fichte's system, though strikingly reminiscent of empiricist models of "sensation" – not much has been accomplished. For the "feeling" of determinability must itself once again be recognized by the "I" as its own foundation or identity, and yet as Novalis so laconically remarks: "Feeling cannot feel itself" (1978, II: 18). It is a crucial, albeit to Fichte most unwelcome, qualification, whereby "feeling" succumbs to the vagaries of representation, figurative expression, and interpretive contingency. Involuntarily, Fichte here finds himself retracing Kant's deduction from the first *Critique* (particularly the pivotal chapter on the "transcendental schematism") and Kant's later, more explicit conception of "feeling" as a subjective universal in the realm of aesthetic production and judgment.<sup>12</sup> Thus Fichte admits that in order to "raise feeling to consciousness" the imagination must produce an "image" (*Bild*) of that feeling, one whereby consciousness would be enabled to recognize its immediate "feeling of determinability" in objective form and thus take hold of a knowledge that had previously slumbered in the encrypted form of an "intellectual intuition" (Fichte 1964-, II, 3: 297). In anticipation of Schelling's and Goethe's conception of an *Urbild*, Fichte stipulates that such an image must be produced by the subject's imagination, a claim that ensures the ascendancy of aesthetics over logic in the business of transcendental philosophy.

And yet once again the problem of reflective recognition intrudes. For what, other than mere desire (which may afford consciousness transient pleasures, though surely no coherent self), could possibly underwrite the objective authenticity of the image that the imagination had produced? How could the self recognize the image as a genuine representation of its own "feeling" of determinability? And how can an image paradoxically charged with mediating this supposedly "immediate feeling of determinability" for the "I" (and thus promoting that "I" to outright self-awareness) be recognized as having *delivered* proof rather than having contrived it?<sup>13</sup> Fichte's own reflections – carefully edited out from the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* – falter on just that point as he worries: "the (productive) imagination itself is a faculty of the Self. Couldn't it be the only grounding faculty [*Grundvermögen*] of the Self?" (Fichte 1963-, II, 3: 298).<sup>14</sup> Is the imagination a "faculty" of a rational, logically deducible subjectivity, or does it merely figuratively conjure or *project* a self whose most abiding characteristic it is to think of itself as firmly, rationally grounded? Mocking the reasoning whereby "*Ich* and *Geist* are but the Christian and Surname [sic] of his weakness [sic], J. G. Fichte," Coleridge was to remark sometime after 1815 that Fichte's had not shown his notion of immediacy (or feeling) "to be more comprehensible than the *Anschaung*, & the precious mechanis[m] of *Selbstbewusstsein* substituted for it." As he sums up his case, "how could Fichte have *made* these abstractions of Reason, Feeling, intuitive space, but from some absolute Entity? And what entitled him to abstract?" Admittedly, though, Coleridge's qualms about Fichte's theory pertain not

so much to "the *doctrine*, as to the Chasms in the Proof of it," and the latter would appear endemic to all talk of self-consciousness (Coleridge 1980, II: 610-11, 607).

Ever the "notorious and inveterate foundationalist," as Daniel Breazeale puts it, Fichte would continue to argue that the ultimate ground capable of comprising and uniting intuition and concept, content and form, substance and accident in one subjective *identity* is to be located in what he calls "intellectual intuition" (Breazeale 2000: 186). This problematic aspect of Fichte's Idealism has recently received much attention. Terry Pinkard convincingly shows how Fichte's notion of "intellectual intuition" effectively concedes the unavailability of objective "ground" for the self. Yet, in following Robert Brandom's influential arguments, Terry Pinkard also suggests that the seemingly indemonstrable, even mythical, nature of an "intellectual intuiti" need not necessarily be read as Fichte conceding defeat. Rather, with this term the *Science of Knowledge* advances not so much epistemological, let alone ontological claims for the self's "truth" as it merely asserts the self's "normative status" and effectively collapses rationality into normativity. As Pinkard puts it, "one cannot give a causal, or, for that matter, any other non-normative explanation of the subject's basic normative act of attributing entitlement to itself and to other propositions." And yet, any normative act derives its authority from the possibility of its contestation. Hence, the initial positing of the "I" by itself must simultaneously provide for the possibility of "incorrectness" vis-à-vis the normative "self" so posited. That is, implicit in a reading of Fichtean "positing" as the establishment of a "norm" is the possibility of that norm's negation by something else. Acknowledging as much, Fichte calls that something else the "non-I" (*nicht-Ich*), though he also hastens to restrict this "non-I" to the purely formal-logical status of an external "check" (*Anstoß*). Even such a minimalist conception of the "non-I," however, entangles Fichte in the logical contradiction of an "I" claiming rational authority and normative status for itself while simultaneously positing "some things as not having their normative status posited by the 'I'" (Pinkard 2002: 114-15; see also Brandom 1994: 3-55).

Fichte's logically inconsistent (dis)qualification of Nature as mere "non-I" – an unorganized and irrational externality – prompted F. W. J. Schelling (1775-1854) to embark on a different course. The objective was not so much to reject Fichte's entire system, to which Schelling had responded quite positively in his early publications between 1794 and 97, as it was to expand the dynamic conception of the Fichtean subject into the seemingly inert and "other" sphere of nature (see Frank 1985: 23-71).<sup>15</sup> In his *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling fundamentally seeks to disarm the logical tension between an "I" making normative claims for itself and, at the same time, attributing nonnormative and, by implication, irrational status to its Other, Nature. For Schelling, the objective became to discover within the realm of nature the same developmental model that had enabled the subject of the *Science of Knowledge* to attain progressively greater explicitness *as a Self* by means of what Fichte had called "reflexive determinations" (*Reflexionsbestimmungen*). As the principal means of philosophical practice, reflection could not content itself with thinking nature in merely formal terms, that is, as the *inessential Other against and by means of* which the self

posits itself. To be sure, Schelling remarks in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797), "as soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world . . . reflection first begins; he separates from now on what Nature had always united. . . . But this separation is only *means*, not *end*." Any philosophy that unsettles the "equilibrium of forces and of consciousness" by a free act of conscious reflection will also have to re-establish this equilibrium in the end; for "*mere* reflection . . . is a spiritual sickness in mankind" (Schelling 1988: 10-11). The only way to remedy the very split between self and other whereby philosophy itself became possible is to locate the same spontaneous and free developmental trajectory that characterizes human intelligence within the seemingly separate domain of nature. As Schelling was to summarize it in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), "intelligence will be able to intuit itself only in an object that has an internal principle of motion [*Bewegung*] within itself. . . . Hence the intelligence must intuit itself . . . as a living organization. But now it appears from this very deduction of life, that the latter must be common to all organic nature, and hence that there can be no distinction between living and nonliving organizations in nature itself" (Schelling 1978: 124).

Arguably, Schelling's initial attempts at constructing nature as the three-dimensional expression of an inherently dynamic intelligence in his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* ran afoul of the empirical approaches favored by the scientific community of his time. Only two years later, however, Schelling returned with a more rigorous systematic formulation of what Dieter Sturma has called "the idea of a genetic isomorphism of nature and spirit," an idea that also proves strikingly prescient of Darwinian and neo-Darwinian thought (Sturma 2000: 225). Beyond its prescience of the kind of evolutionary thinking that was to dominate much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theory, Schelling's *First Draft Toward a Systematic Philosophy of Nature* (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*) of 1799 also merits our attention because its conceptions of "movement" and "development" (*Bewegung* and *Entwicklung*) stand in particularly instructive contrast to Hegel's model in Part 2 of his 1817 *Encyclopedia*. For Schelling, it would be impossible to think of nature as an unconditional "being" (*Seyn*) "unless we could discover within the very concept of being the hidden trace of freedom. . . . Looked upon from a higher viewpoint, this being itself is nothing but nature's continual activity as it has congealed in its product." Schelling adamantly opposes any "primitive" reifying view of nature: "everything in nature must be understood as something that has become [*ein Gewordenes*]." The key question, then, becomes why an infinitely active nature should ever assume a particular material *Gestalt*. Given that, as Schelling puts it, "nature abhors all individuality and strives continually toward the absolute," the explanation for why we are nonetheless presented with definite and necessarily inadequate material entities has to be sought in the same logic of "development" (*Entwicklung*) that allows us to think of nature as "evolution" (*Evolution*) (*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*, in Schelling 1982: 13, 33).

Schelling's argument here strikingly prefigures Richard Dawkins's reinterpretation of Darwin's theory of survival, according to which the individual being's preoccupation

with its own survival is not driven by a desire to preserve its body but, rather, by a need for transmitting the genetic information contained in the body – a plot of which the individual organism, even a human one, need not be conscious at all (Dawkins 1989: 12-45). Thus Schelling remarks that the “metamorphoses through which various kinds of insects pass are *almost exclusively determined* by the development of their gendered individuality [*Geschlecht*].” Once a definite gender and sexual maturity has been attained, “the metamorphoses cease,” and it appears that the butterfly, having evolved beyond its larval stages, “seems to have assumed this ultimate developmental stage solely for the purpose of propagating its species.” Schelling’s speculative concept of development thus accords individual entities and their morphological *Gestalt* only an instrumental, quasi-transitional role in a much larger evolutionary plot whose rationality we must ultimately locate in its continuous prolongation, an objective that can only be realized if there is something to transmit. Like the *Bildungsroman* – one may think of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* or his ironic subversion of didactic poetry in the “Metamorphosis of the Plants” – nature individualizes itself solely because it is only “at the peak of individuation that sexual maturity will be attained,” which in turn ensures the prolongation of the process of rational organization that defines the totality of nature (*Entwurf*, in Schelling 1882: 45, 48n, 49n). As it “advances the development of individual forms, nature is by no means concerned with the individual – on the contrary, it aims at the annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of the individual.” For as soon as “the common objective [*das Gemeinschaftliche*] has been secured, nature will abandon the individual, . . . indeed will proceed to treat it as an impediment [*Schranke*] of its activity, one that it works to destroy. For the individual must appear as the means, and the species as the end of nature” (ibid.: 50n, 51). Schelling proceeds to analyze how every developmental stage, as it manifests itself in the definitive *Gestalt* of a given organism, is but a “phenomenon” of a logical process consumed with its own continuity and coherence. Long before Darwin, Schelling also remarks on how the “developmental drive” (*Bildungstrieb*) is in principle absolutely free but, in fact, is constrained and given direction by “external conditions.” Only through the latter does a given organism’s internal “embryonic disposition” (*Keim oder Anlage*) acquire a sense of developmental direction and purpose. With this explanation for “why each organism can only ever reproduce itself ad infinitum” – that is, due to some “primordial restriction imposed [by external contingency] on its developmental drive” – there is no further justification for metaphysical or theological conceptions of nature as “preformation. . . . For the entire diversity of organisms and [their] component parts reveals nothing but the manifold directions in which the developmental drive is constrained to express itself at any given stage of development.” For Schelling as for Goethe, with whom he was in close contact between 1799 and 1803, all formation [*Bildung*] thus occurs through *epigenesis* (that is, through metamorphosis or dynamic evolution)” (ibid.: 54n, 56, 60-1).<sup>16</sup> The concept of “development” has now evolved from a characteristic of the Enlightenment individual’s rational and spontaneous self-determination to the simultaneously historical and systematic organization of all being.<sup>17</sup>

## Negotiating Difference: Reason, Modernity, and Pragmatism in Hegel

As early as his long 1797 review essay of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*, Schelling had begun to develop a protodialectical conception of philosophy that instituted a reflexive divide between "consciousness" and "spirit." As he puts it:

every act of the soul is also a determinate stage of the soul. . . . Thus, through its own products – imperceptible to the common eye, [yet] clear and distinct to that of the philosopher – the soul marks the path on which it gradually reaches self-consciousness. The external world lies unfolded before us, so that we may rediscover within it the history of our spirit. ("Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Science of Knowledge*," in Schelling 1994: 90)

Yet to read Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as introducing "a 'pre-history' of reason" (Sturma 2000: 218; see also Frank 1985: 97-107) into German philosophy also demands clarification of some fundamental philosophical issues on which Schelling's later philosophy was to differ emphatically from that of Hegel. It was left to Hegel to develop a comprehensive systematic account of the transforming relation between mere "opining" (*Meinen*) – that is, the discriminations ventured by our "natural consciousness" or "understanding" (*Verstand*) – and a fully socialized rationality (*Vernunft*) defining of philosophical "spirit" (*Geist*) proper. Already in his seminal 1801 *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Hegel offers the following, programmatic qualification of a philosophy that remains entirely confined within the domain of the understanding and, on that basis, argues for the necessary and irremediable discontinuity between our forever partial, rational engagement of the phenomenal world and the forever ineluctable domain of the noumenal:

The intellect, as the capacity to set limits, erects a building and places it between man and the Absolute, linking everything that man thinks worthy and holy to this building, fortifying it through all the powers of nature and talent and expanding it *ad infinitum*. The entire totality of limitations is to be found in it, but not the Absolute itself. [The latter] is lost in the parts, where it drives the intellect in its ceaseless development of manifoldness. But in its striving to enlarge itself into the Absolute, the intellect only reproduces itself *ad infinitum* and so mocks itself. Reason reaches the Absolute only in stepping out of this manifold of parts. The more stable and splendid the edifice of the intellect is, the more restless becomes the striving of life that is caught up in it as a part to get out of it, and raise itself to freedom. (Hegel 1977a: 89-90)

Presaging the critique of Enlightenment thought later undertaken by Nietzsche, Freud, and Adorno, Hegel pointedly comments on the "restlessness" of a "life" confined within the understanding's fragmented representation of being held and associated primarily with Kant's critical philosophy and its subjectivist extension in

Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. By the time of the *Phenomenology* – itself the crucial transitional work in Hegel's oeuvre – the question as to how to grasp the meaning of the “absolute” is posed in markedly different ways than in his earlier writings. No longer does the “absolute” denote a merely negative void (as was the case in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*) inaccessible to the understanding's forever reactive, partial, and merely accumulative representations of being as the *other* of the thinking subject. Rather, the “absolute” comes to encompass the entire logic of successive paradigms of knowledge of which the individual subject can never be fully cognizant. As the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology* famously puts it:

The Truth is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially the *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself. (Hegel 1977b: 11)

In developing this gnomic pronouncement, Hegel's *Phenomenology* rearticulates what Schelling had first claimed vis-à-vis Fichte and Kant, namely, that the principal tool of the understanding, the “concept” (*Begriff*) stands not in radical separation from being (*Sein*) but is fundamentally on a continuum with being inasmuch as the latter has to be thought as forever developing. Hegel thus redefines philosophy's overall self-conception by insisting on the necessary “incompleteness” of the kind of conception of the world held by the understanding at a given point in historical time. Doing so allows Hegel to move beyond Kant's dualist (in its origins Gnostic) assertion of a categorical “incompatibility” between the noumenal (nonintuitable) totality of Reason and the understanding's contingent perspective (*Vorstellung*) on the phenomenal world (Pippin 1991b: 533).<sup>18</sup> Inasmuch as the concept can only ever furnish partial knowledge of “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) and remains susceptible to error, it must not be mistaken as a static implement, to be indifferently applied to a putatively separate realm of phenomena (“nature”). The challenge or, in Hegel's Protestant work ethic, the “labor” (*Arbeit*) of philosophy thus “consists not so much in purging the individual of an immediate, sensuous mode of apprehension . . . but rather in just its opposite, in freeing determinate thoughts (*Gedanken*) from their fixity. . . . [For] fixed thoughts have the ‘I’, the power of the negative, or pure actuality, for the substance and element of their existence.” To tease the developmental logic, the intrinsic “dynamism” (*Bewegung*) out of thought is the great task of speculative dialectics:

Thoughts become fluid when pure thinking . . . recognizes itself as a moment, or when the pure certainty of self abstracts from itself – not by leaving itself out, or setting itself aside, but by giving up the *fixity* of its self-positing. . . . Through this movement the pure thoughts become *Notions* (*Begriffe*), and are only now what they are in truth, self-movements (*Selbstbewegungen*), circles, spiritual essences, which is what their substance is. (Hegel 1977b: 19-20; see also Hegel 1952: 30-1)

What is here being said of an individual's cognitive relationship toward being also holds true of more complex *systems* of thought, including those put forward by Kant, Fichte, and also Schelling. The autonomous and spontaneous selves developed by these two thinkers, "critical" articulations of Enlightenment subjectivity, Hegel insists, must themselves be reflexively understood and absorbed as mere "moments" into a dynamic process of intellectual development (*Bildung*). Hegel thus aims not to refute but, rather, to sublimate (*aufheben*) Kant's and Fichte's philosophies from their initial status as *doxa* or "opinion" (*Meinung*) to their truthful position within the developmental economy of philosophy as a "system." For however theoretically circumspect, Enlightenment rationality had always unfolded as a form of an "opinion" and thus necessarily had "fixated on the antithesis of truth and falsity." Hence, for Hegel, it could never actually "comprehend the diversity [*Verschiedenheit*] of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in them simple contradictions [*Widerspruch*]" (Hegel 1977b: 2, translation modified; see also Hegel 1952: 10). In what amounts to a categorical break with Kant's and Fichte's premise of a radical discontinuity between subjective rationality and the realm of the noumenal or Being (*Sein*), Hegel premises his own correction of the Enlightenment project on a fundamentally new understanding of "difference." For Hegel, the logical category of "difference" no longer operates disjunctively – by positing an ontological incompatibility between two kinds of being. For to deploy it in that manner necessarily (and dogmatically) posits a realm of being supposedly independent of any specific subjective viewpoint and the discursive networks through which discrete viewpoints must continually be negotiated. With "substance" no longer operating as a foundational philosophical category in Hegel's system, "difference" – like time itself – now serves to organize different conceptual models or viewpoints *into a succession*. As Hegel puts it in the *Logic*, in observing that two things differ *in some specific respect* we institute "difference" (*Unterschied*) as a matter "of reflection, not [as] the otherness of determinate being." Whatever otherness an intelligence notices is "the otherness of an essence" (*das Andere des Wesens*) and not "the other as other of an other, existing outside it" (Hegel 1969: 417, translation modified; Hegel 1986, II: 46). In this manner, "difference" is repositioned as a key term within a narrative that progressively unmasks each instance of object-perception (*Wahrnehmung*) as but a transitional "normative" position taken up by one agent and entered, with varying degrees of success, into social, intersubjective circulation. Rather than *dissociating* discrete entities, "difference" in Hegel *organizes relations* over time by articulating the "diversity" (*Verschiedenheit*) of intellectual states and conceptual models (including the earlier, disjunctive paradigm of Enlightenment rationality) as a logical and historical sequence.

Hence Hegelian reflection repositions Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal as a particular "moment" in the trajectory of rationality to full awareness of its freedom, which will ultimately lead it to recognize that distinction as one that was not found (any more than objects are "found") but made. Hegel bluntly applies this position to his discussion of nature in the *Encyclopedia*: "Nature's essential

and distinctive characteristic is to be the Idea in the form of otherness [*die Idee in ihrem Anderssein*]” (Hegel 1970: 15). As Terry Pinkard puts it, “in showing that the normative demands made by ‘consciousness’ (that is, the norms governing judgments about objects of which we are aware), we are driven to comprehend that our mode of *taking* them to be such-and-such plays just as important a role in the cognitive enterprise as do the objects themselves or our so-called direct awareness of them” (Pinkard 2002: 225). Hegel thus unmasks various epistemological stances, including the category of “perception,” as covertly creating its “object” in the very act of venturing specific normative assertions about it. The act of “perception” (*Wahrnehmung*; literally, “a taking-for-truth”) thus surreptitiously constructs an object by venturing certain predicates “about” it, predicates that reflection will eventually come to reinterpret as norms for an intersubjective understanding. For in the end, “there is no ‘outside’ or extra-conceptual *explicans* [but] . . . only what we have come to regard as an indispensable *explicans*, and the narrative (i.e., Hegel’s *Phenomenology*) we need to give concerns that ‘coming to regard’ ” (Pippin 1999: 72).<sup>19</sup> It is in “self-consciousness” that the subject has progressed from a critical employment of the concept to a putatively other perceptual object to a reflexive “dismantling” (*Auseinanderlegung*) of the concept itself. To do so, however, is to shift one’s intellectual concern from the intended “correspondence” between the concept and the object to an explication of the concept *for another* self-conscious being. As Hegel dramatizes in a series of stages, any theory of self-consciousness is implicitly a theory of intersubjectivity. Whereas in perception “consciousness is to itself the truth,” self-consciousness now recognizes the “singleness . . . [and] *empty inner being* of the Understanding . . . [to be] no longer essences but moments of self-consciousness.” The critical, reflexive distancing vis-à-vis the concept as a mere tool of the understanding produces a self-conscious subject *and* simultaneously casts its emergence as “essentially the return from *otherness* [*Anderssein*].”

In its very mode of being, then, Hegelian self-consciousness “is movement” (*Bewegung*) and “life,” a paradigmatic shift from the inertia of merely perceiving consciousness that also explains why a number of readers have interpreted the *Phenomenology* as a developmental narrative or *Bildungsroman*. The formerly heteronomous “object” of perception, which is the negation of self-consciousness, “through this reflection into itself . . . has become life.” Through a series of further reflexive steps, self-conscious subjectivity ultimately recognizes that a truly corresponding point of reference for its cognitive striving can ultimately only be found in another, equally self-aware being: “Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. . . . Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it” (Hegel 1977b: 104-5, 106, 110).<sup>20</sup> As Terry Pinkard summarizes this crucial transition: “Hegel’s resolution of the Kantian paradox was to see it in social terms. Since the agent cannot secure any bindingness for the principle simply on his own, he requires the *recognition* of another agent of it as binding on both of them” (Pinkard 2002: 227).<sup>21</sup> As Jean Hyppolite had noted long before, “the condition of self-consciousness is the existence of other self-

consciousnesses." Only "this mutual recognition, in which individuals recognize each other as reciprocally recognizing each other, creates the element of spiritual life" (Hyppolite 1974: 163, 166). The quasi-contractual logic that begins to permeate Hegel's argument with the section on "self-consciousness" also hints why Hegel was the only German Idealist to develop a comprehensive theory of language, and some closing reflections on the relation between dialectic movement and linguistic form are in order.

What the *Phenomenology* calls "spirit" is in the end precisely this ongoing, inter-subjective negotiating of those norms or "notions" (*Begriffe*) that are to be taken as the binding, communal "reality." Much has been said about the organizational peculiarities of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its uneasy fusion of systematic and historical claims. Part BB, entitled "Spirit" thus effectively makes up the entire second half of the book as Hegel dialectically configures the three phases of the spirit – spirit in its immediacy, in alienation from itself, and as self-certainty – with the three historical stages of classical antiquity, feudal modernity up to the French Revolution, and the modern secular state since Napoleon. Each of the many transitions that comprise this historical part of Hegel's *Phenomenology* occurs when a community of subjects, having posited a coherent view of their world, reflexively understand this view to have been a discursive construct and hence open to dynamic change. In arriving at a reflexive understanding of their own opinions as intrinsically linguistic, formal constructs – that is, as expressions of their own, intellectual "freedom" rather than as facsimiles of being – the subjects of a discursive community also begin to perceive a deep-structural connection between the "expression" (*Äußerung*) and the eventual "jettisoning" (*Entäusserung*) of their specific worldview. This recognition, in turn, produces their "alienation" (*Entfremdung*) from previous opinion, which is now repositioned as but a moment in the simultaneously logical and historical development of a metasubjective "spirit."

For an example, one may turn to the struggle between the "noble consciousness" and an emergent theory of the modern state, as it is charted in the section on "Self-Alienated Spirit: Culture [*Bildung*]" of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel there shows how for the noble representative of a civic-humanist order the function of language exclusively inheres in "law and command, and in the actual world, in counsel only [and thus] has the essence for its content." Yet precipitated by other emergent social and intellectual formations (i.e., the rising professional, middle classes and their commitment to a more abstract and egalitarian idea of *civitas*), the "noble consciousness" of the feudal subject is constrained to adopt new forms of self-legitimation, which in turn impels it to reflect upon and thus distance itself from the paradigm of the noble individual. Characteristic of the latter was above all the aristocratic *habitus* of authoritative "speech [whereby] the pure self . . . *qua independent, separate individuality* comes into existence, so that it exists for others." Yet precisely this form is also its limitations, since it lacks the permanence and, seen as a medium, lacks universality inasmuch as all speech is local, occasional, and ephemeral; for "that it is *perceived or heard* means that its *real existence dies away [verhallt]*" (Hegel 1977b: 308-9, 1952: 362-3).<sup>22</sup> With

its claim that "alienation takes solely place in language," Hegel's phenomenological analysis of spirit as its own history thus posits language as the very catalyst for the reflexive movement that is history. In its three dimensions – a) as the form of a specific content; b) as the reflexive content of that very form; and c) as a semiotic medium connecting and reconciling these two positions – language constitutes the very infrastructure of Hegelian reflection. As the very "medium of reflection" (*Reflexionsmedium*), to borrow Walter Benjamin's expression, language serves as the very circuitry of a systemic (i.e., no longer subjective) model of "intelligence." Indeed, as close readings of the second half of the *Phenomenology*, part III of the *Encyclopedia*, or all of Hegel's *Aesthetics* richly confirm, language is homologous with rationality itself, something that in the late work of Hegel presents itself as a dynamic and self-regulating structure of progressive and increasing complexity. Hegel's philosophy thus closely mirrors or presages a number of discursive and intellectual formations arising either simultaneously with it or following later in the twentieth century, such as the rise of the developmental novel (*Bildungsroman*), the rise of structuralist (rather than agency-driven) models of social description, and above all the "linguistic turn" of philosophy typically said to have begun with Wittgenstein and Heidegger and widely credited with having profoundly reconfigured the relationship between aesthetics, literary studies, historical inquiry, and philosophy.

## NOTES

- 1 Especially poignant instances of the abstract category of space superseding the local and contingent meaning of place would be the capitalization of land as "real estate" via parliamentary acts of enclosure in England or the sweeping geographic and legal reorganization of Germany under the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* of 1803 and the subsequent introduction of uniform law (the *Code Napoléon*). See Sheehan (1989: 14-40, 235-73); see also Nipperdey (1996: 11-68).
- 2 Giddens notes that "notions coined in the meta-languages of the social sciences routinely re-enter the universe of actions they were initially formulated to describe or account for." As he puts it, "Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological" (Giddens 1990: 15, 43).
- 3 Evidence of the accelerating rate of literacy can be found in the number of new titles on display at the Leipzig book fair: 960 in 1700, 2,600 in 1780, and over 5,000 in 1800. See Sheehan (1989: 153) and Pinkard (2002: 7).
- Likewise, German as a vernacular rapidly displaces Latin as the official language of scholarship during the eighteenth century, with the ratio of Latin to German publications dropping from 1:2 in 1700 to 1:10 in 1780; still, advanced literacy lags significantly behind England and France; see Engelsing (in Sheehan 1989: 157), who estimates that no more than 5 percent of Germans around 1780 possessed a high level of literacy.
- 4 On the relation of Kantian "morality" to institutional, organized religion, see Pinkard's (2002) splendid survey of *German Philosophy: 1760-1860*, pp. 58-65.
- 5 For a close and sustained reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, see Rodolphe Gasché (2003) *The Idea of Form*, especially pp. 42-59.
- 6 On this debate, see Beiser (1987: 226-84), Pinkard (2002: 105-8), and the essays by A. von Schönborn and Michael Baur in Baur and Dahlstrom (1999); see also Breazeale (1996) and Cassirer (1974). Fichte's review of "Aeneisidemus" can be found in Fichte (1988).

- 7 Notwithstanding Fichte's eagerness to escape the aporias of reflection in his quest for autonomous self-constitution free of all presuppositions, "elements of the reflection theory are...insinuating themselves into Fichte's counter-proposal. [Thus...] we do not yet see how we can use the productive act's encounter with itself to make this knowledge intelligible" (Henrich 1982: 26).
- 8 On Novalis's remarkably perceptive critique of Fichte in the six groups of manuscripts that make up the *Fichte Studies*, see Von Molnar (1987: 39-43) and Bowie (1997: 65-80). William O'Brien reads the *Fichte Studies* as the "decisive point...at which Romanticism turns away from Idealistic philosophy, or more precisely, turns back upon it in order to analyze it as language, and ultimately, as a fiction" (O'Brien 1995: 78).
- 9 Characteristically, Novalis will rewrite that Fichtean sentence as "The self must posit itself as actively presenting" (*Das Ich muß sich, als darstellend setzen*; Novalis 1978, II: 194), with the emphasis now placed on the temporalized, progressive, and intrinsically aesthetic nature of "positing."
- 10 Notwithstanding his fundamental departure from Fichte's system, Novalis and all early Romantics share the epigenetic premise: "How can a person have a sense of something if he does not have the germ of it within himself. What I am to understand must develop organically within me – and what I seem to learn is only nourishment – stimulation of the organism" (Novalis 1999: 25). Even more clearly, the *Fichte Studies* comment on the logic of origination: "Origination asserts a self-engendering, a causality that is its own cause" (*Entstehen drückt eine Selbsthervorbringung, eine Causalität, die sich selbst Causalität ist... aus*; Novalis 1978, II, 208).
- 11 On this problem in Fichte's early *Science of Knowledge*, see Müller-Sievers (1997: 65-89).
- 12 William O'Brien's study offers the most extensive account of Novalis's linguistic theory (O'Brien 1995: 77-118), though he appears unaware of the structural affinity between Novalis's semiotic speculations and his critique of Idealist models of reflection as *ordo inversus*. The latter concept figures more prominently in Winfried Menninghaus's reading of Romantic theories of reflection and representation (Menninghaus 1987: 74-98); see also Gasché (1986: 23-54).
- 13 Ulrich Pothast remarks that Fichte's theory "constructs the 'I' as one that knows itself, to be sure, though only at the expense of its internal consistency. The theory succeeds inasmuch as it shows that without the premise of certain paradoxes, i.e., incompatible situations, no 'I' deserving of that name could ever be constructed. Fichte's theory may be characterized as a self-consciously paradoxical one" (Pothast 1971: 44, my translation).
- 14 Though he makes no mention of Fichte's "Über Geist und Buchstaben in der Philosophie," a crucial intertext for any discussion of semiotics and linguistic theory relative to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, William O'Brien rightly notes how Fichte, "who took the step [towards semiotics] first, had also recoiled from it" (O'Brien 1995: 101).
- 15 Frank also acknowledges Hölderlin's significant contribution to Schelling's critique of Fichte. Of particular significance here are Hölderlin's letters to Schelling and his early essays, especially "Judgment and Being." See Hölderlin (1987: 37-8 and 124-6 [letter to Hegel]). On Schelling's early writings, see Bowie (1994: 12-29) and Cassirer (1974, III: 217-84).
- 16 In his autobiographical miscellany, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, Goethe recalls reading Schelling's *Entwurf* around 1800 (Goethe 1981, X: 450). Goethe's famous didactic poems, *Metamorphosis of the Plants* and *Metamorphosis of the Animals* fall in the same period, roughly June 1798, though the latter poem remained fragmentary and did not attain its eventual form until 1806. See Goethe (1981, I: 199-203); see also Goethe's occasional poem, "Weltseele," eponymous with Schelling's 1799 treatise (Goethe 1981, I: 248).
- 17 Hegel's "Philosophy of Nature," which forms Part II of the 1817 *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, most cogently challenges Schelling's construction of nature as a separate developmental structure, ostensibly running parallel to the development of human intelligence, and recognizable for the latter

- qua "intuition." As Hegel puts it, "in the Philosophy of Nature, people have fallen back on intuition (*Anschauung*) and set it above reflective thought; but this is a mistake, for one cannot philosophize out of intuition. What is intuited must also be thought" (Hegel 1970: 12). Schelling in turn responded with an incisive critique of Hegel's conception of Being (*Sein*) in his 1827 *Lectures on Modern Philosophy*, charging that for Hegel "being" as the "starting point" of all philosophical reflection is held to something "strictly negative, deficient, an emptiness" (*ein bloßes Minus, als ein Mangel, eine Leere*) which, paradoxically, is nonetheless "to be overcome and filled with content" by the autotelic process of thought (Schelling 1976: 419). On Schelling's critique of Hegel, see Manfred Frank's excellent *Der unendliche Mangel an Seyn* (1975: 32-119).
- 18 Pippin quickly inflects this ultimately crude view of Kantian dualism, particularly as regards Kant's conception of moral agency; see Pippin (1991b: 537-41).
  - 19 See also Martin Heidegger (*Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes*). Heidegger had already emphasized Hegel's unmasking of "perception" (*Wahrnehmen*; literally, "a taking-for-truth") as part of the overall project of a "Science of the Experience of Consciousness" – that being the original title for the *Phenomenology*.
  - 20 On different, often radically incompatible readings of the *Phenomenology*, see the opening of Pippin (1993).
  - 21 Pinkard here summarizes his earlier, expansive and thorough reinterpretation offered in *Hegel's Phenomenology: the Sociality of Reason* (Pinkard 1994).
  - 22 See also §§ 440-64 of the *Encyclopedia*, where Hegel further develops his linguistic theory; see Hegel (1978: 78-217). The most expansive meditation on the dynamic relationship between "spirit and letter" (*Geist* and *Buchstabe*) is arguably offered in Hegel's *Aesthetics*. On Hegel's linguistic theory, see Derrida (1980) and Smith (1988).

#### REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max (1972). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming. New York: Continuum.
- Baur, Michael (1999). "The role of skepticism in the emergence of German idealism." In Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (eds.), *The Emergence of German Idealism*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, pp. 63-91.
- Beiser, Frederick C. (1987). *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Blumenberg, Hans (1983). *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bowie, Andrew (1994). *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowie, Andrew (1997). *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Brandt, Robert (1994). *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Breazeale, Daniel (1996). "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory: Fichte and the 'Primacy of Practical Reason.'" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1): 47-64.
- Breazeale, Daniel (2000). "The Spirit of the *Wissenschaftslehre*." In Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 171-98.
- Cassirer, Ernst ([1920] 1974). *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der Neueren Zeit*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Cassirer, Ernst (1981). *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. James Hayden. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1980). *Marginalia*, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, 5 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Dawkins, Richard (1989). *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (1980). "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology." In *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 69-108.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1964-). *Werke*, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Jacob. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb ([1794] 1970). *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1987). *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1988). *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Frank, Manfred (1975). *Der unendliche Mangel an Seyn: Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Frank, Manfred (1985). *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Frank, Manfred (1989). *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Gasché, Rodolphe (1986). *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gasché, Rodolphe (2003). *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1981). *Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz. Munich: Beck.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1994). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1952). *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1969). *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1970). *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977a). *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977b). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1978). *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, trans. and ed. M. J. Petry. Dordrecht, Netherlands and Boston: Reidel.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1986). *Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, 2 vols. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Heidegger, Martin (1980). *Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Frankfurt: Klostermann.
- Henrich, Dieter (1982). "Fichte's Original Insight." *Contemporary German Philosophy* 1: 15-53.
- Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hyppolite, Jean (1974). *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel (1969). *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp-Smith. New York: Macmillan.
- Kant, Immanuel (1981). *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kant, Immanuel (1983). *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Ted Humphrey. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kant, Immanuel (1997). *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Löwith, Karl (1949). *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Menninghaus, Winfried (1987). *Unendliche Verdopplung: die frühromantische Grundlegung der Kunsttheorie im Begriff absoluter Selbstreflexion*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Müller-Sievers, Helmut. *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature Around 1800*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nipperdey, Thomas (1996). *German History from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800-1866*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) (1978). *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl

- and Richard Samuel, 3 vols. Munich and Vienna: Hanser.
- Novalis (1999). *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret M. Stoljar. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Novalis (2003). *Fichte Studies*, trans. and ed. Jane Kneller. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Brien, William A. (1995). *Novalis: Signs of Revolution*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pinkard, Terry (1994). *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinkard, Terry (2001). *Hegel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinkard, Terry (2002). *German Philosophy, 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pippin, Robert B. (1991a). "Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas." *Monist* 74 (3): 329-57.
- Pippin, Robert B. (1991b). "Idealism and Agency in Kant and Hegel." *The Journal of Philosophy* 88: 532-41.
- Pippin, Robert B. (1993). "You Can't Get There From Here: Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*." In Frederick Beiser (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 52-85.
- Pippin, Robert B. (1999). *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of High European Culture*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pothast, Ulrich (1971). *Über einige Fragen der Selbstbeziehung*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Rosen, Stanley (1987). *Hermeneutics as Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1976). *Schriften von 1813-1830*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1978). *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1982). *Schriften von 1799-1801*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1988). *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph (1994). *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F. W. J. Schelling*, ed. and trans. Thomas Pfau. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Schönborn, Alexander von (1999). "Karl Leonhard Reinhold: '...endeavoring to keep up the pace mit unserem Zeitalter.'" In Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (eds.), *The Emergence of German Idealism*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, pp. 33-62.
- Sheehan, James J. (1989). *German History, 1770-1866*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Smith, John (1988). *The Spirit and its Letter*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sturma, Dieter (2000). "The Nature of Subjectivity: The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature." In Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 216-31.
- Taylor, Charles (1989). *Sources of the Modern Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Von Molnar, Géza (1987). *Novalis: Romantic Vision, Ethical Context*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ziolkowski, Theodore (1990). *German Romanticism and its Institutions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.