

## 2 Determinacy, Indeterminacy, and Contingency in German Idealism

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German idealism stands out in the history of philosophy for its systematic ambitions, despite, or perhaps because of, which it enjoys renewed interest. Guided by the idea that a philosophical tradition is better identified by its motivating problems than by its characteristic theses, we find German idealism driven by still-pressing questions. Are we rationally entitled to certain metaphysical concepts? Are such concepts merely empty forms lacking actuality? Is nature's thoroughgoing explanation in terms of such concepts consistent with the nature and goals of human freedom? The space defined by these questions inspires Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling to develop a unified method for their solution after Kant. Early fissures appear in this method, which, while they do not undo the idealists' shared motives, spawn a host of diverging agendas in subsequent post-Kantian thought. Determinacy and indeterminacy offer useful ways of viewing these fissures, particularly when we first consider a modal feature of Kant's critical turn.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant reorients logic from an undisciplined use of the "form of thinking in general,"<sup>1</sup> which yields the endless controversies of rationalist metaphysics, to an analysis of "the form of a possible experience in general."<sup>2</sup> Trading the logic of thinking for the logic of experience discloses a certain modal peculiarity of *a priori* conditions of possible experience, such as space, time, and the categories of the understanding. While necessary for us, they are radically contingent insofar as they lack a knowable, absolute ground: they are anthropically necessary, yet are brute facts.<sup>3</sup> The critical turn accordingly confronts us with the radical contingency of the logic of experience.

Kant's tolerance for radical contingency initiates two disputes that shape the course of German idealism. The first concerns the set of *a priori* conditions. With no absolute ground, this set's determination is not fully rigorous, but is to some extent haphazard or rhapsodic. To rectify this, Fichte and Hegel develop methods for determining the system of *a priori* conditions. The second dispute concerns the purpose or value of this system. Schelling argues that there is no decisive answer to why there should be such a system: however we construct it, its value is contingent on our "wholly undetermined" capacity to will its construction.<sup>4</sup> This argument exposes German

idealism to the open question of systematicity's value, confronting reason itself with its inborn indeterminacy of purpose.

I propose to explore the concepts of determinacy and indeterminacy in order to trace German idealism's path through these disputes. In §1, I explain Fichte's charge that Kant determines the categories rhapsodically and outline his genetic deduction of *a priori* conditions of experience from the I. In §2, I illustrate this deduction's application of the principle of determinability in the *Foundations of Natural Right*. In §3, I explicate Hegel's rhapsody charge against Fichte before sketching his speculative determination of the system of conditions in the *Science of Logic*. Finally, in §4, I reconstruct Schelling's argument in *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* that a philosophical system's value is indeterminate because it issues from an originally undecided act of will. I hope to show that while determinacy guides German idealism's highest initial ambitions, indeterminacy emerges as perhaps its natural and unavoidable limitation.

### §1

Prior to giving a transcendental deduction of our entitlement to the categories in the first *Critique*, Kant offers a metaphysical deduction of the categories' origin in the understanding. Whereas a transcendental deduction answers the question *quid juris* regarding our right to possess and use a pure concept, a metaphysical deduction answers the question *quid facti* regarding the fact from which that concept's possession arises.<sup>5</sup> Answering the question of right blunts skepticism about whether we are justified in using pure concepts like causality by showing that they are *a priori* conditions of experience. Answering the question of fact fills the lacuna left by explaining our possession of concepts that are necessary for the possibility of experience in terms of such contingent mechanisms as divine implantation and customary conjunction.

Kant's answer to the question *quid facti* is a metaphysical deduction that aims to show that the categories coincide with the logical forms of judgment.<sup>6</sup> The faculty for judging—the understanding—provides an appropriate origin from which to derive these pure concepts insofar as it allows Kant to proceed systematically rather than “rhapsodically from a haphazard search for pure concepts, of the completeness of which one could never be certain, since one would only infer it through induction, without reflecting that in this way one would never see why just these and not other concepts should inhabit the pure understanding.”<sup>7</sup>

The charge of rhapsody concerns the modal status of the origin from which one derives the categories in response to the question *quid facti*. A derivation is rhapsodic if this origin is haphazard or contingent, which it is if, like the whim of a god or the flux of custom, a real alternative is possible. It consequently provokes uncertainty regarding the “completeness”

of the set of categories. By investigating the understanding's own forms of judgment, Kant intends his metaphysical deduction to secure a rigorous determination of this set.

Despite championing the spirit of transcendental idealism, Fichte returns the charge of rhapsody to Kant in the *Wissenschaftslehre Nova Methodo*: "Kant proves his philosophy only by means of induction and not through deduction."<sup>8</sup> Fichte here is targeting Kant's metaphysical deduction, for, shortly after, he says that while Kant's "conclusions are the same" as the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s, the latter "connects them to something higher."<sup>9</sup> Given that Kant's transcendental deduction concludes with our right to the categories as necessary conditions of experience—a thesis that Fichte shares<sup>10</sup>—and given that Kant's clue to this conclusion is the metaphysical deduction of the categories from something higher—namely, the understanding—Fichte's charge must be that the metaphysical deduction is inductive. Why might this be, and why would Kant's deduction thereby be rhapsodic?

Fichte interprets Kant as arguing that experience is explicable if we assume "the operation of this or that [category]" and he asserts that this Kantian argument can secure "only hypothetical validity."<sup>11</sup> A hidden premise motivating Fichte's assertion is that nothing definitively warrants the antecedent of Kant's argument, namely, that we can assume the operation of the specific categories derived in the metaphysical deduction. Fichte's premise would be true if there is any doubt about precisely which categories we may assume to be in operation. Now, Kant's metaphysical deduction takes as operative those categories which coincide with the forms of judgment taken over from traditional logic—an inheritance that Kant himself recognizes is radically contingent in §21 of the *Transcendental Analytic*:

for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception *a priori* only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.<sup>12</sup>

Absent some "further," absolute ground, the forms of judgment from which the categories are derived are facts as brute as the spatio-temporal character of human sensibility. This contingency extends to the categories, given their alleged coincidence with these forms. Hence, Kant's determination of the set of *a priori* conditions of experience of which the categories are members is rhapsodic or, as Fichte says, inductive.<sup>13</sup>

The rhapsody problem is what elicits Fichte's complaint in the *Nova Methodo* that "Kant does not derive the laws of human thinking in a rigorously scientific manner," which, he claims, is "precisely what the *Wissenschaftslehre* is supposed to do."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, this problem is what prompts

him in *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* to ask of Kant, "who does not derive the presumed laws of the intellect from the very nature of the intellect [. . .] how did you become aware that the laws of the intellect are precisely these laws of substantiality and causality?"<sup>15</sup> In order to secure a rigorous answer to the question *quid facti*—one that non-rhapsodically determines the categories' precise kind and number—Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* begins by positing the freedom of the I as the "single basic law" and "explanatory ground of experience."<sup>16</sup> Such an absolute ground offers an apt origin from which to then deduce the categories insofar as it avoids Kant's "detour" through traditionally observed logical forms, whose relative contingency leaves the categories' completeness uncertain.<sup>17</sup>

"Nevertheless," Fichte adds,

it remains merely a presupposition that this constitutes the necessary and fundamental law of reason as a whole, a law from which we can derive the entire system of our necessary representations. [. . .] A complete transcendental idealism has to demonstrate the truth of this presupposition by actually providing a derivation of this system of representations, and precisely this constitutes its proper task. It does this by proceeding as follows: *It shows that what is first set up as a fundamental principle, and directly demonstrated in consciousness, is impossible unless something else occurs along with it, and that this something else is impossible unless a third thing takes place, and so on until the conditions of what was first exhibited are completely exhausted, and this latter is, with respect to its possibility, fully intelligible.*<sup>18</sup>

The I is a presupposition because it is a "*fundamental principle*" and, hence, not derivable. Nevertheless, as an absolute ground, it contains the demonstration of its truth in the form of a "derivation" of the system of its own "*conditions.*" During his Jena period, Fichte divides the *Wissenschaftslehre* into two parts: intellectually intuiting the I as first principle, and deducing from it the conditions of its realization.<sup>19</sup> With this methodological division, the precise number and kind of categories are derived from the absolute ground whose realization they make possible.

In order to distinguish the derivation of the system of *a priori* conditions from Kant's own metaphysical and transcendental deductions, Fichte labels his deduction "genetic."<sup>20</sup> The notion of genesis is meant to reflect the sense in which these conditions are determined by a *sui generis* activity of thought. Anticipating the I's emerging conditions, Fichte says:

On the one hand, spatial extension and subsistence will be ascribed to it, and in this respect it becomes a determinate body; on the other hand, temporal identity and duration will be ascribed to it, and in this respect it becomes a soul. It is, however, the task of philosophy to demonstrate this and to provide a genetic account of how the

I comes to think of itself in these ways. Accordingly, this is not something philosophy has to presuppose, but rather is part of what has to be derived.<sup>21</sup>

Although the *Wissenschaftslehre* begins with a presupposition, the *truth* of its beginning cannot be presupposed. On pain of rhapsody, it cannot presuppose the conditions of its first principle's realization, which include space, time, and the categories. A "complete transcendental idealism" must accordingly prove the truth of its beginning by genetically deducing these conditions from the I.<sup>22</sup>

## §2

Fichte adopts several names for the rule that is meant to guide the determination of the system of *a priori* conditions. In the *Nova Methodo*, he says that deduction overcomes presupposition by following the "law of reflective opposition." At this stage of the text, he has argued that there is "no consciousness of the I without consciousness of the Not-I."<sup>23</sup> This indicates that adhering to the rule in question consists in determining a condition through its opposite. Another name for this rule is the "law of reflection," according to which "determining" something occurs "by means of opposition."<sup>24</sup> Fichte eventually refers to the rule as the "principle of determinability."<sup>25</sup> As a method of deducing *a priori* conditions, determination through opposition has the advantage of ensuring that no conditions are introduced rhapsodically, e.g., by inductive appeal to observed forms of judgment inherited from traditional logic. It instead proceeds by (a) positing a condition, (b) discovering that it is unstable without its opposite, and (c) generating a successor condition to resolve their resulting tension.<sup>26</sup>

A detailed deduction occurs in *Foundations of Natural Right*, where Fichte gives a "genetic proof"<sup>27</sup> of the external world, the body, and other minds, among other *a priori* conditions. I will illustrate the principle of determinability's application in an early stage of this proof, in which the concept of freedom is discovered to be unstable without that of a sensible world, the resulting tension between which concepts generates the concept of other minds, which resolves it.

Like other texts in the Jena period, *Natural Right* posits I-hood as the "exclusive condition of all philosophizing." 'I-hood' denotes a rational being's existence as free—as "an acting upon itself."<sup>28</sup> Fichte claims that certain "necessary actions [. . .] follow from the concept of the rational being" that condition its possibility,<sup>29</sup> the first of which we can ascertain via the principle of determinability.

We find that the concept of freedom is unstable without that of an opposing not-I: "This activity is *constrained* and *bound*, if not with respect to its form (i.e., that the activity occurs), then with respect to its content (i.e., that the activity, once it occurs in a particular case, proceeds in a certain way)."<sup>30</sup> While the form of freedom is to act upon itself and is otherwise

shunted blindly, it is empty without some distinct "content" to guide its movement. In other words, that freedom occurs is a condition of philosophizing, whereas how it occurs owes in part to some not-I. Hence, if free activity is to be "an *efficacy* directed at objects," then some "world-intuiting activity" must limit it.<sup>31</sup> Freedom's determinacy accordingly requires positing a sensible world in opposition to it.<sup>32</sup>

Fichte acknowledges that common sense already grants existence to the world without the aid of philosophy, but he asserts that this bestowal must be *explained*. Philosophy must "bracket" common sense in order to explain "why we can posit ourselves only as altering the form of things, but never the matter."<sup>33</sup> According to Fichte's explanation, it is because we cannot determinately posit ourselves as free without an opposing not-I that we posit the independent matter of the world.<sup>34</sup>

A tension now emerges. At one stage, a subject limits the world insofar as she is free (a). However, at another stage, the world limits her insofar as she does not create the world (b). A "prior moment" precedes the world's limitation by the subject, one in which she is limited by the world, "and so *ad infinitum*."<sup>35</sup> This regress, Fichte says, "can be cancelled only if it is assumed that *the subject's efficacy* is synthetically unified with the *object* in one and the same moment."<sup>36</sup> In particular, the synthesis of the subject and what opposes it requires an event that "leave[s] the subject in full possession of its freedom to be self-determining."<sup>37</sup> Fichte locates this event in another's summons, which regards "the subject's being-determined as *its being-determined to be self-determining* [. . .] calling upon it to resolve to exercise its efficacy."<sup>38</sup> Your summons limits me by opposing my agency, yet limits itself by assuming and inviting the exercise of the same: as we might say, it imposes a normative rather than a factual limitation.<sup>39</sup> It thereby unifies subject and object, resolving the tension of the subject's limitation by the sensible world (c). In the causally more robust space of a social world, the summons' final cause or "ultimate end" is that the addressee's freedom "ought to exist."<sup>40</sup> You make room for my free activity in a way that a merely sensible world cannot. Fichte thus infers that the "undivided event" of "*free reciprocal efficacy*" between minds is an *a priori* condition of experience.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of another mind summoning me to action affords stable determinacy to the concepts of freedom and world. Fichte arrives at this intermediate deductive result via the principle of determinability. Without mentioning this principle, he states: "*In this process of distinguishing through opposition, the subject acts in such a way that the concept of itself as a free being and the concept of the rational being outside it (as a free being like itself) are mutually determined and conditioned.*"<sup>42</sup> The instability of the concept of freedom, and the tension that it produces with the concept of a merely sensible world, generate the first in a series of *a priori* conditions whose totality Fichte gradually determines with a genetic deduction from a first principle.<sup>43</sup>

## §3

Kant's tolerance for radically contingent, i.e., absolutely groundless *a priori* conditions provokes Fichte's charge of rhapsody and inspires him to deduce such conditions from the I. Deducing them via the principle of determinability is meant to remove their contingency. Nevertheless, this deduction rests on the contingency of its first principle, for while the I is meant to generate the necessary conditions of its own possibility, it is itself "merely a presupposition." Although self-positing, the I as first principle is not a given datum or a finished fact, but an activity that we must resolve to perform, on pain of what Fichte calls "dogmatism," by which he means Spinozism. We will see that, for Hegel, this presents a Kantian relapse that impedes the rigorous determination of the system of conditions.

In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel hails Fichte for detecting the rhapsody problem:

It remains the profound and enduring merit of Fichte's philosophy to have reminded us that the *thought-determinations* [i.e., the categories] must be exhibited in their *necessity*, and that it is essential for them to be *deduced*.—Fichte's philosophy ought to have had at least this effect upon the method of presenting a treatise on logic: that the thought-determinations in general [ . . . ] are no longer just taken from observation and thus apprehended only empirically, but are deduced from thinking itself. If thinking has to be able to prove anything at all [ . . . ] then it must above all be capable of proving its very own peculiar content, and able to gain insight into the necessity of this content.<sup>44</sup>

Hegel holds that if the categories are "*thought-determinations*"—as required by an adequate answer to the question *quid facti*—they cannot be "empirically" grasped or "taken from observation" of traditional or customary rules, but rather must be "deduced from thinking itself." This echoes Fichte's charge of rhapsody against Kant and his subsequent demand that the categories be derived "from the very nature of the intellect."<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, Hegel holds that logic, in order to be a rigorous "Science," must begin from "total *presuppositionlessness*." Lacking any further ground, a presupposition is radically contingent—merely "an arbitrary assurance."<sup>46</sup> As he says in the *Science of Logic*, that which "has a *presupposition* [ . . . ] takes its *start* from the *contingent*."<sup>47</sup> Hegel, accordingly, has reason to suspect a Kantian tolerance for contingency in Fichte's first principle, which we saw is "merely a presupposition." Moreover, in *Concerning the Concept of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte says that his science "is not something that exists independently of us and without our help. On the contrary, it is something which can only be produced by the freedom of our mind, turned in a particular direction."<sup>48</sup> Inseparable from the *Wissenschaftslehre* is the contingency of our adopting its orienting standpoint.

The question, as Fichte says in the *New Presentation*, is whether we assign the "explanatory ground of experience" to the I and embrace "idealism" or assign it to the not-I and embrace "dogmatism."<sup>49</sup> Answering this question is philosophy's first task. Answering it in favor of idealism is, moreover, its "first demand."<sup>50</sup> But this presupposes one's "confidence in one's own self-sufficiency and freedom."<sup>51</sup> Whether I affirm my freedom and posit the I is a radically contingent or brute fact. For Hegel, by contrast, presuppositions must "be given up when we enter into the Science."<sup>52</sup>

Fichte's violation of Hegel's scientific criterion extends even further. In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel notes that the Fichtean I "is not absolute" insofar as it is "conditioned by something else," namely, the very need to deduce its conditions of realization. The I's "incompleteness" in this regard is what necessitates "the deduction of the world of sense."<sup>53</sup> Worse still, the sensible world offers dubious determinacy to the I's free activity, for it "appears as an incomprehensible primitive determinateness,"<sup>54</sup> i.e., as a brute fact. Fichte appears to presuppose the world, since, in order to posit an (incomplete) I, he must first have "abstracted from the alien other which is afterwards taken back again." Indeed, that the I initially lacks a proof of its truth implies its limitation in advance by something other. Hegel accordingly describes Fichte's I as a "mirror" that "receives the sense-world and posits it ideally within itself, only to give it back afterward just as it received it."<sup>55</sup> If this assessment is correct, then the first presupposition of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is saddled with a second. Such a starting point cannot help initiating a rhapsodic determination of *a priori* conditions.<sup>56</sup> It, therefore, cannot "display the realm of thought philosophically, that is, in its own immanent activity or, what is the same, in its necessary development."<sup>57</sup>

Beyond presuppositionlessness, Hegel is concerned for the very thesis that drives Fichte's charge of rhapsody against Kant: reason's absolute freedom.<sup>58</sup> Fichte sees that a rigorous answer to the question *quid facti* must show that the origin of the conditions of experience does not exceed reason's power of explanation. Eliminating externality in this respect is meant to enshrine the freedom of reason or I-hood. However, Hegel observes in the *Encyclopedia* that the I "does not genuinely appear as free, spontaneous activity [. . .] having been aroused only by a check from outside."<sup>59</sup> Hegel refers here to Fichte's claim in *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* that "the ultimate ground of all reality for the I is an original interaction between the I and some other thing outside it," which he calls a "check."<sup>60</sup> If Fichte presupposes not only the I as first principle, but also the world as a check on the I's realization, then he entrenches the threat of radical contingency and so fails to overcome Kant's restriction on reason's capacity for self-explanation.

Fichte might reply that the idea of a check is underdeveloped in the *Foundations*, as it does not signify the social world that is deduced in *Natural Right*, from which he may infer that Hegel's attack is stalled at a dialectical stage in which the tension between opposing concepts has not yet been

resolved. But Hegel can retort that the very idea of the opposition between the I and the not-I is arbitrary because the I already abstracts from the not-I, "an incomprehensible primitive" or "bare assurance" imposed on the I. Whether subsequently analyzed as the subject's sensible object or as its social other, the not-I's initial opposition lacks deductive necessity. Consequently, determining the I through its opposition to the not-I, in accordance with the principle of determinability, is at best incomplete.

However, rather than abandon Fichte's method of determining *a priori* conditions through opposition, Hegel adopts a modified method according to which opposition is necessary insofar as it comes to *originate* in a condition.

After stating his scientific criterion, Hegel gives a preliminary gloss of this new method: "the *logical* has three sides: ( $\alpha$ ) *the side of abstraction* or *of the understanding*, ( $\beta$ ) *the dialectical* or *negatively rational side*, [and] ( $\gamma$ ) *the speculative* or *positively rational one*."<sup>61</sup> Understanding initially captures Fichte's awkward pivot on two original presuppositions: through "restricted abstraction," understanding "stops short" at the opposition of brute or "fixed" determinacies. Dialectic then transforms Fichte's notion of opposition from the arbitrary and external imposition on a condition to that condition's own inner contradiction: as Hegel says, dialectic is "the genuine nature" of a condition, a nature that "is not restricted merely from the outside," but "passes over, *of itself*, into its opposite";<sup>62</sup> a condition thus negates itself through the contradiction that it contains. Finally, speculation yields a "*positive result*" where Fichtean deduction secures only rhapsody: it produces "not *simple, formal* unity, but a *unity of distinct determinations*," namely, a unity of a condition and its own inner opposition.<sup>63</sup>

I will trace this method through the first stage of the *Science of Logic* in order to illustrate Hegel's systematization of Fichte's response to the question *quid facti*.<sup>64</sup>

Hegel's *Logic* takes being as the least arbitrary starting point. Since being is all encompassing, it entails no differentiating (hence, no potentially arbitrary) opposition. As Hegel intones: "*Being, pure being*—without further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself and also not unequal with respect to another; it has no difference within it, nor any outwardly."<sup>65</sup> Being avoids the fixed and mutually external abstractions of the understanding that saddle Fichte with two equiprimordial presuppositions. But being also initiates the negations of dialectic, for its indeterminacy leaves "as little" for thought as the concept of nothing. Indeed, Hegel says, "There is *nothing* to be intuited in it."<sup>66</sup> Given its "emptiness," being passes "*of itself*" into its opposite. It negates itself as all-encompassing insofar as it harbours its own contradiction.<sup>67</sup> This yields "*distinct determinations*" ripe for speculative unification. Although being and nothing are indistinguishable in their indeterminacy and so are, in some sense, "*the same*," they do not constitute a simple, stable unity. Rather, their unity is the "*movement*" of "*each immediately vanish[ing] in its opposite*,"<sup>68</sup> a movement that Hegel

calls "becoming." Becoming is their positive result—the first in a long series of thought-determinations whose totality Hegel calls "the absolute idea."<sup>69</sup>

By removing Fichteian presuppositions from the system of *a priori* conditions, Hegel provides a deeper solution to the rhapsody problem. Nevertheless, his solution exhibits yet a deeper contingency, for systematicity raises the question of its value, the indeterminacy of which, Schelling will argue, reveals reason's insuperable limits.

#### §4

Hegel rejects haphazard or rhapsodic limits on reason's power for explanation in order to demonstrate its absolute freedom. While this systematically articulates how reason's essence must be, that reason exists at all is a separate matter, one that Schelling continually investigates through variations on the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"<sup>70</sup> No appeal to reason can answer this question without raising it anew, for even if the rigorous determinacy of *a priori* conditions is entirely internal to a rational system, that system's value and the purpose of its construction originate in a brute act of will.<sup>71</sup> Turning to German idealism's final shift, I will reconstruct Schelling's argument in the *Freedom* essay that freedom is an undetermined capacity for willing.

It is useful to begin by noting that the *Freedom* essay abandons two doctrines from Schelling's earlier work. First, it rejects absolute knowledge. In *Of the I As First Principle*, Schelling had posited "an ultimate point of reality on which everything depends," of which we have knowledge "through which alone all other knowledge is knowledge." This point is the I, and this knowledge is intellectual intuition.<sup>72</sup> While Schelling does not mention intellectual intuition in the *Freedom* essay, he rejects absolute knowledge when he chides those who lament that the ground of reality and knowledge is "incomprehensible" and "without understanding."<sup>73</sup> Second, the essay rejects absolute idealism, the view promulgated in Schelling's identity philosophy, according to which reason has absolute knowledge of itself, while we finite knowers are "merely its organ."<sup>74</sup> In stark contrast, he now declares individual human freedom to be "the one and all of philosophy."<sup>75</sup>

Now, in the essay, Schelling charges Fichte with "subjective idealism" for failing to show that "everything actual" has "freedom as its ground."<sup>76</sup> But what precisely is Fichte's error, given that he explicitly posits the I's freedom as absolute ground? First, it is the "arrogance" of holding that the absolute can be known and can thus be given "order and form."<sup>77</sup> Second, it is the "impetuosity" of lamenting that the "darkness" of a "will in which there is no understanding" should be "the root of understanding."<sup>78</sup> Both claims reprise Schelling's earlier criticism of the doctrine of intellectual intuition.<sup>79</sup> The second claim in particular inspires a decades-long critique of Hegel, casting freedom as "the incomprehensible base of reality in things."<sup>80</sup> What is Schelling's argument for this claim?

Freedom is incomprehensible if it is ultimately undetermined by reason. Schelling supports the antecedent by claiming that freedom, regarded as “a wholly undetermined capacity to will one or the other of two contradictory opposites, without determining reasons but simply because it is willed, has in fact the original undecidedness of human being as idea in its favor.”<sup>81</sup> The supporting claim is that human existence is always to be decided. Who I am to be remains an open question. Schelling immediately clarifies that the will’s indeterminacy in this respect does not refer to “individual actions,”<sup>82</sup> which must have their determining reasons. Rather, that I commit to a system or way of life for which such reasons can appear as determining—e.g., the system of Kantian ethics—is an originally undecided act of will.<sup>83</sup> Freedom so regarded is therefore a capacity to open a space in which certain reasons go unquestioned, yet is itself unfathomable—an “*unground*.”<sup>84</sup>

Schelling’s argument casts in unintended light Hegel’s claim that Science begins with the “resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering thinking as such.”<sup>85</sup> If, as with any way of life, a philosophical system rests on an “arbitrary” resolve—driven, say, by a longing for Science—then no system is presuppositionless.<sup>86</sup> A system presupposes a radically contingent valuation, that is, an act of freedom determined in advance by no principle of reason, but driven by a “yearning and desire” for understanding. Accordingly, while freedom expresses a “will in which there is no understanding,” it is not a mere drive, but a drive toward systematic intelligibility—what Schelling calls “a will of the understanding.”<sup>87</sup>

To be sure, Schelling speaks in the essay of freedom’s “inner necessity,” an “essence” that he defines as “fundamentally [one’s] *own act*.” However, if my essence is an “*act*”, as opposed to a principle of reason, then I am originally “an undecided being.”<sup>88</sup> Freedom’s “inner necessity” accordingly consists in one’s ineluctable responsibility to resolve how to live, which decision is radically contingent. *Contra* Hegel, a system’s “innermost presupposition” is freedom, whose essence is indeterminacy or “absolute *indifference*.”<sup>89</sup> As Schelling says in his 1827/28 Munich lectures: “Common ethical judgment therefore recognizes in every person—and to that extent in everything—a region in which there is no reason at all, but rather absolute freedom. [. . .] The unreason of eternity lies this close in every person, and they are horrified by it as it is brought to their consciousness.”<sup>90</sup>

If freedom is the indeterminate and therefore incomprehensible ground of reason, then a presuppositionless system is a contradiction in terms, for a system’s driving value—why it matters—issues from a brute act of will. Schelling’s defense of this claim revives a Kantian tolerance for radical contingency, thwarting the thesis for reason’s absolute autonomy that inspires Fichte’s and Hegel’s systematic constructions. It is precisely the original undecidedness of human freedom that, for Schelling, reveals reason’s inborn indeterminacy of purpose. At the heart of the German idealist tradition—between alleged subjective idealism and professed absolute idealism—emerges the proto-existentialist insight that, however we answer

perennial questions about metaphysical concepts, their actuality, and their explanatory relation to human freedom, we inescapably embody the further question of why such questions matter.

### Notes

- 1 Kant (1998, A55/B79).
- 2 Ibid., A246/B303.
- 3 Allison (2006) argues that what distinguishes Kant's "anthropological" turn from empiricism is the latter's retention of the "theocentric paradigm of classical rationalism" whose core assumption is that cognition consists in conformity to a God's-eye perspective (p. 115).
- 4 SW (I/7, p. 382).
- 5 Kant (1998, A84–85/B116–117); cf. AA (18, p. 267).
- 6 Ibid., A66–83/B91–115.
- 7 Ibid., A80–81/B106–107.
- 8 GA (IV/2, p. 6).
- 9 GA (IV/2, p. 8).
- 10 See Fichte, GA (IV/2, pp. 55, 113); SW (I, pp. 446, 449, 457–458, 462); SW (III, pp. 34, 35, 73); SW (IV, p. 49).
- 11 GA (IV/2, p. 6).
- 12 Kant (1998, B145–146).
- 13 Whether the absence of an absolute ground warrants criticism is one of the central debates of post-Kantian idealism. Fichte claims in the *New Presentation* that Kant's metaphysical deduction at least implies a rigorous answer to the question *quid facti*: "the *Critique of Pure Reason* by no means lacks a foundation. Such a foundation is very plainly present; but nothing has been constructed upon it, and the construction materials—though already well prepared—are jumbled together in a most haphazard manner" SW (I, p. 479n). Contrast Henrich: "the *quaestio juris* can be answered in a satisfactory way even if the *quaestio facti* meets with insurmountable difficulties. Consider again the example of the last will: in many cases we are unable to produce a complete story of the way in which the will has been made. But if it can be determined in court that the will is authentic and valid, by means of only a few but crucial aspects, the question of right can still be answered decisively" Henrich (1989, p. 36).
- 14 GA (IV/2, p. 7).
- 15 SW (I, p. 442).
- 16 SW (I, pp. 425, 445).
- 17 SW (I, p. 442). Compare Fichte's 1812 lectures on transcendental logic: "[Kant] was not so disinclined as he ought to have been [toward general logic. . .]" and "had not recognized that his own philosophy requires that general logic be destroyed to its very foundation." SW (IX, pp. 111–112).
- 18 SW (I, pp. 445–446).
- 19 See Fichte, GA (IV/2, p. 179); SW (I, p. 87); SW (III, pp. 2, 9); SW (IV, pp. 14–15).
- 20 See Fichte, SW (I, pp. 271, 305); SW (I, pp. 458, 495); SW (II, pp. 445–446); SW (III, p. 77); SW (IV, pp. 14, 37); GA (II/4, p. 103); GA (IV/3, pp. 342, 480–481). For an illuminating account of the connection between a pragmatic history of the mind and a genetic deduction, see Breazeale (2013, pp. 70–95). On the relation between Fichte's genetic deduction and Kant's metaphysical and transcendental deductions, see Bruno (2018).
- 21 SW (I, p. 495). Compare an unpublished passage from 1793: "Sensibility, understanding, reason, the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of desire—can one

- demonstrate [. . .] the necessity of all these? More specifically, can the whole of philosophy be constructed upon a single fact?" GA (III/3, p. 26).
- 22 In the *New Presentation*, Fichte addresses the question of how to transition from the I, which is absolute and thus determined by nothing outside it, to determinate conditions. Since "nothing determinate can be derived from what is indeterminate," and since the I is "the ultimate ground of all explanation," Fichte concludes that the I must be determined "by its own nature" SW (I, pp. 440–441). From this, we can infer that deriving the conditions of the possibility of the I's realization is the I's own activity of self-determination, i.e., its own transition to greater determinacy.
  - 23 GA (IV/2, p. 38).
  - 24 GA (IV/2, p. 44). Compare Fichte's claim that reciprocal interaction is "the category of categories" GA (IV/2, p. 212). On the Maimonian roots of Fichte's principle of determinability, see Breazeale (2013, pp. 42–69).
  - 25 GA (IV/2, pp. 2, 51).
  - 26 On the proto-Hegelian character of Fichte's derivational method in *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, see Neuhouser (2014).
  - 27 SW (III, p. 77).
  - 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
  - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 2. While Fichte's deduction supports Kant's response to Humean skepticism, it also responds to Maimonian skepticism. Kant's transcendental deduction shows that experience is impossible without the categories. While this proves our right to the categories, contra Hume, it raises the question of whether we actually apply them, i.e., whether they have reality, a challenge raised by Maimon (2010, p. 42). Fichte explicitly responds to this challenge when he says that, in deriving the categories from the I, the latter's reality is "transferred" to the former; SW (I, p. 99); cf. SW (I, p. 121n); GA (IV/2, p. 8). Hence, he calls the categories "necessary actions" in *Natural Right*. This has the effect of both imbuing otherwise empirical phenomena like mutual address and bodily movement with transcendental significance and expanding 'transcendental' to denote certain actions. On the actuality problem raised by Maimon, see Franks (2005, pp. 243–249).
  - 30 SW (III, p. 18).
  - 31 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
  - 32 *Ibid.*, p. 19. Gottlieb (2015) rightly argues that Fichte's deduction of the external world is motivated by ethical rather than epistemic skepticism.
  - 33 SW (III, pp. 24, 27, 29).
  - 34 Compare Hegel: "the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood" (1977a, p. 18).
  - 35 SW (III, pp. 32–33).
  - 36 SW (III, p. 32).
  - 37 SW (III, p. 33).
  - 38 SW (III, p. 33).
  - 39 See Franks (2016, p. 100).
  - 40 SW (III, pp. 33, 36).
  - 41 SW (III, p. 34).
  - 42 SW (III, p. 42).
  - 43 For an account of how, according to Fichte's German idealist agenda, second-person reference between rational subjects derives from a first principle, see Bruno (forthcoming a).
  - 44 GW (19, §42R).
  - 45 SW (I, p. 442). Compare Fichte's criticism that Kant's metaphysical deduction is inductive with Hegel's criticism in the *Science of Logic*: "Kant made the profound observation that there are synthetic principles *a priori*, and he recognized

as their root the unity of self-consciousness, hence the self-identity of the concept. However, he takes the specific connection, the relational concepts, and the synthetic principles, from formal logic as given; the deduction of these should have been the exposition of the transition of that simple unity of self-consciousness into these determinations and distinctions; but Kant spared himself the effort of demonstrating this truly synthetic progression, that of the self-producing concept" GW (12, p. 205).

- 46 GW (19, §78).  
 47 GW (11, p. 388).  
 48 SW (I, p. 46).  
 49 SW (I, pp. 425–426).  
 50 Ibid., p. 422. For an account of why philosophy's first task and first demand are, for Fichte, one and the same, see Bruno (forthcoming a).  
 51 GA (IV/2, p. 17).  
 52 GW (19, §78).  
 53 GW (4, pp. 389–390).  
 54 Ibid., p. 389.  
 55 Ibid., p. 393. Hegel chides Fichte for masquerading the I's "infinite poverty" as an "infinite possibility of wealth." Ibid. (p. 390). Compare his criticism of sense-certainty; W (3, p. 82).  
 56 Equiprimordially presupposing the I and the not-I is what necessitates the infinite practical striving for their unity in the *Foundations*, which inspires Hegel's longstanding criticism that the *Wissenschaftslehre* guarantees its own irresolution (see, e.g., GW [4, pp. 45, 400–402]; [19, §60A2, §94A]; [21, pp. 123, 150, 227]), an incompleteness that Martin (2007) argues instantiates Hegel's concept of bad infinity.  
 57 GW (21, p. 11).  
 58 See Fichte: "What then is the overall gist of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, summarized in a few words? It is this: Reason is absolutely self-sufficient; it exists only for itself" SW (I, p. 474). Compare Pippin: "If there is a 'monism' emerging in the post-Kantian philosophical world, the kind proposed by Fichte (and that decisively influenced Hegel [. . .]) is what might be called a normative monism, a claim for the 'absolute' or unconditioned status of the space of reasons" Pippin (2000, p. 164).  
 59 GW (19, §60A2).  
 60 SW (I, pp. 248, 279).  
 61 GW (19, §79).  
 62 Italics added. Compare Hegel: "what seems to happen outside of [Spirit], to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject" W (3, p. 39).  
 63 GW (19, §80–82).  
 64 For an account of why Fichte's genetic deduction is an answer to both the question *quid juris* and the question *quid facti*, see Bruno (2018).  
 65 GW (21, pp. 68–69).  
 66 Ibid., p. 69.  
 67 Compare Hegel: "in speculative thinking [. . .] the negative belongs to the content itself" Hegel (1977a, p. 36).  
 68 GW (21, pp. 69–70).  
 69 Ibid., p. 236. According to Franks, "[Fichte's] idea of intellectual intuition and [Hegel's] idea of determinate negation are both attempts to conceptualize the same thing: the relationship between the *ens realissimum* or absolute first principle, and the fundamental forms or categories in virtue of which all possible entities may be determined and individuated" Franks (2005, p. 340).

- 70 For an account of how this question structures both Schelling's philosophical development and his influential critique of Hegel, see Bruno (forthcoming b).
- 71 Compare Schelling: "I ask again, why is there a realm experience at all? Every reply I give to this already presupposes the existence of a world of experience. In order to be able to answer this question we should first of all have to have left the realm of experience; but if we had left that realm the very question would cease" SW (I/1, p. 310).
- 72 SW (I/1, pp. 162, 181).
- 73 SW (I/7, p. 360).
- 74 SW (I/6, p. 143). *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy* expresses the union of Schelling's earlier doctrines with the claim that intellectual intuition, philosophy's "first cognition," "snatches the ultimate doubling [of the real and ideal] away from the dualism it inhabits and establishes *absolute idealism* for the partial idealism of the world of appearances" SW (I/4, p. 404).
- 75 SW (I/7, p. 353).
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 352.
- 77 See Fichte: "idealism begins with a single basic law of reason, which it immediately establishes within consciousness. In order to do this, it proceeds as follows: it summons the listener or the reader to think freely of a certain concept. If he indeed does this, he will discover that he is obliged to proceed in a certain way. Here we have to distinguish between two different things: [1] The requested act of thinking, which can only be performed freely. The person who does not perform this act on his own will not be able to see any of the things set forth in the *Wissenschaftslehre*. [2] The necessary manner in which this free act of thinking has to be performed if it is to be performed at all. The basis for this necessity lies in the very nature of the intellect itself and is not a matter of free choice. This is something *necessary*, even though it only occurs in and by means of a free action. It is something *discovered*, even though its discovery is conditioned by freedom" SW (I, p. 445).
- 78 SW (I/7, pp. 359–360).
- 79 For an account of this criticism, see Bruno (2016).
- 80 SW (I/7, p. 360).
- 81 SW (I/7, p. 382).
- 82 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
- 83 Schelling's conception of will affords an account of evil that steers between the Scylla and Charybdis of sensation and reason. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant observes that evil poses a daunting question, for its ground lies neither in the senses, for which we are not responsible, nor in reason, which cannot "extirpate" the dignity of the moral law. Kant (AA 6, p. 35). On Schelling's view, evil's imputability is only explained by the positive idea of will as "the capacity for good and evil" SW (I/7, p. 352).
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 407. Compare Schelling: "no one has chosen [one's] character following reasoning or reflection. One did not consult oneself" SW (I/8, p. 304).
- 85 GW (21, p. 56).
- 86 Compare Nietzsche (2006): "there is no 'presuppositionless' science—the very idea is unthinkable, paralogical: a philosophy, a 'faith' must always be there first, so that from it science can acquire a direction, a sense, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist" (Third Essay, §24).
- 87 SW (I/7, p. 359).
- 88 SW (I/7, pp. 383, 385).
- 89 SW (I/7, pp. 385, 407).
- 90 SW (I/9, p. 93). Compare Schelling: "most people are frightened [. . . by] abyssal freedom in the same way that they are frightened by the necessity to be utterly one thing or another" SW (I/8, p. 304).

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