

Historicism and the Question of Normativity: From Georg Hegel to Karl-Otto Apel

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Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Hegel and the Problem of History	9
I. Hegel's Solution to Historicism: an Overview.....	10
II. Hegel's Kantian Context.....	24
III. Hegel's Ontology: The Concept.....	29
IV. Answer to Kant's Antinomies and Historicism.....	46
Chapter 2: Rickert, Troeltsch, and the Rejection of Speculative History	53
I. The Post-Hegelian Era.....	55
II. Heinrich Rickert	59
The Limits of Concept Formation.....	61
Rickert and Hegel.....	75
III. Ernst Troeltsch.....	80
The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions.....	80
Reviewing Troeltsch's Solution.....	84
IV. Troeltsch's Final Writings.....	91
Troeltsch's Critique of Kant's Ethics.....	92
Troeltsch's Individualism and Nominalism.....	98
Critique of Troeltsch.....	101
Perpetual Peace	113
Chapter 3: Heidegger and the Dissolution of Normativity	121
I. Being and Time's Ontology	122
II. The Ontological Reconceptualization of the Terms of Historicism.....	125
III. Critique of Heidegger	135
Tugendhat's Critique of Truth as Primordial Disclosedness.....	135
The Problem of Subjective/Da-sein Idealism	146
Da-sein's Finitude and Eternal Truth	154
The Ontological Ground for Da-sein's Finitude.....	156
Da-sein's Finite Existence and the Quality of its Acts: Carl Page's Critique.....	161
Chapter 4: The History of Being and the Linguistic Turn in the Later Heidegger.....	174
I. History in Being and Time.....	178
The Common View of Time as Objective Presence.....	178
The Common Understanding of History	180
The Ontological-Existential Understanding of History.....	182
Critique of Heidegger's Category of Possibility as an Answer to Historicism	189
II. From Being and Time to The History of Being.....	191
III. Being's Narrative.....	198
From the Pre-Socratics to the Present Age of Decision.....	198
Critique of Heidegger	208
IV. Heidegger's Linguistic Turn.....	219
A Development in Concreteness.....	219
The Development from Being to Appropriation.....	221
Being as Language	229

The Event of Appropriation as Language	233
Chapter 5: Gadamer's Refutation of Historicism and the Contra-Factual Agreement	240
I. Gadamer's Polemic against Historicism	243
Restoring Prejudice	246
Fusion of Horizons.....	251
Language as the Universal Horizon.....	261
Gadamer's Content Account of Language	266
II. The Habermas and Gadamer Debate.....	273
Habermas' Critique.....	275
Gadamer's Response.....	280
Chapter 6: Apel and the Logos-A Priori	293
I. The Logos-A Priori.....	297
Verbally Expressible and Communicable Meaning.....	299
Intersubjectively Consensual Truth.....	304
Moral Validity and Normative Rightness.....	309
Philosophy of History.....	317
II. Amy Allen and the End of Progress.....	325
Allen's General Critique of Transcendental Normativity and Historical Progress.....	328
Allen's Critique of Forst.....	333
Allen's Account of Normativity	343
III. Critique of Allen	349
Reply to Allen's Metanormative Contextualism	351
Reply to Allen's Criticism of Forst.....	364
Reply to Allen's General Criticism.....	373
Conclusion	381

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Introduction

The State of the Author

A common approach to situate readers to one's work is to provide a short historical account of the subject matter, a so-called state of the question, along with how one is situated in this scholarly context. Because the body of my work is itself a historical account of the subject matter, I think it best to situate my readers with an alternative method, a so-called state of the author approach. At first glance, this work will seem a bit out of place as a dissertation in a religious studies department, since its method of argumentation, its interlocutors, and its concerns are conventionally more neatly placed in a philosophy department.¹ However, I hope that some personal autobiographical accounting will help elucidate this oddity. Also, I hope to show connections between my work and the concerns more conventionally situated in theology or religion departments.

Through some personal experiences during my teenage years, I became a very committed Christian and was quite earnest in living according to its prescriptions. One effect that Christianity had on me was to heighten my self-consciousness and intellectual curiosity. It forced me to question what I was living for, what my priorities in life were, and what reality at a more cosmic level was all about. It awakened in me both a greater sense of purpose and correlatively a deeper need to understand... everything. As a result, I became a voracious reader. I plunged myself into the study of theology, philosophy, church history, and to understand the context of the latter, history in general.

As my studies progressed, I became increasingly anxious. The problem I had was that my faith made claims about events and figures in history, but the historical material I was reading seemed to contradict some of these, and the prospect of having my faith falsified loomed large for me. But I was optimistic that these could be resolved with time, so I plunged myself into further theological and historical studies. Theologically, I progressed

¹ At least this seems to be the case in our post-Enlightenment age.

through a number of increasingly “liberal” paradigms to accommodate for the historical difficulties, but as I continued my historical studies, the problems became more fundamental, global, and intractable. The problem was that religious claims spoke from the authoritative position of “Thus saith the Lord,” but given enough time, history seemed to undermine “The Lord’s word,” showing it to be either factually wrong, outdated, inconsistent with the other things the Lord said, or just hideously immoral.

After many years of study, I came to the conclusion that there is no meaningful way in which theology *qua* theology (as a source of supernatural revelation) has normative authority. It seemed to me like the blade of history undermines the perspective of revelation from which theology presumes to speak. Theology appeared not to have any special insight into reality or the human condition that is qualitatively different from the common wisdom allotted to the human race. Dogmatic discourse is involved in the same limitations, prejudices, immoralities, blind spots, and positive insights as well as any other form of discourse. As such, it was evident to me that theological discourse was not suited to answer the questions of normativity that history posed for me because my questions were increasingly transcending theology’s horizon. Theology begins from the event of faith, but the questions I had, asked for the normative grounds for this commitment to faith, to which theology *ultimately* and for the most part just reasserts its stance of faith.²

At the same time, I also came to see the value in theological discourse when understood as a set of symbols. Religious symbols often have, in light of their longevity and previous normative role in organizing pre-modern societies, a great deal of wisdom—albeit human wisdom—but insights nevertheless into reality and the human condition. Properly demythologized, the symbols of theology can help elucidate the nature of human fallenness, evil, justice, love, interpersonal relationships, and the human longing for purpose and completeness.

² There are exceptions to this claim as can be readily seen in Pannenberg’s work and arguably Tillich’s, but these thinkers constitute a considerable minority in the contemporary theological landscape.

Along with my reconceptualization of theology, I also became increasingly aware of the universality of the historical problem. I came to see that theology was not history's sole victim. The blade of history threatens to undermine the very nature of normativity, truth, and knowledge in all disciplines, including, as Thomas Kuhn has argued, the natural sciences. The problem is a global one.

In light of the depth and universality of this problem, I came to realize that I needed to think much more deeply and fundamentally about the nature of normativity and reason in order to answer my questions. I needed to examine the nature of history, truth, validity, and logic at the most fundamental level possible. This then is what led me to pursue what is conventionally understood as a "philosophical" project on historicism.

I say "conventionally" because its impetus and sustaining energy is clearly religious, in the sense of Tillich's ultimate concern. In Tillich's lingo, you could say that I am looking for the normative reality of the God above God. Insofar as religions also ask ultimate questions, we share a common concern, though we may have distinct methods. I am asking religious questions through philosophical means because conventional theological or religious discourse is not suitable to answer my questions as the horizons of discourse for these two disciplines presuppose more basic philosophical concepts.

But though our methods of inquiry may differ, I do believe that the results of my work can contribute to the discipline of religion, though I do not develop this in this work. Insofar as I am asking questions of what is ultimately true and what is ultimately right (and whether these questions are even intelligible in light of human historicity), the results of this inquiry can contribute to how religious discourse fashions its narratives, or how it prioritizes its rituals and observances. Insofar as I make an argument for rationality as an infinitely open horizon of understanding, this invalidates contextual theologies which attempt to ground normativity on bounded contexts, like postliberalism.

Additionally, in chapter six, I provide the rational grounds for a minimal teleology in history. To illustrate how this could be done concretely in different domains of inquiry, I

give examples of how one could order the historical material in a history of aesthetics, science, and ethics in light of the normatively grounded principle that Karl-Otto Apel calls the *logos-a priori*. In turn, this minimal teleology could then be used to construct a rationally grounded eschatology, which is important because it gives people a common purpose to aim for both at the individual and societal level. This then is how my work can be situated within the study of religion.

The Nature and Scope of the Work and its Proposed Solution

As for the work itself, this dissertation is an examination of the nature of normativity and specifically normative notions like rationality, validity, truth, and universality, and how these notions have been problematized in light of historicism. *Prima facie*, normative notions such as these appear to be the basic grammar of rational thought. These notions appear to tell us what is rationally obligatory or what *ought* to be rationally accepted at the cost of irrationality. In light of the rational obligations they impose, normative notions allow us to make claims about what *ought* to be accepted not just for ourselves or our communities but for the whole class of rational beings as they connect us to reality. Hence, the normative notions constitutive of rationality seem to have an intrinsically universal horizon in the demands they make on us as rational beings.

But ever since the Enlightenment, we in the West have come to realize how deeply historicized human knowledge is. By historicized, I mean more than just the fact that knowledge is produced in a historical context or that truth claims have a historical background from which they arise. Rather, I mean that many of the claims that we, as a human race, have taken to be true, sometimes foundationally true, have shown themselves to have been historically situated, having only a temporary validity that is merely relative to the historical horizon in which they were made. But if truth comes and goes with the passing of horizons, how are we to understand the *prima facie* universality of normativity? More foundationally, how are we to understand what normative notions are in light of the historicity of knowledge?

The problem of history has global implications for what constitutes knowledge, human existence, and reality because “history” is really a placeholder for concepts like contingency, finitude, materiality, and immanence. So when we ask the question about how history and reason reconcile, we are asking foundational questions about how dualities like form and matter, the finite and the infinite, immanence and transcendence come together, if at all.

These are the central issues that animate this work. What is to come is an exploration of these questions through a historical exposition of the way in which some of the most influential philosophers in the Western tradition have wrestled with the problem of history. This work is both a historical narrative of the problem of historicism from Hegel to the present, but it is also a constructive argument about how reason and history come together. The dual descriptive and normative goals that I set for myself means that not only am I trying to faithfully reconstruct a thinker’s thought as it pertains to history, but I am also dialoguing with them to learn through their mistakes and positive insights how best to understand the apparent antinomy of history and reason.

The short answer to be developed through this narrative is that reason and history operate in distinct yet complementary domains that are not reducible to one another. Reason operates in the realm of validity that is universal and cannot be reduced to historical facticity, while history operates in the realm of meaning that is particular and is only given to us in piecemeal ways through the progress of time. Past thinkers have tried to either reduce the materiality of history to the formality of reason or they reduce the formality of reason, including its rules of validity, to the sheer facticity of fleeting historical conditions. What happens when these reductions are done is that you either end up with a speculative history that has little resemblance to actual history (the reduction of the material to the formal) or you produce, by reducing the formal to the material, a radically contingent account of history, knowledge, and reality that dissolves all meaningful validity away and hence performatively contradicts itself.

While my answer is temperate, it will seem throughout this work that I am mostly emphasizing the problems of the formal-to-material reduction, and this will be correct, as most of my argumentative fire will be drawn against this position. The reason for this is that few people in our day are seriously peddling speculative histories. On the other hand, the formal-to-historical reduction has been and currently is still quite influential in the humanities as the influence of Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, Heidegger, and Gadamer show.

We also inhabit a moment in history when many of the postmodern claims about the dissolution of truth and facts that were once confined to the ivory tower are now publicly acknowledged at the highest levels of political office with the embracing of “alternative facts” and white supremacists’ appeal to racial contexts to ground alternative moralities. The “post-truth” epistemology of postmodern intellectuals is now a regular political staple used to ground the most absurd and immoral policy decisions based on alternative realities.

Ideas have consequences. The dissolution of normativity has led to morally and intellectual bankrupt positions, and one of my goals in this work is to show why this is so, while also showing how the refutation of a post-foundationalism does not commit one to an old-fashioned Cartesian foundationalism or to ignoring the situating factors of knowledge. My two-world picture of normativity will show that there is change and no steady foundation at the empirical-historical level, while there is a procedural foundationalism that exists at the logically invariant formal level that normatively regulates empirical-historical content.

A Brief Roadmap to the Work

The work begins by introducing the problem of historicism with Hegel’s thought. My aim in this chapter is largely expository as I try to explain the problem and how Hegel goes about solving it with his system. Chapter two transitions to explain why the post-Hegelian context rejected Hegel’s formalism and why a new generation of thinkers became much more attuned with the empirical particularity and variability of history. I show this shift even within the post-Hegelian context itself as my exposition of Rickert and Troeltsch exemplifies a transition from a more formal to an increasingly empirical direction. In light

of the increased consciousness of the particularity of history, Troeltsch despairs of ever finding any common norm that holds any trans-historical validity. Using Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace*, I argue that this worry is overblown.

In chapter three, we enter a new stage in the history of this problem as the Heidegger of *Being and Time* reconfigures all the essential terms of the debate. For Heidegger, the problem of historicism is due to a faulty ontology that conceives of Being in terms of objective presence. But once we clarify the meaning of Being in terms of its true temporal/historical nature, we will see that the problem of history was itself the problem all along. In chapter four, post-*Being and Time* Heidegger doubles down on this insight by providing a history of Being that argues that historical movement is discontinuous and that values and norms come and go through a destiny that is beyond the control of any human being. The later Heidegger also linguistifies Being, bringing about a new form of relativism.

Chapter five begins to give us the substantive workings of a solution through Gadamer's argument against the fragmentation of understanding caused by historicism. As a thinker, Gadamer is an odd mix between Hegel and Heidegger, and through his Hegelian argument for a universal horizon, Gadamer brings us halfway there to a solution. However, his Heideggerian side continues to commit him to dissolving normativity into the event of a tradition. With Habermas, we get an incisive critique of Gadamer that shows what Gadamer gets right, which is the need for a deeper sustaining agreement that grounds all our disagreements, while also signaling the need for this sustaining agreement to be other than the contingent history within which one has grown up.

Chapter six gives us the nature of this sustaining agreement with Karl-Otto Apel's notion of the *logos-a priori*. Apel argues that the nature of *all* argumentative discourse—even the most virulently postmodern argument—necessarily presupposes four major categories of normative entailments. These entailments are presupposed at the cost of performative contradiction. From the *logos-a priori*, Apel shows that the relevant community that constitutes Gadamer's call for a deeper sustaining agreement that grounds all our disagreements is not the historical community of our tradition but an idealized unlimited

community of discourse participants. Truth demands a universal context of justification that transcends every kind of epistemic contextualism—whether of a historical, linguistic, cultural, economic, religious or any other kind.

To test Apel's thesis, I review Amy Allen's critique of an Apel-like thesis and her own argument for a metacontextual normativity. I find both her critique and original argument wanting and Apel's thesis convincing. I conclude with the affirmation that the *logos-a priori* is an essential constituent of human life and that it is the most foundational source of normativity by which we can adjudicate the ever changing flow of new historical content that we are only ever privy to sequentially and through piecemeal ways.

Chapter 1: Hegel and the Problem of History

Introduction

The questions that historicism raises lie far beyond the disciplinary field of history. These questions do not confine themselves to historiographical issues of how to do history or epistemological questions of how historical knowledge is possible. At its heart, historicism raises questions about the most fundamental dualities of human existence, and it asks how or whether these dualities cohere with one another to form a coherent intelligible reality. Some of these dualities include the tension between the particular/universal, the finite/infinite, matter/form, unity/plurality, and contingency/necessity. G.W.F Hegel was one of the first thinkers to understand the scope of this problem, and in response constructed a comprehensive metaphysical system that sought to reconcile all of these dualities into a coherent and intelligible whole.

The plan for this chapter is to first give an overview of Hegel's solution to the problem of historicism, followed by a much more detailed analysis of this solution broken down into three major sections. The first of these sections will look at the Kantian context to which Hegel was responding. This is an important context because the issue of historicism is a historical version of the problem raised by Kant's antinomies of how the application of finite categories can ever reach the unconditioned without resulting in contradictions. When this problem is put in a historical register, the issue becomes one of asking how finite historical particulars can ever reach a universal truth. The second section will then give a detailed account of the ontology that Hegel proposes that synthesizes the finite and infinite in a holistic system. Finally, the last section will show how Hegel's ontology answers both the problems raised by Kant's antinomies, where Kant argues that the finite and infinite are antithetical realities, and historicism, which claims that the finitude and contingency of history is incommensurable with an infinite and universal truth. In the next chapter, I will

examine criticisms of Hegel's system and how a new generation of thinkers responded to historicism.

I. Hegel's Solution to Historicism: An Overview

It is appropriate to introduce the problem of history with the thinker who provided one of the most comprehensive reflections of it while simultaneously offering a solution that paradoxically arises from the dynamics of the problem itself. In presenting this solution, Hegel constructed a comprehensive metaphysics that systematizes all of reality. The history of philosophy has had its number of system builders, but what is unique to Hegel (up to his time) is his use of motion and time as an integral part of his articulation of reality. Though plenty of thinkers after Hegel have had their share of criticism of his philosophy, Hegel's insights, like his dialectic, have a sublatale quality to them such that those who seek to categorically repudiate Hegel end up synthesizing some dimension of his thought into their own. For these reasons, Hegel deserves pride of place in any discussion of history.

So what then is the problem that consumed Hegel's intellectual efforts? A clear and brief description of the problem shows up in Hegel's *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* where he notes the peculiar fact that philosophy has a history:

The first thought that may strike us in connection with the history of philosophy is that this subject itself involves at once an inner contradiction, because philosophy aims at knowing what is imperishable, eternal, and absolute. Its aim is truth. But history relates the sort of thing which has existed at one time but at another has perished, superseded by its successor. If we start from the fact that truth is eternal, then it cannot fall into the sphere of the transient and it has no history. But if it has a history, and

history is only a display of a series of past forms of knowledge, then truth is not to be found in it, since truth is not something past.¹

According to Hegel, philosophy seeks truth, and truth is characterized as eternal, imperishable, and absolute. Already with this first move, Hegel is at odds with many contemporary postmodern thinkers who insist that truth is only ever a context-relative judgment. For these thinkers, judgments are never true *simpliciter*; judgments are only true relative to any number of relativizing factors including an era of being (Heidegger), an episteme (Foucault), a language game (Wittgenstein), or a theoretical framework (Feyerabend). In this passage, Hegel himself will go on to problematize the search for truth in light of the historical nature of truth claims, but what he takes as necessary is that the concept of truth cannot but have the absolute nature that he has articulated it to have at the cost of self-contradiction. If the concept of truth is relativized to any of these contextual factors, then the concept loses its meaning. What is spoken of by the word “truth” in this relativizing context then becomes what we understand as opinion since both relative truths and opinions posit claims restricted to particular subjects or communities that have no binding rational authority for others. As Hegel explains, “An opinion is a subjective idea, an optional thought, an imagination, which I may have as so and so, while someone else can have it differently. An opinion is *mine*, it is not an inherently universal absolute thought” (*IHP* 17). For it to command rational assent, truth must have the absolute qualities ascribed to it. Otherwise, it cannot command universal assent; it is just mere opinion.

But if truth has this absolute quality to it, then there seems to be a contradiction between the aim of philosophy and its performance. While philosophy aims for eternal truth, its actual performance, as displayed by its history, perpetually yields time-bound and hence relative *claims* to truth. The history of philosophy shows that truth claims come and go as frequently as its thinkers. Moreover, there are as many philosophical claims to truth as there are thinkers, all competing with each other for the coveted title of truth. The diversity

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 11. Henceforth, this work will be referenced as *IHP* in parenthetical notation.

and ephemeral nature of philosophical claims to truth suggests to the reader of its history that despite the stated aim of eternal truth, the actual result of philosophical activity is the mere production of opinions. But if our search for truth consists only in the proliferation of opinions, then there is no possibility of them being rationally adjudicated because opinions are simply one's own and not the kind of thing that must of necessity be intersubjectively and universally shared across history.

Thus, the two major problems with which history indicts philosophy is the plurality of competing philosophical views and the fleetingness of these views. Conversely, what this shows is that if philosophy's aim is to be achieved in history, then the history of philosophy should show a convergence of philosophical views, because the universality of truth should harmonize competing views, assuming the existence of intelligent and rational thinkers, and it should show a greater endurance in philosophical views in proportion to the degree to which these views approximate truth, because truth is eternal. For Hegel to successfully defend philosophy as actually accomplishing its goal of truth, he must reconcile what the concept of truth demands with what the history of philosophy in fact shows. How is he to do this?

To answer this difficult question, Hegel reflects on the kind of unity that is constituted by truth. Philosophy aims to know a unitary truth, and in doing so, it seeks to know "the source from which everything else merely flows, all laws of nature, all phenomena of life and consciousness; they are only reflections of it" (*IHP* 18). In the discussion leading up to this point, Hegel speaks of the diversity of philosophical views, but now he introduces the diversity of concrete phenomena in the world, e.g., laws of nature, phenomena of life, and consciousness. In addition, Hegel speaks of a source from which all these concrete phenomena flow and makes the further claim that "philosophy's aim is to bring back all these laws and phenomena by an apparently reverse way to that single source, but in such a way as to grasp them as issuing from it, i.e., to know their derivation from it" (*IHP* 18).

There seems to be a parallel between the demands of truth in bringing together the competing philosophical views into one harmonious whole and what Hegel calls "a source"

from which all concrete phenomena are said to derive. Just what this source is supposed to be will be discussed very shortly, but for now, the point seems to be that if truth mirrors reality, and if reality is constituted by differentiated phenomena, then the discourse of truth should also be constituted by differentiated and diverse views. Though truth is one, its oneness is not a simple unity. As Hegel explains, “But this proposition that the truth is *one* only is itself abstract and formal, and the most essential thing to learn, rather, is that the one truth is not a purely simple and abstract thought or proposition; it is truer to say that it is something in itself concrete,” (*IHP* 18) and:

in itself the Idea is essentially concrete, the unity of different categories... it is the business of philosophy to show, against the intellect, that what is true, the Idea, does not consist of empty universals but in a universal which in itself is the particular, the determinate... the universal contains its specification in itself, that the Idea is in itself the absolute unity of differences, this is where a strictly philosophical proposition begins...(IHP 19)

This passage brings to the fore the nature of what Hegel previously called “the source” and which he then refers to as the Idea and the universal. Typically, a source connotes something separate from its product so that source and its product are two different realities. Hegel also refers to “source” and “product” as “universal” and “particular” respectively, and while these two terms are typically understood as opposite and antithetical concepts, Hegel does not use these concepts this way.

In the prior passage, Hegel tells us that the Idea, i.e., the universal, is not an abstract entity over against the particulars but rather the collection of particulars *and* the absolute unity of their differences. The idea, as the universal, is distinct from the particular but the universal is *not* antithetical to the particular but rather dialectically related to and inclusive of the particular. The universal precisely as *universal* includes within itself *all* particulars. If the universal did not include within itself all particulars, if it were over against particulars, it would be just another particular insofar as it would be a bounded thing, perhaps a very large and compounded particular, but a particular nevertheless.

Furthermore, for the particular to be a particular, it must have determinacy. But determinacy cannot be obtained without other contrasting particulars by which a determinate particular can possess its unique determinacy. The color blue cannot have its unique determinacy as blue unless there exist other colors by which this determinacy can be contrasted. What this means then is that the universal enters into the conceptual and ontological constitution of a particular (hence Hegel's language about the Idea being the source of all particulars) while at the same time being distinct from the particular. The source of the particulars of concrete living entities then is life itself or the set of all concrete particulars and their differences that make possible the unique determinate nature of every particular. At the same time, each particular is necessary for the universal (which Hegel understands as a concrete universal) to be instantiated. Otherwise, without the particulars, the universal remains an empty universal or as Hegel calls it, "abstract."

What is true at the ontological level is also true at the conceptual level insofar as the articulation of Truth (the ultimate goal of philosophy) needs the particular discourses on truth (the particular philosophical discourses that come and go in history) for its instantiation. In this way, the particular/universal relationship that is exhibited in ontology is also reflected in the particular/universal relationship of Thought's self-articulation. Far from impugning philosophy's goal of a unified Truth then, the diversity of philosophical theories manifested in the history of philosophy is actually essential for the realization of Truth just as concrete particulars, i.e., the diversity of phenomena that Hegel referred to as laws of nature, life, and consciousness, are essential for realizing the universal, i.e., the concretized Idea. What remains to be shown is how exactly this unity and universality of Truth is consistent with the historicity of particular truth claims, their genesis and expiration dates, and the mutual exclusivity of competing philosophical truth claims throughout history. For it is one thing to say that the diversity of philosophical views mirrors the diversity of the phenomena of life and hence the unity of truth mirrors the unity of life, but it is another to show *how* this diversity actually fits together into a unified whole.

To answer this problem, Hegel brings up the concept of development. He says:

Only what is living and spiritual moves, bestirs itself within, and develops. Consequently the Idea, concrete in itself and developing, is an organic system, a totality including in itself a wealth of stages and features. Philosophy is explicit knowledge of this development and, as conceptual thinking, is itself this thinking development. (*IHP* 20)

Closely associated with development is the principle of organicism. The truth that philosophy seeks is not an inert mathematical proposition but rather the truth of the concrete and dynamic life of Spirit. If philosophy is to be faithful in its mission to reduplicate the structure of reality for thought, then it must mirror the dynamic development of Life itself, and this is precisely what a study of the history of philosophy does. It is an account of the historical development of Spirit into and out of forms of consciousness that can no longer keep pace with Spirit's forward momentum as it marches forward to full maturation. If philosophy is to mirror the dynamic and ever changing development of Life itself, then the historical coming and goings of different philosophical viewpoints are *not* contradictory to the eternal status of Truth but is *precisely* what is to be expected. The reduplication of reality in thought must include development, i.e., the coming and going of different philosophical views, just like an organism also exhibits development, e.g., the turning of a caterpillar into a butterfly. If philosophy does not show this kind of development in its own activity, then it fails to be a veridical account of Truth. Static accounts of reality do not bring out the concreteness and dynamism of life and so remain abstract and incomplete.

At this point of the argument, one may agree with the fact that life develops and hence thought's activity must also show a multi-stage process of distinct viewpoints, but what justification is there to believe that the actual schools of thought in the history of philosophy are connected to each other? Why should these different viewpoints be thought of as developmental stages of a greater organic process realizing itself through them as opposed to just one thing after another? Can it not be the case that human beings, particularly cultures that have never come into contact with one another, simply have

radically different conversations with little to no meaningful points of contact between one another? Hegel's organic principle seems to require a necessary interconnectedness between the discourses of the most disparate cultures, and this kind of move seems like a difficult one to prove on an empirical basis. One would have to do ethnographies of the thousands of people groups and then compare their discourses to each other to verify if Hegel's claim rings true. On just a purely practical basis, this task seems daunting for even the most daring anthropologist.

But Hegel's argument is, so he thinks, unaffected by this objection because the Idea's organic development is not based on empirical events but on an *a priori* metaphysical basis. Empirical events are the externalization of a deeper conceptual reality that is the Idea's self-development. As Hegel says, "the dispersal of the development [into the historical eras in which distinct philosophical views are expounded] is at the same time a movement inwards; i.e., the universal Idea still lives as its basis and remains all-embracing and unalterable" (*IHP* 20) and "There is *one* Idea in the whole and in all its members... all these particularizations are only mirrors and copies of this one life; they have their reality only in this unity, and their differences, their different specific characters, are together themselves only the expression of and the form contained in the Idea" (*IHP* 21).

Thus, there is a twofold character to history: the conceptual and the empirical. The conceptual dimension links all historical stages into a unified whole through logical necessity. At the same time, there is no external determination of the Idea's self-development because the Idea encompasses all of reality. The Idea is both center and periphery; it is "the source of light which in all its expansions never leaves itself but remains present and immanent in itself" (*IHP* 21). Having no reality outside itself, the Idea is self-determined as its logical necessity stems purely from itself. As self-determined, it is autonomous and hence free (*IHP* 21). History is a necessary process, insofar as historical events are determined by the idea's self-development, yet history is also a product of freedom, insofar as the Idea's self-development occurs through its autonomous activity.

Hegel is aware that his view of history is strikingly at odds with the historian's understanding of her subject matter. Typically, historians disavow any kind of necessity and universal interconnectedness to historical events, but Hegel argues that they do this because historians *qua* historians do not attend to the conceptual ground of history. If one neglects this ground, then one is bound to see historical events as a series of contingent events. But these historians are akin to a group of people who experience the development of a tree for the first time where each sequential stage of the tree's growth—trunk, branches, leaves, blossom, and fruit—all seem like a miracle (*IHP* 21). Knowledge of the tree's DNA would eliminate the radical contingency from this experience because knowing the developmental program that is DNA would show how each stage is necessary and interconnected. In the same manner, knowledge of the Idea's self-developmental logic would dissipate the experienced arbitrariness of historical events. So in order for Hegel to make good on his claim that history is a necessary and logically interconnected process, he must show what this logic is, and this is precisely what he attempts in his most systematic work, *Science of Logic*.² While a detailed commentary is not possible for this chapter, a brief look at the aims and structure of this work is needed to understand Hegel's view of how Reason/Truth operates in history.

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel seeks to demonstrate the self-articulation of Thought (also referred to as the Idea, the Absolute, Spirit, Logic, and the Concept or Notion in the Miller translation of the *Logic*) without relying upon any presuppositions. All disciplines of inquiry begin with some givens. Either it is a given of content, some foundational proposition(s), or it is a given method, some methodological principle(s) that will determine the kind of knowledge that is sought, or both (*SL* 43). The problem with these piece-meal inquiries is that they do not examine their own foundations, so that they are dependent for their first principles on some other science. But an inquiry's foundation is the most critical element because it determines the superstructure of that science, and ultimately this science's soundness. If the foundation is unsound, then the superstructure

² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, ed. H.D. Lewis, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1989). Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *SL*.

will just be a continuation of this unsound starting point. Hence, Hegel's *Logic* seeks to start with no presupposed foundations other than the activity of Thought itself. Logic, understood scientifically, is comprehensive thought (SL 43), so "not only the account of scientific method, but even the Notion itself of the science as such belongs to its content, and in fact constitutes its final result" (SL 43). Logic is thus self-reflexive and autonomous, for it does not rely on any given content other than its own as its content is self-generated. This then is the dignity of philosophy, to be the thinking of Thought itself, to be that which presupposes nothing, and to be that which is presupposed by all other inquiries.

How then does Hegel suggest that one start from this presuppositionless beginning to a fully differentiated understanding of the Idea or Thought itself? To answer this question, Hegel will take his readers through a conceptual journey in which all the categories of reality: being, nothing, becoming, finitude, quantity, quality and others are all self-generated by Thought. Thought is intrinsically dialectical which means that it contains its own negation, but this negation of Thought sets the condition for a further negation, a negation of the negation, and through this self-negating process, Thought is propelled forward into new actualities of itself. To show how Hegel derives categories of reality from Thought's self-generation, the first couple of transitions in the *Science of Logic* will be sketched.

If the claim is true that Thought autonomously grounds its content purely from within itself, then one must begin with that which has no determinate content whatsoever. This starting point cannot have any qualities, relations, or memberships in a broader group, as all of these are forms of determination, but we are looking for that which is prior to determination, the *Unbedingt*. That which has no determination whatsoever is pure being. Pure being is "pure indeterminateness and emptiness. There is *nothing* to be intuited in it... Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking" (SL 82). But that which is free of all determination is also no-thing, or nothing: "Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*" (SL 82). Like pure being, nothing is completely empty, free of determinate content and presuppositionless. It is nothing after all. Pure being then just is nothing, and nothing is

being. But nothing and being are also opposites. This identity and non-identity of being and nothing is not mediated by anything other than themselves (hence their lack of presuppositions). They are immediately one and are not one (SL 83). But this duality of being and not being is that which we call becoming. Hegel explains, “*Becoming* is the unseparatedness of being and nothing... They are therefore in this unity but only as vanishing, sublated moments. They sink from their initially imagined *self-subsistence* to the status of *moments*, which are still distinct but at the same time are sublated” (SL 105). Through this process of sublation, Hegel shows how nothing is derived from pure being and in turn how becoming is derived from the unity of pure being and nothing, now understood as moments in the new category of becoming.

Like pure being, becoming also shares in a duality because becoming can move from nothing to being which is a coming to be or it can move from being to nothing which is a ceasing to be (SL 106). The result of becoming’s coming to be is being. But this being is not the same as pure immediate being because the being of becoming’s coming to be is a mediated being, one that is mediated by the moments of pure being and nothing in the process of coming to be (SL 106). Likewise, becoming’s ceasing to be gives rise to nothing, but this nothing is not the same nothing that was opposed to pure being because the original nothing was immediate, but the nothing of becoming’s ceasing to be is a mediated nothing, a coming to nothing. This duality of becoming, of its coming to be and its ceasing to be, is determinate being because the determinations of coming to be and ceasing to be apply not to being *simpliciter*, but to “determinate being [Dasein], etymologically taken, being in a certain *place*” (SL 110). In other words, *something* (an indication of its determinateness) comes into being that previously was not and goes out of being that previously was. This determinate being no longer has the state of immediacy that indeterminate being (that which just is) or nothing (that which just is not) had. Through this kind of dialectical maneuvering, Hegel derives the categories of nothing, becoming, and now determinate being from the simple concept of pure being, and the rest of the *Logic* goes on to derive the rest of the categories constituting reality up to the fully differentiated Concept. Throughout this process, Hegel is insistent that no extraneous content apart from

Thought's own activity is used, and as a result of such an autonomous process, Thought's self-unfolding proceeds through an *a priori*, rational, necessary, and logical way.

Crucial to Hegel's project is the claim that Thought's self-unfolding is not merely a conceptual derivation that excludes empirical reality. For Hegel, Thought's self-unfolding is the unfolding of a cosmic Logic, an ontological Logic that subsumes within itself all of reality. The kind of logic that Hegel has in mind is akin to Kant's transcendental logic, which Charles Taylor aptly describes as "not just concerned with its formal consistency but with the conditions of its empirical validity."³ Hegel's Logic then is not just an exposition of mere conceptual categories; rather, it is an exposition of the development of the totality of what is real, both concepts and empirical objects, as this holism is at the heart of Hegel's project.

Spirit or Thought is intrinsically dialectical which means that it negates itself. In its self-negation, Spirit becomes an other to itself through its exteriorization or physical embodiment. Empirical reality is thus a carnal exteriorization of Spirit. At the same time, this process of self-negation is also a process of self-discovery as Spirit comes to know itself and attain further differentiation through this process of exteriorization. The idea is that for any subject to know itself in an act of self-consciousness, it must first objectify itself for it to be a product of its own thought. As Hegel says, "But consciousness essentially involves the fact that I confront myself, am an object to myself. By making this absolute division, this distinction between me and myself, the spirit is made objectively existent, putting itself as external to itself" (*IHP* 24). Just as any subject reduplicates itself in its acts of self-consciousness so that there is a subject-self and object-self, so Spirit's object-self is its embodied-self or what we understand as physical nature, and this is the means by which it comes to know itself. Hence, while the physical world is in one sense the other of Spirit, it is also, in another sense, nothing but Spirit itself in its self-objectification. The upshot then is, as Taylor has put it, that "in grasping the categories of thought about things, we are also grasping the ground plan or essential structure to which the world conforms in its

³ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 226.

unfolding.”⁴ The system of categories in Hegel’s *Logic* just *is* the essential structure of the whole cosmos. What we have in the *Logic* then is the DNA of all of reality, or as Hegel more boldly puts it, “this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind” (*SL* 50).

Based on this metaphysical derivation of historical reality from the activity of the Absolute itself, Hegel is thus able to affirm the interconnectedness of all of history, and most importantly the history of thought, because history is simply an external objectification of the internal metaphysical process that is self-unfolding. Though history is full of empirical particularity, the universal structure within the particular is the self-unfolding Idea that follows the path traced by the *Logic*. As Hegel explains,

I maintain that the succession of philosophical systems in history is the same as their succession in the logical derivation of the categories of the Idea. I maintain that if the fundamental concepts appearing in the history of philosophy are treated purely as what they are in themselves, discarding what affects their external form, their application to particular [circumstances] etc., then we have before us the different stages in the determination of the Idea itself in their logical order and essence. Conversely, if we take the logical process by itself, then we have in its chief stages the progress of the historical facts; but of course our aim must be to discern these pure concepts within the historical form of those facts. (*IHP* 22)

Hegel’s metaphysics of the Idea as reality’s DNA and the empirical world as the self-objectification of reality allows him to say that history in general, but more particularly, the history of thought is simply a reduplication of the Idea, a universal incarnation if you will. And if this is what history is, then it follows that what appears to be contingent, fleeting, and contradictory historical epochs are at their core parts of one unified, rational, and

⁴ Ibid., 225-226.

necessary mosaic because the historical eras are just incarnations of the distinct stages of the Idea's rational and necessary self-development.

To recap Hegel's solution to the problem of historicism: Hegel acknowledges that there is an apparent contradiction between philosophy's aim of an eternal and necessary truth and the doing of philosophy in history, which evinces a morass of contingency and historical conditioning as philosophical schools come and go and do so in direct correlation to the life of the historical era in which they arise. But far from negating Truth, this apparently contingent series of truth claims is actualizing the very dynamic and organic nature of Truth. Their coming and going mirrors the developmental nature of Spirit. They appear to be contingent because without knowing Spirit's self-developmental logic, they will just seem like random events following one another, but once one knows Spirit's self-generating Logic, the contingency that history evidences is seen to have been a façade all along. Spirit, i.e., Truth, is eternal, but this eternality is one that is being actualized through the particulars of history. Thus, history and the Idea are not only compatible, but are actually mutually dependent on one another as the Idea needs history for its actualization, lest it remain abstract, and history presupposes the Idea, i.e., the cosmic developmental plan of the universe, for its content.

At this point, it is important to understand where Hegel agrees with historicism's claims and where he departs from them, as well as getting a more detailed understanding of the nature of his putative reconciliation. For Hegel, knowledge is correlative to the historical horizon in which it is produced. That is to say, different stages of thought can only appear in virtue of certain historical conditions having materialized and in light of a certain level of historical development having already taken place. Spirit must come to know itself first as substance in a historical context whose conditions allow for the thinking of Spirit as substance before it can know itself as Subject. Similarly, Spirit must first know itself as Subject in a historically suitable context before it can recognize its nature as self-conscious Subject. In this sense, Hegel shares the historicist thesis that knowledge is not only historically contextualized but even *determined* by its historical horizon. But where Hegel breaks with historicism is in his view that his particular historical time has reached a

sufficient level of development where the holism of knowledge, running throughout all historical periods, is, in his nineteenth century context, finally able to be known. In fact, it is through this holism of knowledge that the relativity of historical knowledge is finally able to be seen for what it truly is.

Contrastingly, historicism posits *both* 1) the radical conditioning of knowledge by history, and 2) the incommensurability of knowledge between historical eras because no overarching connecting principle immanent within all historical periods is possible. Because no two historical moments are ever exactly the same, a view of knowledge that 1) fully situates it to its historical conditions and that 2) denies a universally connecting principle within historical periods entails that no two knowledge claims can ever share the same conceptual space, hence the incommensurability thesis. Hegel accepts the first claim while denying the second. The reason he can do this is because he thinks that there is a connecting principle, in fact an Absolute principle, which the historicist denies in claim two, that connects the relativity in claim one to a larger unity.

But how can this be? How can an Absolute enter into, much less connect relativity to a greater whole? It would seem like the relative and the Absolute, being contrary opposites, are unconnected and repellant of one another, but this is where Hegel's very unique understanding of the Absolute comes into play. For Hegel, the Absolute is constituted by an intrinsic negativity where contradiction is a crucial and indispensable *moment* (but not the final word) of its existence. Rather than being repelled by the particular, the Absolute absorbs the particular into itself and in fact can only be properly actualized through it.

Because of the significance of this baffling claim for any reconciliation between not just history and reason, but also the more general antithesis of the finite and infinite, I will undertake a more detailed look into how negativity, and specifically contradiction figures in Hegel's understanding of the Absolute. The fruits of this exposition will be a much more thorough understanding of the role of history in Reason and even the more general problem of the role of finitude in the infinity of the Concept. One of the results that I hope to show is that Hegel's ontology has a high degree of plasticity, making it suitable for

explaining development, movement, and even the intransigencies of thought. These insights will prove to be highly generative for answering the aporias of historicism. But before diving straight into Hegel's ontology, it is important to situate the Hegelian project in its Kantian context so as to gain a better understanding of how Hegel understood the problematic of knowledge that he inherited from Kant. One way to understand Hegel's project is as a response to the limits of reason that Kant's critical philosophy claimed to have shown. Kant's antinomies were meant to have shown how the application of finite categories to the unconditioned results in contradictions. In response, Hegel will argue that these contradictions are not an impediment, but an intermediary and necessary moment for thought to reach the unconditioned.

II. Hegel's Kantian Context

As the post-Kantian idealist school has argued, it is impossible to fully understand Hegel's project without tracing it to its Kantian context.⁵ In his *Critique of Pure Reason*,⁶ Kant argued that it is not the case that our knowledge conforms to objects in the world; rather, empirical objects conform to our categories of thought, i.e., our concepts (Bxvii). For Kant, concepts are rules for organizing a given sensible manifold that is external to us into the determinate empirical objects that we perceive in common experience (A105). In addition to empirical concepts, Kant holds that the mind has an innate set of pure concepts, whose cognition concerns the merely formal aspect of experience wholly free of intuitions, which he calls the categories (A125). These categorial concepts include basic rules that the mind uses to structure reality like unity, causality, subsistence and inherence, necessity, possibility, negation and six others.⁷ One of the groundbreaking conclusions that Kant reaches in his detailed map of the cognitional structure of the mind is that the categories

⁵ Though I broadly agree with the post-Kantian idealist school's emphasis on interpreting Hegel in light of the Kantian problematic of knowledge, I also accept the nuanced view of this position best articulated by Brady Bowman that "*Post Kant* is not necessarily *propter Kant*" (Bowman 2013, p.3). That is to say, though Hegel is interested in the question of knowledge, his answer is a deeply metaphysical one, a post-critical metaphysics for sure, but metaphysical nonetheless insofar as knowledge of the Being of the Absolute plays an indispensable role in transcending the Kantian solution to the question of knowledge.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Henceforth, all references to this work will use the standard A and B edition notation.

⁷ For the full list, see the Table of Categories on A80/B106, p. 212

cannot fulfill their cognitive function properly without a sensible manifold that is given to them from the outside. While the categories are responsible for shaping the manifold into the determinate empirical objects that we cognize, the categories do not produce the bare existence of the manifold. This manifold is *given* to the mind from the outside, and it is in virtue of the synthesis between the raw external manifold and the activity of the mind that objectively valid cognitions arise.

Another critical conclusion that Kant reaches in the *Critique* is that when the categories attempt to cognize and produce knowledge apart from their role in organizing objects of experience, they ensnare themselves in self-contradictions. Kant elaborates this point in the antinomies where he demonstrates that when thought argues for claims detached from sensible intuitions, it produces contradictory results for metaphysical questions like whether God exists, whether human freedom is real, whether simple parts exist, or whether the universe had a beginning in time (A426/B454 - A460/B488). The conclusion that Kant draws from this analysis is that human reason must accept its finite limitation, its incapability to know anything about objects beyond human experience. Kant acknowledges that reason necessarily demands to know the unconditioned, or things in themselves (Bxx), but this demand must be resisted, for ceding to it only leads one to contradiction and transcendental illusion. At best, the unconditioned can serve a role in cognition as a regulative ideal, a maxim that reason sets for itself, but it cannot be an objective principle that rests in the constitution of objects of knowledge (A666/B694).

Kant's project, and particularly the conclusions he reached in the antinomies, had a profound effect on Hegel's understanding of the Absolute and its relation to the finite categories of thought. Hegel will agree with Kant that the categories of thought ensnare themselves in contradiction, but unlike Kant, Hegel will not see this result as severing access to knowledge of the Absolute. For Hegel, the finitude of categorial thought is merely one moment in a deeper system of relations that gives rise to the very determinacy of the categories that Kant naively accepts as given. Kant goes wrong in thinking that the categories are the foundational structures from which thought begins. The categories are not an ultimate *source* but a *product* of a deeper dialectical movement that Hegel expounds

in his *Logic*. For Hegel, the categories ground finite cognition, and Kant is able to claim a determinacy and self-subsistence to the categories because he abstracts away from the relational and dialectical movement that undergirds and produces these qualities, qualities that he accepts as foundational. But why should there be a deeper reality that underlies the categories? Are concepts like unity, reality, and negation not already foundational concepts? What would it mean to get behind these concepts?

According to Hegel, the mere positing of a plurality of categories leaves a number of contingencies in need of an explanation. In his *Logic*, Hegel faults Kant for failing to provide a systematic derivation of the categories, failing to properly relate them to each other, and failing to define and explicate their content aside from the formal role they play in constituting empirical objects of experience (*SL* 63).⁸ A systematic derivation is necessary because there is the unexplained brute fact that there are twelve categories, and Kant is not clear as to how they all interrelate or work together to form a cohesive picture of the empirical world. Kant does gesture toward some nascent theory of unification insofar as he speaks of a transcendental unity of apperception, the “I think,” which is the ground of the categories accompanying all our representations, but Hegel thinks this move ultimately reduces to the minimalistic claim of the I’s abstract universality, a mere factual stating that the “I think” accompanies all our representations without any explanation as to how it does this, or by what manner the categories are derived from it (*ENC* §20).⁹

There is an acute irony in Hegel’s critique of Kant in that the latter’s *Critique* was itself a rebuke to both empiricists and rationalists for naively accepting the view of knowledge as a matter of accurately receiving what is out there, whether as empirical objects or rational structures. The *Critique*’s job was to rid us of this naïve positivism by showing us the

⁸ Hegel’s opprobrium of Kant in the *Logic* is biting: “Now because the interest of the Kantian philosophy was directed to the so-called *transcendental* aspect of the categories, the treatment of the categories themselves yielded a blank result; what they are in themselves without the abstract relation to the ego common to all, what is their specific nature relatively to each other and their relationship to each other, this has not been made an object of consideration. Hence this philosophy has not contributed in the slightest to a knowledge of their nature” (*SL* 63).

⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, trans. William Wallace, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Henceforth, all references to this work, including the material in the *Zusätze*, will use the standard paragraph notation - §.

mediated nature of knowledge, and specifically the categories' role in mediating this knowledge to us. The irony then is that Hegel takes this same type of criticism and applies it to the categories themselves so that the *Critique* was not nearly critical enough as it itself is in need of critique. Kant naively assumes that the categories are immediate structures of conceptualization and thereby neglects to question the process through which the categories themselves are formed and mediated to us by a deeper structure. Kant is guilty of a categorial positivism that needs to be overcome by a thorough account of the deeper structure of thought that forms the categories.

This criticism reveals Hegel's discontent with formalism and philosophical abstraction and conversely his emphasis on the need for philosophy to reflect the concreteness of life. Kant's main preoccupation throughout the *Critique* was to show how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible, so his aim in exhibiting the categories was to show how certain concepts can be innate to the mind alone and hence possess the kind of *a priori* necessity needed to ground scientific judgments. Thus, Kant's project drives him to remain at the level of abstraction that precludes important reflection on the concrete nature of the categories. Interestingly enough, this is a point that Kant himself concedes in the *Critique*:

Since I am concerned here not with the completeness of the system but rather only with the principles for a system, I reserve this supplementation for another job... I deliberately spare myself the definitions of these categories in this treatise, although I should like to be in possession of them... In a system of pure reason, definitions of the categories would rightly be demanded, but in this treatise they would merely divert attention from the main object of the inquiry. (B108-109)

But according to Hegel, the problem with postponing reflection on the categories themselves, apart from their role in constituting empirical objects, is that this abstraction will prevent Kant from seeing how the categories properly relate to the "I think," the unity of thought, i.e., the unconditioned, which Hegel will argue is knowable, and not confined to the unknowable noumenal realm, through a *concrete* understanding of the categories. By

approaching the categories in their concrete form, Hegel will show how the unconditioned, the unity of thought, is not merely a regulative principle but also a constitutive one that encompasses all of reality, a constitutive principle that transcends the epistemic horizon within which Kant operates, and consequently a constitutive principle that is not only the fundamental principle of knowledge, but also the fundamental principle of being. Hence, by neglecting the concrete nature of the categories, so Hegel will argue, Kant is not just dismissing a small footnote to his theory, he is dismissing a fundamental element that would, if taken seriously, invalidate and revolutionize his conclusions about the Absolute.

Before getting into Hegel's argument as to how attending to the concreteness of the categories can give us knowledge of the Absolute, we must take stock of the outstanding questions on the table and how this soon to come prolonged exposition of Hegelian ontology fits in with the broader question of historicism. First, in outlining Hegel's criticism of Kant's categories, I have hinted at Hegel having a deeper account of reality that explains how the categories are derived. It will come as no surprise that this deeper account of reality is Hegel's Concept, but what exactly this is has not yet been fully elaborated to the degree needed to understand the larger issue in question that started this discussion about the categories. This larger issue is the central question of historicism, of how one can claim the existence *and* knowledge of an Absolute in light of the relativizing effect of history on knowledge. In particular, how can Hegel maintain the historicist's first assumption, that knowledge is radically conditioned by history, while rejecting her second assumption, that knowledge between historical eras is discontinuous and hence incommensurable? As will be explained, Hegel's articulation of what the Absolute is will answer both Kant and the historicist in showing the systematic whole behind both Kant's categories and distinct historical periods. Through the articulation of the Concept, Hegel will take himself to have reconciled the dualisms of the particular and universal in all its forms, whether it is those expressed in history and thought, concepts and intuitions, or unity and plurality. My task then is to describe what exactly this Concept is and how this articulation is supposed to solve the aporias of historicism.

III. Hegel's Ontology: The Concept

To summarize in brief what I will elaborate over the following pages, Hegel's Concept is a kind of holism that encompasses all that exists. The holism in question contains a fractal-like pattern such that every part of the system recapitulates the structure of the whole system and as a result, the whole is in every one of its parts while it being simultaneously the case that the parts are collectively constituting the whole. The key to understanding this holism is that at its core, it is not made up of discrete and independent parts but rather a set of relations. Hegel's revolutionary ontology posits this set of relations as the foundation of the system from which relata, or what common sense understands as ordinary and self-subsistent objects, are formed. Traditional ontology thinks of relations as the interaction between two different substances, or even the interaction that a substance has with itself. But Hegel inverts this relationship, so that the primal element in his ontology is a set of relations. To further compound the counter-intuitive claims, Hegel also posits, or so I will claim agreeing with Bowman, Henrich, and Horstmann, that this set of relations is an infinite negative self-relation. In order to explain this last claim, I will look at the second movement of Hegel's Logic, *The Doctrine of Essence*, as explicated in both the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* and the *Science of Logic*.

As far as there being determinate objects, Hegel grants determinacy to things,¹⁰ but what it means for an object to be determined in its own self is for it to be determined by *its own other*. This principle is one that will occupy Hegel for much of the *Doctrine of Essence*, that Being contains within itself an intrinsic negativity: "Essence—which is Being coming into mediation with itself through the negativity of itself—is self-relatedness, only in so far as it is relation to an Other..." (*ENC* §112). Hegel says that there is an intrinsic negativity to Being, but this negativity is not the kind that withdraws what it negates. Quite the contrary, Being's negativity is what allows it to appear *as* Being. Hegel calls this intrinsic negativity a

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, this is not fully correct in the sense of a discrete or radically individuated determinacy because from the absolute standpoint, one sees that all is internally connected to all, in which case, there are no real distinctions that individuate objects, in a thick sense. Having said that, the absolute standpoint also sublates within itself all difference and opposition as well as similarity and identity, so there is a sense in which the unity had in the Concept is not what Hegel calls an abstract unity, but a differentiated unity that includes within itself plurality. However, from the point of view from which this discussion starts, which is that of the common understanding, there are objects as a moment of the unfolding of the Concept.

“reflection, or light thrown into itself” (*ENC* §112). Being is simple immediacy while Essence is mediating Being’s simple immediacy in light of its intrinsic negativity. In claiming an intrinsic negativity to Being, Hegel is denying that there are self-subsistent discrete objects. Rather, things are intrinsically or within themselves, relations. Furthermore, Hegel claims this relation to be 1) a self-relation and 2) a relation of negativity, so Being is intrinsically a negative self-relation. The nature of this negativity is distinct from common negation and must be looked at in further detail. To help with this endeavor, I will look at a reconstruction of this key concept in Brady Bowman’s *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*.

In order to make explicit Hegel’s key assumptions, Bowman himself relies on a highly influential Hegel commentator named Dieter Henrich in his reconstruction, so what follows is a joint reconstruction by Bowman and Henrich. According to Bowman and Henrich, the key to understanding Hegel’s concept of being is autonomous negation.¹¹ Contrary to the rules of negation in classical logic, autonomous negation is distinct from the common negation operator in that autonomous negation does not presuppose a positive term or a positive claim to negate, hence its autonomy. Nevertheless, autonomous negation must negate something for it to be understood as negation, so its negating activity is directed toward itself (*NEGAT* 50). In doing so, autonomous negation does follow three rules of classical logic concerning negation: 1) negation must negate something, 2) negation can negate itself, and 3) the negation of a negation yields a positive result (*NEGAT* 50). Accordingly, when negation negates itself, autonomous negation enters into a self-reflexive relation where the two negations are by definition identical (*NEGAT* 51). On the other hand, the negating and the negated also play different roles in this self-reflexive relation since one is *negating* while the other is *negated*, so autonomous negation produces both identity and difference at the same time (*NEGAT* 51). Furthermore, the result of autonomous negation is the vanishing of negation which gives rise to the appearance of absolute or immediate affirmation (*NEGAT* 51). But this affirmation also reestablishes autonomous negation because affirmation’s appearance only arises through the activity of autonomous

¹¹ Brady Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 50. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *NEGAT*

negation (*NEGAT* 51), so affirmation is at once immediate being (insofar as negation vanishes) and mediate being (insofar as negation's activity establishes it). From these dynamics, Bowman concludes that "a relation of synonymy is established at the very basis of Hegel's thinking between identity, immediacy, relation-to-self, and being on the one side, and between difference, mediation, relation-to-other, and negativity on the other" (*NEGAT* 51).

One of my misgivings about Bowman/Henrich's claim, which is shared by a reviewer of Bowman's book, Dean Moyar,¹² is that while Hegel clearly expounds *The Doctrine of Essence* as a doctrine about the negativity of Being, this is only the second movement of his triadic Logic. Is it a mistake then to make the global claim of Being as intrinsic negativity based on the penultimate movement of the Logic, which we know is itself going to be negated in the third section, *The Doctrine of the Concept*? Indeed, from reading the final pages of the *Doctrine of the Concept*, Hegel seems to claim that Being has come full circle and returned to Being's initial immediacy, though a determinate immediacy:

Now this result, as the whole that has withdrawn into and is *identical* with itself, has given itself again the form of *immediacy*. Hence it is not itself the same thing as the *starting-point* had determined itself to be. As simple self-relation it is a universal, and in this universality, *the negativity that constituted its dialectic and mediation has also collapsed into simple determinateness which can again be a beginning*. [italics are mine] (*SL* 838)

And:

From one aspect, the *determinateness* which the method creates for itself in its result is the moment by means of which the method is self-mediation and converts *the immediate beginning into something mediated*. But conversely, it

¹² Dean Moyar, review of *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, by Brady Bowman, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews: An Electronic Journal* (December 2013), <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/hegel-and-the-metaphysics-of-absolute-negativity/>

is through the determinateness that this mediation of the method runs its course; it returns through a content as through an apparent other of itself to its beginning *in such a manner that not only does it restore that beginning—as a determinate beginning however—but the result is no less the sublated determinateness, and so too the restoration of the first immediacy in which it began* [Italics are mine] (SL 840).

Having said this, Bowman/Henrich's autonomous negation reconstruction does seem to correspond to Hegel's dialectical method insofar as this method shows how every term in the system is continually passing over into its opposite, and Hegel insists that the method and content of the Concept are one and the same from the Absolute standpoint:

Accordingly, what is to be considered here as method is only the movement of the *Notion* itself... there is now the added *significance* that the *Notion is everything*, and its movement is the *universal absolute activity*, the self-determining and self-realizing movement... *it [the method] is the method proper to every subject matter because its activity is the Notion.* [Italics are mine] (SL 826)

Thus, I ultimately come down agreeing, though still with some reservation, with Bowman/Henrich because the very ambiguity that Hegel sets up in this final section as to whether Being's negativity has collapsed and vanished or whether it is retained in the content insofar as method and content are one is precisely the same ambiguity that Bowman/Henrich's reconstruction of Being as autonomous negation says that one should expect as autonomous negation is both a negating and affirmation of itself.

In addition to this point, Bowman and Henrich's reconstruction of Hegel's concept of Being as absolute negativity has great explanatory power as it can elucidate Hegel's claims that 1) the negativity that negates Being is not something external to it, 2) that this negativity does not withdraw what it negates, and 3) that Being is illuminated through this negativity. If Being is autonomous negativity, then negativity by definition is not something external to

Being since Being just is autonomous negativity. Secondly, when this negativity negates itself, the negating activity is both a contradicting of the original negation, but it is also a reaffirmation of the original negation. Thus, in light of the latter reaffirmation, negating activity does not merely withdraw what it negates but also reaffirms what it negates. Finally, insofar as Being's intrinsic negating activity contradicts itself and hence reaffirms itself, it shines forth into what it is for all to see, which is what Hegel describes as the illuminating consequence of Being's negative self-relational activity.

These three claims are integrally related to Hegel's concepts of determinate negation and sublation, which the Bowman/Henrich reconstruction also elucidates. According to Bowman, "Determinate negation expresses a specific phase in the unfolding of absolute negativity, namely the moment of relation-to-other when conceived *as the result* of self-referential negation" (*NEGAT* 55). The common understanding of determinate negation often understood as the adage that determining an object is only possible through a contrast provided by what is distinct from said object, while not incorrect, is incomplete according to Bowman, if one does not attend to the metaphysical claim being made. Determinate negation is not just an epistemic claim, it is also a metaphysical claim about what is most foundationally real. Likewise, sublation or "the idea that one can simultaneously negate and preserve some term or object" (*NEGAT* 56) is also a metaphysical claim whose ground is autonomous or absolute negativity. Thus, the Bowman/Henrich reconstruction of Hegel's concept of Being in terms of autonomous negation has great explanatory power. The issue that still needs further development, specially now in light of this new understanding of Being as autonomous negation, is how objects that appear to common sense as individual and self-subsistent entities can be derived, not just from a set of relations, but ultimately an autonomously negative self-relation that supposedly produces the whole of reality.

In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel elucidates his dialectic principle by showing the mutual dependency of contraries. Concepts such as likeness and unlikeness presuppose each other for their determinacy. Like things are only said to be alike when it is presupposed that they are unlike. Likewise, the motivation for making a judgment that things are unlike one

another is that they are sufficiently alike that a differentiation needs to be made that limits or qualifies that way in which they are alike (*ENC* §118). The two concepts are reciprocally related (*ENC* §118) as likeness needs *its* opposite, unlikeness, for it to be likeness and vice versa. One may object that likeness/unlikeness is an intrinsically relational pair, and hence its mutual determination is not characteristic of self-subsistent objects, but Hegel's next examples will show how this relational dynamic extends to any object or term.

Hegel goes on to speak of the Positive and Negative, where the Positive can stand for any concrete term or object and the Negative can stand for an opposing term or Object. Initially, these terms seemed completely opposed to each other as follows: "The Positive is the identical self-relation in such a way as not to be the Negative, and the Negative is the different by itself so as not to be the Positive" (*ENC* §119). But precisely through this total opposition, both terms are shown to be determinative of each other, "Thus either has an existence of its own in proportion as it is not the other" (*ENC* §119). The unique character that the Positive has is only unique in virtue of it being distinguished from, and hence related to "*its*" Negative (*ENC* §118). Hegel italicizes *its* to show that any Positive determination has as part of its constituent character an opposing determination that allows it to reflect itself as the Positive determination that it is. The Positive would cease to exist as what it is without *its* opposite. This is a point that Hegel will strongly emphasize to show the vacuity of content *apart* from the relational matrix in which that content appears.

In addition to a mutual co-determination, Hegel attributes the even bolder thesis of an interchangeability between the Positive and Negative. He says,

Positive and negative are supposed to express an absolute difference. The two however are at bottom the same: the name of either might be transferred to the other. Thus, for example, debts and assets are not two particular, self-subsisting species of property. What is negative to the debtor is positive to the creditor. A way to the east is also a way to the west. Positive and negative are therefore intrinsically conditioned by one another, and are only in relation to each other... Similarly, in electricity, the positive and the

negative are not two diverse and independent fluids. In opposition, the different is not confronted by any other, but by its other. (*ENC* §119)

With these examples, Hegel is showing that opposing terms really constitute one thing, and it is actually a matter of perspective or just sheer convention that designates one end of the pair as what it is as opposed to its opposite. For example, a road that leads to the west, for those travellers coming from the east, is exactly the same road that leads to the east, for those coming from the west (*ENC* §119). The only difference grounding the distinct designation is the perspective taken when approaching the road. Likewise, in electricity the positive and negative charges have no self-subsistent quality that makes either positive or negative. What grounds the distinct designations is the oppositional relation between the two so that either charge could have been designated “positive.” Thus, opposite pairs are not just co-determining of one another, but, because of their relational grounding, also interchangeable in a way that will need to be further elaborated.

Perhaps the immediate concern that Hegel’s dialectic provokes is the worry of contradiction. If negative properties are constitutive of positive ones, are we not then saying that an entity can be simultaneously and in the same place both positive and negative? And is this not violating the law of non-contradiction? At first blush, Hegel seems unabashedly in agreement: “The Negative is to be, no less independently, negative self-relating, self-subsistent, and yet at the same time as Negative must on every point have this its self-relation, i.e., its Positive, only in the other. *Both Positive and Negative are therefore explicit contradiction; both are potentially the same* [italics are mine]” (*ENC* §120). To compound this worry, Hegel also says “Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world: and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable” (*ENC* §119). It seems like the price, which Hegel is gladly willing to pay for his relationally dialectical ontology, is acceptance of contradiction, so is Hegel guilty of violating what many accept as the most foundational principle of thought?

I do not think he is, and despite Hegel’s own statements just given, I do not think he believes he does either as contradiction for Hegel is a moment that resolves itself in the

greater unfolding of the Concept. But before elaborating this latter point, it is important to see what Hegel thinks is wrong with the law of non-contradiction. In *The Doctrine of Essence*, Hegel's basis for rejecting the law of non-contradiction is that its abstract formality does not coincide with the concreteness of actual life. In his discussion of the law of excluded middle, Hegel explains this principle as the claim that a thing must be either A or non-A or equivalently, that a thing cannot be both A and non-A, cannot be both blue and non-blue (*ENC §119*). But the problem with this formulation is its abstraction. This law artificially creates the concept of non-blue, which does not exist in real life as non-blue is not a color in the color spectrum (*ENC §119*). What exists is colors other than blue like yellow, red, brown, green, but all of these have their own determinations in contrast to the formal vacuity that non-blue posits. Because laws like non-contradiction and excluded middle are formulated in abstract terms, their abstraction allows them to artificially create content-free terms that are artificially unrelated toward one another, A and non-A: "that Everything has the one and not the other of *all* predicates which are in such opposition" (*ENC §119*). But no such content-free abstractions exist, "Neither in heaven nor in earth, neither in the world of mind nor of nature, is there anywhere such an abstract 'either-or' as the understanding maintains. Whatever exists is concrete, with difference and opposition in itself" (*ENC §119*). As long as contradictory terms are understood on the basis of their instantiation in concrete life, they will have *concrete* opposition, and this opposition presupposes, as Hegel previously showed, some basis of similarity by which the two terms are meaningfully compared. That opposite pairs reciprocally co-constitute one another "is implied in saying that what is opposite to another is *its* other" (*ENC §119*).

This elucidation shows that Hegel is not objecting to the law of non-contradiction, given the formal terms in which it operates. His objection is precisely with the formal terms in which it is given. The problem is that abstraction allows one to think of objects as self-subsistent and sharply delimited from each other or as Hegel describes it, exterior to one another. But once the formalism of generalized laws is rejected, the relational co-dependency of terms in the concreteness of life is visible for all to see. And given relational co-dependency, the independence of terms that the law of non-contradiction presupposes for a contradiction to occur never obtains, so there is never, in concrete life, the kind of contradiction that is

stipulated by the formal law of non-contradiction. Thus, Hegel does not violate the law of non-contradiction as this law understands contradiction. The kind of contradiction that Hegel affirms is the relationally dialectical kind that obtains in concrete life. It is of this kind of contradiction that Hegel says, “*everything is inherently contradictory*” (SL 439). But even while acknowledging this kind of dialectically concrete contradiction, Hegel thinks that it is only a moment in the unfolding of the Concept:

contradiction is not the end of the matter, but cancels itself. But contradiction, when cancelled, does not leave abstract identity; for that is itself only one side of the contrariety. The proximate result of opposition (when realized as contradiction) is the Ground, which contains identity as well as difference superseded and deposited to elements in the completer notion. (ENC §119)

The concrete contradiction intrinsic to concrete objects, its elements of difference and identity gets superseded in Ground. Exactly what Hegel means by Ground and it being that into which opposites are superseded needs explanation.

As Hegel noted, the next moment in the unfolding dialectic of the Concept is Ground, and considerable time will be spent on this moment because while Ground is not the Concept, Ground manifests the structural holism intrinsic to the Concept. In doing so, Ground reveals a key aspect of the Concept that is needed to understand Hegel’s mediation between history and Reason or, in Kant’s problematic, the finite categories and the Absolute. What is Ground then? As Hegel remarked, it is the proximate result of opposition or Hegelian contradiction. As was stated previously, because in any pair of opposites, the Positive is constituted by itself and its other and likewise the Negative is constituted by itself and its other, both terms cancel each other out in the sense that their self-subsisting determinateness perishes: “The positive and negative constitute the *positedness* of self-subsistence; their negation of themselves by themselves sublates the *positedness* of self-subsistence” (SL 433). Without their individuated self-subsistence, the positive and negative “fall to the Ground” (ENC §120). As Beatrice Longuenesse has pointed out, this

falling to the Ground [*zu Grunde geht*] is a play on words.¹³ On the one hand, *zu Grunde geht* indicates a perishing: the positive and negative *qua* self-subsisting properties cease to exist. On the other hand, *zu Grunde geht* also means “goes to its ground, i.e., is brought back to its ground or to the reason for its being” (*HECM* 68). But what exactly is the reason for the being of objects?

Ground, as the reason for the being of any object or term, turns out to be the set of determining conditions for the being of every “thing” that exists. Hegel explains, “the Ground is the unity of identity and difference, the truth of what identity and difference have turned out to be—the reflection-into-self, which is equally a reflection-into-another, and vice versa. It is essence put explicitly as a totality” (*ENC* §121). Though Hegel often uses a single pair of opposite items to illustrate the concept of dialectical and reciprocal co-determination of the items in the pair, this simple pairing is a pedagogical technique to simplify the dynamic he is describing. The reality of dialectical co-determination is that every object is co-constituted by every other object in the world, or to be more precise, by every other relation of opposition through which objects appear. The color blue is not just opposed by yellow, but also by green, red, purple etc... In fact, color as a category is opposed by other sensible categories like sounds, smells, tastings, and then the higher category of sensibility as such is also opposed by other categories like mathematical objects, ethical maxims etc... Furthermore, while sensibility is determined by all its opposite categories, sensibility is also determining of all its opposite categories. Thus, what Hegel means when he describes Ground as “essence put explicitly as a totality” (*ENC* §121) is a totality of oppositional relations, or the system as a whole over against its parts *and* the parts of the system over against the whole. This reciprocal co-determination between parts and whole is aptly described by Longuenesse:

Ground is the unity of thought into which the given thing ‘disappears.’ This unity is fully realized (*complete ground*) when a system of relations exhaustively connects the things initially presented as contingent and

¹³ Béatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 68. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *HECM*.

dispersed. Complete ground is the unity of 'conditions' (the things, *conditions* of thought) and the 'conditioned' (thought unification itself). The process of thought is thus 'conditioned' by the things *presupposed* to this process; but according to a familiar progression in the Logic, the 'presupposed' is at the same time 'posited,' and the given things are themselves conditioned by the relations that organize them; this reciprocal presupposition of the condition and the conditioned is a very important aspect of Hegel's notion of 'ground'...
(*HECM 73*)

As one can see, there is an intrinsic holism to Ground, which is very significant in prefiguring the structure of the Concept, and it is important to see why this holism matters to Hegel.

So what is at stake for Hegel in terms of the holism of Ground? The key issue in this holism is none other than the nature of rationality itself. In completed Ground, all is opposed to all and because opposition is reciprocally related to identity, this means that all is identical to all, all elements are co-determining one another in a single system that has sublated all identity and difference. The universality of the system is crucial because this is the concrete manifestation of rationality itself, whether it is understood in its cognitive sphere, i.e., in terms of a veridical cognition, or whether it is understood in the practical sphere, i.e., in terms of a normatively binding moral maxim. In being the reason for the set of oppositional relations, Ground is both an ontological claim, i.e., a claim about what foundationally is, and an epistemic claim, a claim about what foundationally constitutes knowledge. What Hegel's Logic is doing, and what this particular section on Ground is revealing is an explanation for the quality of objectivity that is intrinsic to rational thought, the quality of universality that binds all rational knowers to assent to what is shown to be objectively valid. Hegel is taking what the philosophical tradition from the Greeks onward has accepted as hallmark qualities of rationality and explaining these in terms of a concrete Logic that is intrinsic to anything that exists. The explanation at this point may sound a bit abstract, but fortunately, Hegel provides examples for how the universality of Ground constitutes rationality.

In explicating the idea of Ground in *ENC* §121, Hegel identifies this concept with Leibniz' idea of sufficient reason, or sufficient Ground as Hegel understands the concept. The insight behind the principle of sufficient Ground is that things are not just immediately given to us but are mediated, and asking for their sufficient Ground is the demand to bring to consciousness the principle of mediation of the thing. But this principle of mediation must be brought out of the formal demand for a reason and into the concrete reason or concrete principle of mediation upon which a phenomenon is grounded. Otherwise, what we have is a restatement of the object under study or a simple and self-immediate identity, which explains nothing (*ENC* §121). As an example, Hegel says: "We see an electrical phenomenon, for example, and we ask for its ground (or reason): we are told that electricity is the ground of this phenomenon. What is this but the same content as we had immediately before us, only translated in the form of inwardness" (*ENC* §121). So the demand for a ground for any object or term is the demand to show the principle of mediation, the difference constituting the thing, and this is to take the thing out of its simple immediate self-identity.

Having established that seeking an explanation for a phenomenon is to seek its Ground, i.e., its principle of mediation, Hegel next explains that phenomena do not have one simple ground (or reason) but a plurality of grounds. Hegel's example here is an act of theft:

various grounds may be alleged for the same sum of fact. This variety of grounds, again, following the logic of difference, culminates in opposition of ground *pro* and *contra*. In any action, such as a theft, there is a sum of fact in which several aspects may be distinguished. The theft has violated the rights of property: it has given the means of satisfying his wants to the needy thief: possibly too the man, from whom the theft was made, misused his property. (*ENC* §121)

Hegel's point in this example is that the formal demand for a sufficient ground does not translate into a singular reason because actions will have a plurality of reasons for their occurrence, depending upon the different points of views of the participants, the different

aspects of the situation, circumstances etc... A “sufficient ground,” as Leibniz demanded, has to include the set of all the concrete reasons for the phenomenon in question. This example illustrates the concrete holism that is necessary for Ground to serve as a properly rational explanation.

A final example that further shows why Ground must operate as a universally concrete holism is that of Socrates and the Sophists, where Hegel shows what a ground without universality looks like. Without the universality of reasons, one can surely act or believe on a single ground, but this ground provides no normative force either in the ethical or cognitive arena for the rational justification of either the action or belief. Hegel illustrates this point with the Sophists:

That desideratum the Sophists supplied by teaching their countrymen to seek for the various points of view under which things may be considered: which points of view are the same as grounds. But the ground, as we have seen, has no essential and objective principles of its own, and it is as easy to discover grounds for what is wrong and immoral as for what is moral and right. Upon the observer therefore it depends to decide what points are to have most weight. (*ENC* §121)

Hegel’s point is that if ground/reason, i.e., the principle of mediation, is understood as a self-subsistent singular reason (in abstraction from what Hegel thinks is its true dialectical interaction with everything else), then this principle is fully exemplified in the immorality and sophistry of the Sophists. Every person who acts immorally has some ground for acting. Perhaps a wife wishes to continue in her husband’s good graces, so she lies about her affair, or a man feels humiliated by his beloved’s unrequited love, so he rapes to reassert his power etc... All these cases include reasons or grounds for the behavior performed, but what they lack is a moral quality, a normative force since “the objective foundation of what ought to have been of absolute and essential obligation, accepted by all, was undermined” (*ENC* §121). What makes a moral action have its objective validity in the practical sphere is its basis upon a universality of grounds.

In the Sophist example, Hegel describes normativity in the realm of action, but the way Ground functions in the realm of practical reason is equivalent to how it functions in theoretical reason since both these spheres depend upon a concrete universality for their objective validity. The Sophists lacked this universality of ground in their justification for belief, and this is what Socrates exposed in his refutation of the Sophists:

Socrates, as we all know, met the Sophists at every point, not by a bare reassertion of authority and tradition against their argumentations, but by showing dialectically how untenable the mere grounds were, and by vindicating the obligations of justice and goodness—by reinstating the universal or notion of the will. (*ENC* §121)

Just as a proper explanation in the realm of theoretically rational justification must take into account all reasons and show how these ground the phenomenon in question, so all actions, if they are to be moral, must account for the universal good, and not just privilege the interests of the individual perpetrator over against everyone else. This discussion shows the necessity of understanding Ground as a universal concrete holism in order to ground rational objectivity as such, both in the theoretical realm as well as the practical realm.

The universality intrinsic to Ground prefigures the Concept, but it is not yet the Concept because further concretization needs to take place before the fully concrete universal can be realized. Because Hegel's reconciliation of history and Reason ultimately depends on the Concept, it will be worth delineating, with the help of Longuenesse's reconstruction, some of the dialectical iterations that Ground undergoes on its way to the Concept. Through this trajectory, we will have a better sense of the concreteness of the Concept. Ground is not yet Concept because Ground still has a separation between the unity of Ground and its content that will require further mediation. How is this so? In *The Doctrine of Essence* Ground goes through several iterations, first formal ground, then real ground, then complete ground, and in each of these stages, Ground becomes more comprehensive and differentiated.

In its first iteration as formal ground, the latter is nothing but the reification of empirical regularities observed in nature into hypothetical entities like fictional forces (*HECM* 94). This “unity” constitutes no true unification principle since the explanatory principles are just a restatement of the phenomena. At this stage, the empirically given objects are confused with constructions of thought (*SL* 460-61).¹⁴ Because of this lack of unity, real ground attempts to bring true unification to the empirical multiplicity, and it does this by seeking an essential determination that characterizes the empirical multiplicity as opposed to the inessential determinations that formal ground provided. But the question then arises, “why is *this* determination, rather than any other, ‘essential,’ bearing the unity of the whole” (*HECM* 98). Essential determination must prove its essentiality over against inessential determinations, which means that the essential determination of real ground is itself in need of a ground. The dynamic that occurred at the level of simple objects, the dialectic between the unity of an object and its multiplicity in terms of how other objects contribute to the first object’s constitution is now happening at the level of grounds as there is a plurality of them that also demands unification. In this way, the need for a ground for real ground leads to complete ground. Complete ground’s job is to ground the unity of essential and inessential determinations (*HECM* 100), “for ‘complete ground’ characterizes the respective efficacy of each real determination as defined not in itself, but in virtue of its relation to all the others” (*HECM* 101).

In the development of Ground what is in full display is thought’s recurring demand for unification as it is progressively faced with new and more comprehensive multiplicities, and what is further in view through the course of this development is that the series of unifications are becoming further differentiated and incorporating into themselves a wider set of relations. First, unification occurs within the object itself, then it is the object in its relation with other, then it is the object with its relation to its ground, then it is this ground in relation to other grounds, then it is the unity of these grounds into a complete ground.

¹⁴ “Many who come to these sciences with an honest belief may well imagine that molecules, empty interstices, centrifugal force, the ether, the single, separate ray of light, electrical and magnetic *matter*, and a host of other such things which are spoken of as though they had an immediate existence, are things or relations actually present *in perception*... one finds oneself in a kind of witches’ circle in which determinations of real being and determinations of reflection, ground and grounded, phenomena and phantoms, run riot in indiscriminate company and enjoy equal rank with one another” (*SL* 460-61).

The development of Ground shows the universal orientation of the Concept as it breaks the exteriority of self-subsistent finite terms and dissolves them into a set of progressively wider and holistic unities. This dialectic will continue incorporating into itself wider sets of relations until “the unity of essence and being is realized, the unity of thought manifests its capacity to produce all the content of thought” (*HECM* 102). At this stage, the Concept will have been realized, and it will have done so through the development of ever wider holistic unities of Ground.

A natural question that may arise from witnessing the ever-recurring unification of Ground is: why should thought continually seek unity? Why should a multiplicity not exist as a plurality without a need for unity? Is this not merely an ungrounded prejudice for unity? Unity is demanded because what rationality demands is a universal account of how an element fits with everything else. This was the insight that Hegel illustrated through the subjectivism of the Sophists. What characterized sophistic methodology was precisely this neglect of universality in their formulation of practical and theoretical rationality. That is to say, the Sophists gave reasons, either for beliefs or behaviors, but the behaviors and beliefs that they rationalized were immoral and lacking rational justification, respectively, and they lacked justification because their grounds were one-sided. Alternatively, a universal justification, either for beliefs or behavior, forces one to examine how the belief or behavior in question coheres with all else. The universal is the properly rational because its vantage point is more comprehensive and inclusive than a merely one-sided explanation, and the history of human development is a history of the search for ever more inclusive and comprehensive viewpoints from which to mediate reality.

This story is in fact the theme of what is perhaps Hegel’s most famous work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*,¹⁵ and it likely holds this place because it taps into a core dimension of our human existence, the search for ever more inclusive mediations. Human reason is driven to these higher viewpoints because of a recurring contradiction, and this contradiction consists in the limited shapes of consciousness by which we as human

¹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Henceforth, this work will be referenced as *PS* followed by its paragraph notation.

knowers understand ourselves and the universal demand for all-inclusiveness that rational thought places on the human situation. These limited shapes of consciousness and the unity of thought result in contradiction because in its essential being, consciousness transcends the finite limits it sets for itself. Consciousness is open to the infinite and hence can only be satisfied by a shape that mirrors its adequacy to the infinite:

the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint [the standpoint of Science or Pure self-recognition in absolute otherness], should show him this standpoint within himself. His right is based on his absolute independence, which he is conscious of possessing in every phase of his knowledge; for in each one, whether recognized by Science or not, and whatever the content may be, the individual is the absolute form, i.e., he is the *immediate certainty* of himself and, if this expression be preferred, he is therefore unconditioned *being*. (PS §26)

What consciousness seeks—ultimate Wisdom—it already has within itself, but only in seed form. As Hegel says, “The beginning of philosophy presupposes or requires that consciousness should dwell in this *element* [the standpoint of Science]. But this element itself achieves its own perfection and transparency only through the movement of its becoming” (PS §26). Though Science is intrinsic to consciousness, it is so only in abstract form, and the journey through the various limited standpoints that consciousness will take are all necessary developmental moments needed to realize Science in its full concretion.

This is why Hegel thinks so highly of contradiction and describes it as “the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity” (SL 439). Contradiction motivates a journey, and this journey is recounted in *The Phenomenology* where human consciousness takes on the standpoints of sense-certainty, perception, self-consciousness, and many others before reaching the absolute standpoint. From the *Logic’s* perspective, this stage is the point where the Concept or Spirit has reached full differentiation, where there is no longer a

separation or contradiction between its rational imperative (thought's demand for universal unity) and its concrete content. Hegel claims that it is only at the point where all is related to all, where all concrete opposition and identity has been sublated, that Truth can be realized: "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and to be *actual* knowing—that is what I have set myself to do" (*PS* §3).

With this exposition of Hegel's system and how the Concept is realized through the particular, I can now show how these insights resolve Kant's antinomies, which is the epistemic problem of how the finite can know the infinite, and then history and Reason, which is the metaphysical and cosmic version of this problem of how a universally mediating principle can interconnect and even ground the relativity of historical particularity. These two problems are intimately related because the Kantian mode of thought, finite cognition, is the same mode of thought employed by the historicist in viewing historical periods and historical particulars as delimited unto themselves. Hence, showing how Hegel responds to Kant will bring us a long way to understanding how he responds to historicism.

IV. Answer to Kant's Antinomies and Historicism

Recall that Kant claims that finite categories cannot reach the Absolute because the antinomies show that when finite categories are applied to the unconditioned, they end up in contradiction. Recall also that Hegel faults Kant for providing no systematic derivation of the categories and thus naively accepting their foundational status in cognition. In light of this objection, one can understand Hegel's *Logic* as providing what Kant failed to do, a systematic derivation of the categories. This derivation is supposed to show why Kant's categorial positivism is wrong since the *Logic* shows how the categories are products of a more primordial dialectically relational movement. Furthermore, this relational movement sublates into itself contradiction, which Kant took to be an impasse in the search for the Absolute, but in Hegel's hands, contradiction is the principle of movement that derives the

categories. All the dialectical transitions that occur among the categories in *The Doctrine of Being*, then in *The Doctrine of Essence* and finally in *The Doctrine of the Concept* show how contradiction is not an impasse to the Absolute but the very vehicle of its realization. Just like Hegel showed that a positive determination, i.e., a simple object or term, depends upon not just on its opposite, but on an entire relational network that encompasses all of reality for its determinacy, so also any individual category depends upon the entire set of all of the categories that are delineated in the *Logic*, and all these together, in the unity of their unity and difference, constitute the Absolute Concept or what Kant understands as the unconditioned.

Hegel agrees with Kant that thought contradicts itself when attempting to think the Absolute, but he thinks Kant failed to see how contradiction points to the co-determinacy of terms and ultimately their relational nature, which when related to all relations gets you the Absolute. Kant failed to see contradiction as a necessary developmental stage of thought, for when one realizes how each positive determination is really constituted by the whole, their sharp finite boundaries disappear and the self-subsistent bounded terms that the law of non-contradiction presupposes is negated, and this is why contradiction is ultimately sublated. Regarding this dynamic, Hegel says:

The true meaning and resolution of these determinations is just this, that they attain to their Notion, their truth; being, determinate being, something, or whole and parts, etc. substance and accidents, cause and effect, are by themselves [merely] thought-determinations; but they are grasped as determinate *Notions* when each is cognized in unity with its other or opposite determination... Cause and effect, for example, are not two different Notions, but only *one determinate* Notion, and causality, like every Notion, is a *simple* Notion. (SL 607)

For Hegel the plurality of finite categories is ultimately constituted by one Concept, i.e., the Notion, since their determinate content is derived from the holistic relational network that is the Concept. The problem with Kant's categories is that they abstract from the opposing

relational context that gives them their determinacy and as such, they are merely abstract universals.

Kant is stuck in seeing the world through a lower developmental stage of thought that needs to be transcended. This stage is characterized by what Hegel calls the faculty of understanding which only thinks in terms of finite cognition and hence abstraction. It is as a result of this abstraction, performed by the faculty of understanding, that Kant understands the categories solely as fixed determinations:

Connected with the above is the reason why latterly the understanding has been so lightly esteemed and ranked as inferior to reason; it is the *fixity* which it imparts to determinateness and consequently to finite determinations. This fixity consists in the form of abstract universality which we have just considered; through it they become *unalterable*. For qualitative determinateness and also the determinations of reflection are essentially *limited*, and through their limitation have a relation to their *other*; hence the *necessity* of transition and passing away. But the universality which they possess in the understanding gives them the form of reflection-into-self by which they are freed from the relation-to-other and have become imperishable. (SL 610)

Hegel sets the faculty of understanding, which is only able to grasp the abstraction of self-subsistent and fixed determinations, in contrast to the faculty of reason, which can grasp the intrinsic dialectical movement that produces these finite determinations. Reason understands determination in terms of their relation-to-self and their relation-to-other. What the understanding fails to grasp is that its fixed determinations are merely a moment in the totality of the Concept:

Since, therefore, understanding exhibits the infinite force which determines the universal, or conversely, imparts through the form of universality a fixity and subsistence to the determinateness that is in and for itself transitory,

then it is not the fault of the understanding if no progress is made beyond this point. It is a subjective *impotence of reason* which adopts these determinatenesses in their fixity, and which is unable to bring them back to their unity through the dialectical force opposed to this abstract universality, in other words, through their own peculiar nature or through their Notion. (SL 611)

All understanding can do is impart the infinitely determining force of the universal onto its finite and hence fixed determinations, but as Hegel will show, this is a key moment in the Concept.

It is precisely in coming to the point of the “impotence of reason” that the understanding sees its limits and this limitation prepares the way, or as Hegel says, thought becomes impregnated, and is ready to give birth to the true universality which is the Concept:

The understanding does indeed give them, so to speak, a rigidity of *being* such as they do not possess in the qualitative sphere and in the sphere of reflection; but at the same time it spiritually impregnates them and so sharpens them, that just at this extreme point alone they acquire the capability to dissolve themselves and to pass over into their opposite. The highest maturity, the highest stage, which anything can attain is that in which its downfall begins. The fixity of the determinateness into which the understanding seems to run, the form of the imperishable, is that of self-relating universality. But this properly belongs to the Notion; and consequently in this universality is to be found expressed, and infinitely close at hand, the *dissolution* of the finite. (SL 611)

Key in this passage is Hegel’s positive estimation of the role of the understanding. Its fixed determinations are not a complete delusion. The understanding, rightfully recognizes that reality is laden with a self-relating universality, whose qualities include imperishability and hence a fixity of determination.

Where the understanding goes wrong is in attributing these qualities to finite categories since these qualities rightfully belong to the Concept as it is only the Concept that possesses self-relating universality. This self-relating universality gives the Concept the qualities usually associated with classical theism like omnipresence, immutability, omniscience, simplicity, and eternity among others.¹⁶ The Concept sublates all that exists, including all identity and opposition: “The universal as the Notion is itself and its opposite, and this again is the universal itself as its posited determinateness; it embraces its opposite and in it is in union with itself” (SL 606). As such, there is no place external to it in which it is not; hence it is omnipresent. Since movement is the traversing of an area of space, and since the Concept sublates all spaces to itself, there is no meaningful sense in which the Concept can be said to move, so it is also immutable. The Concept also sublates all intelligibility as it is the Ground for all that intelligibly is, so it is also omniscient. Because the Concept sublates all difference and similarity to itself, there is nothing external to the concept that stands as a contrast or real distinction to it. As Hegel says, “For since it is the absolute form, the Notion that knows itself and everything as Notion, there is no content that could stand over against it and determine it to be a one-sided external form” (SL 839-840). If the Concept sublates all exteriority, then there is no meaningful sense in which it has separable parts, so it also has the attribute of simplicity:

Thus then logic, too, in the absolute Idea, has withdrawn into that same simple unity which its beginning is; the pure immediacy of being in which at first every determination appears to be extinguished or removed by abstraction, is the Idea that has reached through mediation, that is, through the sublation of mediation, a likeness correspondent to itself. (SL 842)

It is not, as Hegel describes, an abstract simplicity, as traditional theology holds; rather, it is a true universal and concrete simplicity that encompasses all identity and opposition. This is why Hegel describes the Absolute as a universal simple self-relation (SL 838). Finally, the Concept also sublates all temporal relations. There is

¹⁶ “All else is error, confusion, opinion, endeavor, caprice and transitoriness; the Absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*, and is *all truth*” (SL 824).

no time in which it is not, so it is also eternal. Hegel thus shows that the ultimate reality mediated by his dialectical method is indeed the Absolute with the attributes usually associated with it.

As these attributes show, the Absolute that Kant thought was beyond the reach of thought because of contradiction is shown by Hegel to be realized precisely through this vehicle of contradiction and its resolution in the absolute standpoint. This Concept contains all the traditional attributes of classical theism, but with the difference that these attributes are now truly universal, since they are now also concretely universal and not just abstractly so. The attributes that the Concept has, in virtue of its universal self-relation, also coincide with many attributes traditionally given to truth (eternal, one, universal, immutable etc...), and this fact can begin to shed light on the historicist dilemma, the question of how the relativity of historical particularity can be reconciled with an all-encompassing mediating principle immanent in all historical periods.

In short, Hegel's Concept is the resolution of history and Reason. The qualities of truth—eternality, imperishability, simplicity, unity—all of these characteristics are qualities of the Concept, and the Concept only gets realized through a system of relations that sublates within itself all movement, all contradiction, all oppositions and identities, including historical difference and similarity. It is *in virtue* of opposition, contradiction, and movement that the Concept as the Absolute mediating principle of all reality gets realized, so historical difference is not just reconcilable to the Concept's existence, it is *essential* to its realization. Thus, the contradictory poles of the historicist dilemma, the anticipation of the eternality of truth and the contingency and ephemerality of truth claims, are for Hegel two essential moments in the realization of the Concept. It is this very contradiction that gives history its temporal spread, its movement and energy. Through his method of dialectic, Hegel takes himself to have solved one of the most intractable problems in human thought.

Conclusion

Hegel's solution is impressive in its elegance, comprehensiveness, and conceptual rigor. Ironically, Hegel's system prides itself on its attention to concreteness, seeing its focus on concreteness as the answer to the paradoxes and contradictions brought about by Kant's formalism. This is an ironic state of affairs because the bulk of criticism that Hegel's system will receive in the nineteenth century will be that his system eliminates the concreteness of history. The nineteenth century's historical school along with Neo-Kantianism will critique Hegel for treating history as the deduction of a highly speculative metaphysical system that effaces the particularity of history by putting the past into the straightjacket of absolute idealism. Hence, while Hegel thought that he had adequately balanced the formal and concrete, most subsequent thinkers will judge his system as not elevating the concrete near enough.

Chapter 2: Rickert, Troeltsch, and the Rejection of Speculative History

Introduction

This chapter will begin by recounting the historical transition between Hegel and Troeltsch and how the problem of history takes a more concrete direction after Hegel. Post-Hegelian thinkers critiqued Hegel for formulating an *a priori* understanding of history that ultimately dissolves history's concrete particularity. As part of this movement, I will analyze Heinrich Rickert's work, *The Limits of Concept Formation of the Natural Sciences*. Rickert's reconciliation between history and reason admits more variability and contingency in history, and it also provides a mediating principle for all of history in the form of the "autonomous will." This is a formal principle that acts as a necessary transcendental condition for inquiry, showing how the cognitive interest in history is made possible by an implicit acknowledgement of an absolute value and the objectivity of truth. Rickert's formal principle is an improvement in that it does not predetermine the concrete content of history as Hegel's system was accused of doing.

In addition to understanding this more empirically oriented engagement with history, Rickert's work is also essential for understanding Troeltsch's own solution as Troeltsch was greatly inspired by Rickert. What will be evident from my analysis of Troeltsch is that he pushes the problematic of history toward an empirical direction even beyond Rickert. The result of a greater emphasis on concreteness in understanding history is a greater corresponding degree of contingency in the solution to history. This result will be evident when Troeltsch's solution is compared to Hegel's.

But what happens to Troeltsch as he continues to reflect on this problem is that he becomes increasingly skeptical of finding any solution. Troeltsch's later career is marked by an increasing empiricism and nominalism that stems from his increasing focus on the individuality of the concrete particulars of history. This emphasis leads him to deny the

very existence of the categorial judgments needed to recognize an overarching norm within the vast multiplicity of history.

I will argue that Troeltsch's conclusions are overblown. They insist on reducing what is real to the individual token instances of concrete particulars but neglect attending to the intelligible content common to particulars that allows them to be subsumed under common categories. The result of this nominalism is that it makes it impossible, in principle, to ever find commonality amidst diversity. But the problem then rests not with history itself, but on a radically individualized conceptualization of history.

In addition to my conceptual critique of Troeltsch, I will also present Kant's work, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, as a concrete example of not only how a common norm in history is conceptually possible but also how it can be concretely realized. Kant's work shows that the autonomy of human rationality puts demands on the course of history and influences it to conform to its imperatives. In this respect, there is a convergence between Kant, Hegel, and Rickert on the idea that history is realizing a greater degree of freedom. At the same time, there are differences between these thinkers since for Hegel, the realization of freedom in history is a necessary metaphysical development, but for Kant and particularly for Rickert, this realization is a normative demand that reason places on history, but the demand does not guarantee its own realization.

The lesson that many post-Hegelian thinkers took from Hegel is that history is sufficiently contingent and malleable such that no straight correspondence can be drawn from reason's demands to historical events. History's pluralism necessitates a shift in the kind of norm that one should expect to get out of history, a shift from the concrete universal that Hegel sought to a more formal universal that can be multiply realized in a variety of historical circumstances. If history is to have a common norm, then this norm must include within itself a greater ability to admit contingency and particularity.

I. The Post-Hegelian Era

After Hegel's death in 1831, the comprehensive metaphysical system that he developed went through several decades of interpretation, reformulation, and criticism. A major frontal attack on the Hegelian system came from the newly emerging historical school led by Johann Gustav Droysen and Leopold Van Ranke. Their criticism was that Hegel's system pre-determined what history ought to look like, but that a close study of the historical sources actually revealed much more diversity and contingency than Hegel's system allowed. The historical school emphasized the use of historical sources to ground their findings in history rather than understand empirical data as the external objectification of an *a priori* speculative system.

In light of this empiricist focus, the historical school also insisted on interpreting historical data in light of its particular historical context as opposed to Hegel's global context of Spirit's self-actualization. To interpret historical subjects apart from the context in which they were situated would be to project an extraneous frame of reference for interpreting the historical subject. But as soon as one did this, the scientific objectivity of the historical enterprise would be compromised. As such, the historical school insisted that historical eras were not to be viewed as developmental stages of a metaphysical reality being realized in history; rather, historical eras were ends in themselves where they themselves constituted the relevant interpretive frameworks for historical analysis. For the sake of this more narrowed focus, the historical school devoted itself to a rigorous and extensive analysis of historical sources so as to not predetermine their results, as they believed Hegel's metaphysics had erroneously done.

Hegel's system also underwent criticism from the Neo-Kantian school that became increasingly associated with natural science.¹ Unlike Kant's limited goal for philosophy to establish the limits of reason and thereby rid itself of metaphysical speculation, Hegel's system enthroned speculative thought as the essence of philosophy itself. Because

¹ For a thorough historical account of Neo-Kantianism, its genesis and development, see Frederick Beiser's *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

philosophy was the Absolute thinking itself, it alone had direct access to itself and as the Absolute, it provided the foundation for all other derivative sciences. As such, all sciences depended upon philosophy for their epistemic grounding. But as the nineteenth century progressed, it became clear that the natural sciences were making remarkable advances with no need from speculative philosophy. The developing worldview of the emerging natural sciences was a naturalistic one that, like Kant's first critique, banished metaphysics from its purview. For this reason, philosophically inclined scientist or scientifically inclined philosophers like Helmholtz, Herbart, and Fries were drawn to the Neo-Kantian school. This school tried to mirror its own scope of inquiry and methodology after the natural sciences. This was particularly true of Kant scholars that developed psychologistic interpretations of Kant's project. Neo-Kantianism's denial of the possibility of establishing a deductive metaphysical system from which the particular content of individual sciences could be deduced thus appealed to the nineteenth century's emphasis on experimentation and empirical verification. As a result, Neo-Kantianism surpassed Hegel's system in influence for the latter half of the nineteenth century. While the historical school and scientifically inclined Neo-Kantians had their own skirmishes over the role of method in science, their common focus on empiricism and concreteness made them common allies against Hegel's *apriorism*.

It is amidst this backdrop of developments around the turn of the century that Ernst Troeltsch began to tackle the problem of history. Troeltsch is a key transitional figure because he receives the Hegelian problematic through the refraction of these two major empirical schools that had had significant critical engagements with Hegel's ideas. By Troeltsch's time, some of the major assumptions of Hegel's synthesis had been rendered obsolete, and this is evident in Troeltsch's cursory dismissal of them. In an essay entitled *Modern Philosophy of History*,² Troeltsch enumerates these objections:

But such a theory [Hegel's] is, after all, quite impossible. First of all, because a goal for the world or for humanity cannot be metaphysically constructed and

² Ernst Troeltsch, "Modern Philosophy of History," in *Religion in History*, trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991). Henceforth this work will be cited as *MOPH*

then applied to history; for truly, every such goal is always derived or abstracted from actual history. But also, and above all, because in such a viewpoint the essence of actual history is dissolved, and precisely at the decisive point where it unfolds what is essential to it and what distinguishes it from natural science. The particular and the individual, the unique and the peculiar, are destroyed; and with them also the essential organizational principle of history, which is relegated to being an instance of the realization of the universal concept, where the individual is important and essential only as long as he serves the apprehension or illustration of the universal concept. (MOPH 300)

In his greater *Logic*, Hegel claimed to have shown the necessary unfolding of reality from the presuppositionless activity of Thought itself and the unfolding of history was this process' external objectification. But as early as 1840, Trendelenberg, a student of Hegel, had argued that the transitions between the stages of Hegel's dialectical process can only occur through an illicit importation of empirical content into what was supposed to be completely free of experience.³ After Trendelenberg's incisive critique, Troeltsch could take for granted the idea that history cannot be rationally deduced from a metaphysical system. This reduction destroys the essential particularity of history, but it is precisely the concrete particularity of history that makes history what it is. Thus for Troeltsch, Hegel's claim to have discovered the mediation of the Absolute and history was unacceptable because in mediating these two, Hegel dissolved history away. Consequently, the problem of history remained wide open, and this problem would haunt Troeltsch for the rest of his life as he continually sought a way to dam the rivers of the historical flood of values.

At the heart of Troeltsch's concern with history was its relevance to Christian faith. In Christian apologetics, Hegel's system had been used to replace the supernaturalist framework of orthodoxy. If Christianity had to be understood as a historical phenomenon

³ For an illuminating account of Trendelenberg's criticism of Hegel and the overall transition to the post-Hegelian era, see Frederick Beiser's *Late German Idealism: Trendelenberg and Lotze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014).

interconnected with other historical phenomena, then at least it would be the consummation and purpose of the process of all historical phenomena. In light of the objections brought about by Newtonian mechanics and Darwinian evolution, Christianity had defended itself by leaving the cosmological realm and concentrating instead upon the specifically religious and practical dimension of faith whose model lay in the historical narratives of Christianity. As Troeltsch recounts, abstention from the cosmological realm “was only made possible by a more energetic attachment to the given historical reality and power of Christianity” (*MOPH* 275). But with the rise of the historical school’s emphasis on the empirical *a posteriori* approach to history, and with its critique of interpreting history as one grand unified narrative of which Christianity was the apex, this apologetic was no longer feasible. The historical apologetic was made even more problematic by the specific historical critical work of Strauss, Weiss, and Schweitzer that seemed to undermine the very foundations of authority of a historically grounded Christian faith. In light of these troubling developments, Troeltsch concluded that:

History proved to be a merely temporary support. Since it was to prove the truth of Christianity, it was bound to lead to the fundamental question of how it is possible to derive absolute norms from the particularity and relativity of history. Hence on this side of the problem, too, everything is once again put into question. (*MOPH* 275)

This then was the context within which the problem of history, of how to get an absolute norm from the relativity of history, became an existential concern for Troeltsch.

In his attempt to solve the problem of history, Troeltsch was greatly influenced by the Neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert. Rickert was the student prodigy of Windelband, founder of the Baden school of Neo-Kantianism, which focused on the logic of the social sciences or *Geisteswissenschaft*. Rickert’s specific project was to find a logical basis upon which historical science could claim the same degree of objectivity as the natural sciences. This topic is the theme of his great work, *The Limits of the Concept Formation of the Natural*

Sciences.⁴ Rickert had a great influence on Troeltsch, particularly in his early works. This influence is so pervasive that it would not be an exaggeration to describe Troeltsch's solution to the problem of history as an extension of the foundation that Rickert lays, *albeit* an extension that pushes Rickert in a more historically concrete direction. Because of the importance of Rickert's work for understanding Troeltsch, both in what he borrows from Rickert and the way in which he goes beyond him, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of Rickert's work. As such, I will provide an exposition and analysis of Rickert's *The Limits of Concept Formation* with an eye toward understanding how Troeltsch pushes Rickert in a more concretely historical direction.

II. Heinrich Rickert

In *The Limits of the Concept Formation of the Natural Sciences*, Rickert's central concern is to determine whether history is a science, i.e., a domain of inquiry with a degree of objectivity that is on par with the natural sciences. To examine this question, Rickert undertakes an extensive exploration into the forms of knowledge and concept formation in history and the natural sciences. Rickert maintains that natural science employs a generalized method in its concept formation that abstracts away from historical particulars, a method that in fact can only work so long as it abstracts away from concrete historical particulars. The limit to concept formation in natural science then is the concrete historical particular. This limitation to natural science calls for a distinct method of inquiry that can cognize concrete particulars, and this is the historical method. But here is where the problem of the objectivity of this method begins for the following reason: If scientific objectivity is that feature of knowledge that expresses general validity, that feature of knowledge which commands universal assent to its content, then on what basis can historical inquiry be objective? If history is concerned with the concrete particular, which by definition comes and goes, then how can its subject matter be universally binding to all individuals throughout history?

⁴ Heinrich Rickert, *The Limits of the Concept Formation of the Natural Sciences: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Disciplines*, trans. and ed. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *LCF*.

To illustrate this question, consider a typical discovery in natural science. When a scientist discovers a phenomenon like the law of gravity that is confirmed as a veridical natural law, then not only am I subject to this law, but every other human and, for that matter, every other inanimate object is bound, through our physical constitution, to the workings of this natural law. This law would be in force, whether humans discovered it or not, and whether humans ever existed or not—it has a universal validity, and it is from this feature of universality that the law gets its scientific or *wissenschaftliche* objectivity.

In contrast, let us take a typical subject matter of historical inquiry, say a historian finds a new set of scrolls in the Middle East, which detail the life and practices of an ancient tribe that lived three thousand years ago. These scrolls reveal many facets of this tribe's existence including their patriarchal organization, their polygamous marriages, their worship of war-mongering deities, and their animistic understanding of the universe among other things. Unlike the natural scientist's discovery of gravity, the historian is under no obligation to recognize her particular subject matter, i.e., her tribe's religious customs, cosmological understanding, etc., as binding for herself. In fact, the historian may find herself diametrically opposed to her tribe's customs and values. For nineteenth century historiography, all historical inquiry proceeded on the differentiation between the historian and her subject matter and the understanding that the past, as a discrete moment in time that no longer exists, need not impose any universal obligation of belief in its horizon of understanding for anybody. But if this is the case, if history as a particular subject matter claims no universal validity for its historical content, then how can history have any objectivity for its concepts? If objectivity is that feature of knowledge that demands universal validity, and if history *qua* history lacks this feature, then how can history be a science? And even more unlikely, how can history be a science *on par* with the natural sciences?

This is the question that Rickert tackles, and his answer will be that not only is historical inquiry on par with the natural sciences as far as objectivity is concerned, but that historical inquiry is actually a more profound form of objective inquiry. History gets closer to reality than the natural sciences ever could, making fewer presuppositions than they do

while even providing some of the central and foundational presuppositions that natural science employs for its own inquiry. In coming to these conclusions, Rickert will argue that both historical and scientific inquiry depend upon the implicit acceptance of a formal absolute value from which all historical conceptualizations draw upon. What this formal frame of reference does for historical work is that it puts all particular historical values, from those held by ancient middle eastern tribes, to medieval monks, to contemporary Germans, on the same plane of valuation such that these values can be judged relative to each other based on how closely each approximates the absolute value of truth. Thus, the principle that Rickert proposes to mediate history and truth is that of a formal absolute value.

Despite how diverse historical values in distinct historical epochs may be from each other, these values all exhibit their particularity as distinct historical values on a common continuum or scale in which they participate. It is in light of their participation in this common scale, grounded on the absolute value of truth, that historical inquiry is rightfully able to assert its claim to objectivity. In broad strokes, this is Rickert's solution to the question of the objectivity of history. Because Troeltsch was greatly influenced by Rickert, it is important to dive into the particulars of Rickert's work, as this will help us understand Troeltsch's own formulation of the problem and solution to history. What we will see is that Troeltsch borrows Rickert's framework but tries to push beyond its formal orientation to better capture the concrete particularity of history. In order to examine this, we must first take a closer look at Rickert's work.

The Limits of Concept Formation

Rickert begins his work with an exploration of concept formation in the method of the natural sciences. What distinguishes natural scientific concepts from other concepts is their abstraction from perceived empirical reality. This is because natural laws seek to form "concepts of unconditionally general validity for all of its [reality's] parts" (*LCF* 50), but precisely because of this aim, science can never capture the richness of the infinite empirical manifold (*LCF* 43). Concrete reality is infinite in two ways. First, it is extensively infinite, meaning that there are no limits to the number of individual particulars

comprising reality, as the coming to be of new historical realities shows. Secondly, reality is intensively infinite, meaning no single particular object can be exhaustively described because the parts into which a concrete particular can be divided are unlimited *and* the number of aspects under which a concrete particular can be analyzed are also unlimited.⁵ In order for science to form general concepts applicable to all of reality, it must ignore all that is particular and individual to reality because the content of reality exceeds the capabilities of what discrete concepts can express. Because of the unmanageability of the infinite empirical manifold, Rickert calls its content “irrational,” (*LCF* 53) by which he is referring to the excess of the real relative to its possible conceptualization.

For science to make concepts that are rational, i.e., to have a manageable content, it must understand nature on a mathematical basis which allows for the production of invariant laws that can hold validly for all times and places. Scientific laws hold validly for all times and places, but they do not picture or represent a concrete particular at a discrete time or place. A consequence of Rickert’s view is the denial of any kind of direct realism in epistemology where truth is understood as a correspondence between concepts and reality. As Rickert says, “The concepts of the natural science are true, not because they reproduce reality as it actually exists but because they represent what holds *validly* for reality” (*LCF* 44) and “It lies in the *concept* of the law of nature that it has nothing to say about what really occurs here or there, now or then, with a uniqueness and an individuality that cannot be repeated” (*LCF* 41). If we understand reality to consist of the concrete particular objects of our everyday immediate experience, then the scientific method gives us the paradoxical result that the more complete science becomes the further removed from reality it turns out to be. For Rickert, the key result of this investigation is that the limit of scientific concepts is the concrete particular, which is the unique spatio-temporal object of immediate experience. This raises the question as to whether there is another method of concept formation that can capture the concrete particular with no less objectivity and unconditional validity than natural science, and Rickert thinks there is. So what is this alternative method of concept formation that is able to do this?

⁵ Guy Oakes, *Introduction to The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science*, trans. and ed. Guy Oakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), xvii.

Because the empirical manifold is infinite, historical concept formation cannot duplicate the manifold in its infinite entirety, either intensively or extensively. This means that the historian formulating the historical concept must choose what part and aspect of reality to articulate. There is thus a principle of selection that is implicitly operative in any historical concept formation. In this way, historical concepts also transform reality so to speak, but not by abstracting away from their content. Instead, historical inquiry transforms reality by selecting what objects to thematize from the extensive infinite array of empirical objects and what aspects of these objects to bring to light from their intensive infinity. In this way, historical concepts are not tasked with the impossible task of reproducing the infinite manifold. As Rickert explains:

If we restrict historical science to a *part* of reality, its task is no longer contradictory in the sense that would hold true for a historical representation of reality in its totality. Only where both extensive and intensive infinity had to be overcome did the law of nature appear as the exclusive, logically complete means required for the resolution of this task... But if extensive infinity is not at issue, the following sort of scientific analysis at least seems possible: Although it cannot represent exactly the content of reality itself, just as it is, in concepts, its relationship to empirical reality is quite different from and—as this might be put—more proximate than that of natural science. (*LCF* 50)

The key in this passage is that whereas scientific concepts do their work by abstracting away from empirical content, historical concepts present empirical content “more proximally,” even if they do so in a partial and selective manner. But now this use of a selection principle in forming historical concepts introduces the main problem that Rickert will try to solve which is: given that historical reality is known to us through the use of concepts that are formed through a historian’s principle of selection, how then can history be an objective science? The fact that historical knowledge is mediated to us by the seemingly subjective criterion of individual historians calls into question whether history can be a universally valid science on par with the natural sciences. However, Rickert will

argue that history is a science because the historian's selection principle is oriented toward universally valid values.

Rickert's solution to this quandary begins by clarifying the object of historical thematization. He does this by listing the different kinds of possible individuals and then isolating what is distinct about the historical individual. An ordinary individual is simply an object of immediate experience that in virtue of its spatial and temporal determinations is a unique and discrete unity that cannot be subsumed under a natural law without losing its unique individuality (*LCF* 56). Individuals in this category include objects that are not usually distinguished as individuals, such as leaves from a tree or pieces of sulfur. If we look carefully, every leaf is unique and different from another, but we usually fail to attend to these differences because we do not find these differences significant (*LCF* 57). This omission brings us to the next category of individuals, which Rickert calls in-dividuals [from the latin *in-dividuum*, not-divisible] (*LCF* 83). Members in this category are, like the first category, unique in their individuality, but unlike ordinary individuals, they are also highly significant in their uniqueness (*LCF* 83). Rickert gives the example of an ordinary individual like a lump of coal and the extra-ordinary individual like the Koh-i-noor diamond. For most, splitting apart the lump of coal would be an indifferent matter, but splitting the diamond would be a tragedy. Although both are unique individuals, the diamond's uniqueness has an irreplaceable significance (*LCF* 83), so much so that we hold the diamond as something that ought not to be divided, lest it lose this significance. What Rickert finds in our reaction to the diamond is that its "mode of unity in indivisibility just characterized can arise only if its uniqueness is *related to a value*" (*LCF* 84). Finally, there is a category of individuals with a significance that is even higher than diamonds, and this is the historical individual. Unlike diamonds, historical individuals are the proper object of study for historical science because they possess a universal significance, "a value that is valid for everyone" (*LCF* 89). As an example of a historical individual, Rickert uses Goethe: "with reference to the *general* value, the individuality of the average person can be replaced by any object that falls under the concept of a person. The significance of Goethe, on the other hand, lies precisely in what distinguishes him from all other instances of the concept of a person" (*LCF* 89). As a historical individual, Goethe exemplifies a relation to a universal

value because his *oeuvre* engages universal themes that relate to values that are accessible to all cultures and peoples. Thus, our first clue into understanding how history can be an objective science is that its objects of study are related to universal values.

What is crucial in Rickert's discussion of historical individuals is that the historian *relates* them to universal values, but this relating does not entail a direct valuation of them, either positively or negatively, as this would destroy the objectivity of history. In the example of Goethe, using him as an example of a historical individual exemplifying a relation to a universal value does *not* mean that all cultures are bound to recognize the goodness of his work. Rather, Goethe is a historical individual because the themes of his work relate in some way or another to values that are relevant to all cultures, whether these cultures approve or disprove of Goethe's value positions, or whether these cultures know anything about Goethe or not.

To clarify this distinction between value-relation and valuation, Rickert gives the example of two political historians, one a radical free trader and the other an extreme protectionist. Though each has diametrically opposed political values, and though each may make different value judgments about the past, they both agree as to the significance of certain past political events to include in a political history. While they disagree in their value judgments of these events, they agree on what events their value relations lead them to see as significant enough to include in their respective histories. In fact, an agreement in terms of value relations is a presupposition for a disagreement with respect to value judgments as Rickert explains:

differences in evaluation must be based on a *common conception of reality*. If such a *common* conception of reality did not obtain, in a case in which two persons are of a different opinion concerning the value of a condition, the antagonists would not even be talking about the same thing. (*LCF* 92)

History then is a domain of inquiry that is related to values, and in fact universal values, but it is not, as a science, in the business of making value judgments, whether positive or

negative ones about its historical subject matter. The second that history gets into the business of valuating its subject matter, it becomes confessional dogma and ceases to be a science.

One could push Rickert on this point and argue that the distinction between value judgments and value relation is not as separate as he would like it to be because the selection principle one uses to do history is itself a value judgment. For example, one could argue that the inclusion of minorities, women, and marginalized groups in one's historical narrative is a value judgment one makes about what is worth including. But Rickert would likely push back and argue that mere inclusion does not entail a determinate value judgment because one could include minorities in a history to either document their cultural contributions to society *or* to blame them as scapegoats for national tragedies. Thus, Rickert would argue that the inclusion of these groups is indeed an act related to a value, but mere inclusion still leaves the concrete content of this value judgment undetermined, so the distinction between value relation and value judgment holds.

Additionally, one could dispute Rickert's criterion that historical individuals must possess universal significance by pointing out that many non-European cultures may have never heard of Goethe and hence may see no significance in him as a historical individual. Rickert anticipates this objection, but changes the example to Luther and replies:

Only for a historian who is completely alien to German and Christian cultural life would Luther be of no importance whatsoever, and thus not a possible object of a historical representation. This is because the alien historian does not relate Luther's individuality to any value. But if this historian at least understands some religious value or other, in principle he can also develop a sensitivity for the values to which German and Christian historians relate Luther. In that case, a representation of Luther that abstracts from all value judgments possess scientific objectivity for him as well (*LCF* 200).

Presumably then, with the example of a non-European historian who has never heard of Goethe, this historian could still relate to Goethe if she were to have some aesthetic values

from which she could make a connection to Goethe's works. The key principle for Rickert then seems to be that what distinguishes the historical individual as the proper subject matter of history is its in principle universal significance for all human beings. The historical individual exemplifies a value relation that can be potentially placed within the value frameworks of all cultures.

At this point, Rickert has explained how history is grounded in a selection principle that is oriented toward universal values, so the next step is in determining what these universal values pick out in the wealth of historical sources. Rickert thinks his *a priori* reflections on the logic of history can also give us this information. As we have mentioned, proper history consists of a subject matter that is oriented toward universal values. But what does it mean for something to be related to a universal value? What is a value? Rickert defines value as a "future *good* that is to be realized" (*LCF* 101).⁶ For a historical subject matter to be related to a universal value then means that the matter must be understood as having a purpose, an orientation toward the realization of a good. The universality of this good means that it is something toward which all other people, including the historian herself, are also oriented, even if their direct value judgment of this good differs. But what concrete particular in history evinces signs of purposive activity oriented toward the realization of universal goods? Purposive activity presupposes purposive beings acting on the basis of not mere instincts or purely biological drives, but reasons. From these considerations,

⁶ It seems that insofar as all participate, whether through positive or negative value judgments, in the orientation toward universal value, one is permitted to think of the historian's historical work itself as also a contribution toward the realization of universal value. The historian attends to her work in light of some interest, whether it's a religious, political, social, or aesthetic interest. In light of this interest, the historian looks at people from the past that shared this interest and worked to realize the value in question in some way or another. In turn, this historical work provides guidance for the historian, whether in an affirmative direction or a negative direction, as to how their interest in the present value should be realized. There is thus a profoundly existential motivation for history that Rickert lays the foundation for, but doesn't fully unpack. The fact that values drive the study of history shows us that the axis of time most existentially significant for history, then, is the future since it is the future realization of the value in question that motivates historical work. Though Rickert himself doesn't fully unpack the goldmine of insights latent in his clarification of value as purposive activity yet to be realized, Troeltsch reflects directly on this issue in his "What does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?"

Rickert deduces that the historical individual, as the proper object of history, can be none other than human beings oriented toward universal values.⁷

Rickert goes on to expand how human beings are the object of historical study by discussing in detail how human beings are studied as part of a historical nexus or whole that exemplifies a cultural value while also being causally connected to all other historical wholes so as to form a universal whole. The proper objects of study for history then are the values or cultural realities exemplified by historical wholes or past societies of human beings that Rickert calls nonreal meaning-configurations (*LCF* 145). These cultural realities or values include domains like aesthetics, religion, politics, law and they are non-real because as values, they don't reproduce reality, but hold validly and point beyond their existence (*LCF* 162). This is not to say that history does not concern itself with concrete individuals; it does, but it does this for the sake of representing the cultural values that these real individuals exemplify. So history studies concrete individuals, but for the sake of understanding these concrete individuals as bearers of nonreal meaning-configurations, i.e., cultural values (*LCF* 162). It is this fact, that history is oriented toward nonreal meaning-configurations, which provides the condition for the possibility of historical study because while meanings are shareable among different people through different historical times, the empirical psychic processes of past people are not. Rickert explains, "as regards the meaning of the mental life of other persons, we may perhaps acquire direct access to the individuality of its nonreal meaning, but never to the individuality of its real existence" (*LCF* 164). This is because one's mental life is closed off from others unless one shares this through outward expressions, most of which are communicated linguistically.

The next step, which consists of the demonstration of an absolute value, is a crucial one in Rickert's theory. So far, Rickert has shown that history is oriented toward the individual, that this individual is related to a value stemming from the historian's selection principle, and that this value, understood as a future good to be realized, is trying to pick out

⁷ Recall that all of reality for Rickert, including the animate and inanimate, consists of individuals, so that the previous deduction that history must be about historical individuals does not yet get us to those historical individuals being human beings.

historical individuals that have significance for everyone. This significance is to be understood in terms of a value relation and not a value judgment which means that historical individuals are significant to us either in a positive sense (they conform to our value judgments) or a negative sense (they contradict our value judgments). The next question that Rickert tackles is: on what basis can we ground the universality of the historian's value-relevant selection principle, given that historians themselves are also products of particular and historically situated cultures (*LCF* 197)? This is truly the big question because on this question hangs the objectivity of historical science and with this, the whole viability of Rickert's project.

Rickert's first clue into this question is that science itself is not immune from this issue, from finding the ground for the objectivity of value, because in prizing the scientific method above all others, science is also involved in the making of value judgments in the valuation of its own method above others. Furthermore, science also claims validity for its subject matter. Without validity, scientific natural laws would reduce to a mere counting of particulars and grouping these in empirical generalizations that have no more objectivity than history (*LCF* 197). But of course, science claims to be more than a simple arranger of particular objects; it claims to discover the inner workings of the universe through invariant natural laws that hold validly for everyone. But in so doing, Rickert notices the following: "Whoever claims that laws of nature are valid goes beyond experience, whether he is aware of this or not. That is because he makes an assertion about objects that lie outside his experience" (*LCF* 202-03). The very search for laws of nature presupposes the reality of some unconditionally valid knowledge, and this presupposition does not depend on the validity of existing scientific knowledge. For all we know, everything we may know up until now may be wrong, but "as long as natural science is carried on at all, the validity of unconditionally general laws as such and the possibility of at least approximating knowledge of them can never be placed in question" (*LCF* 203-204). To support Rickert's point, one can add that even the giving up of the scientific enterprise because of a conviction that reality is structured in a way such that no invariant laws of nature can be produced also rests on an unconditionally valid law, namely the invariantly valid insight that the universe is structured in a way as to not be able to produce valid laws. All denials

of validity ultimately rest on an ontology that surreptitiously presupposes that validity which they deny.

From these considerations, Rickert finds that natural science, despite its protestations, does depend upon a value after all, the absolute value of truth. Science is inescapably intertwined with an orientation toward an absolute good, the realization of truth. This orientation is an imperative, a categorical imperative at the theoretical level (*LCF* 219). But how does this value of truth relate to the values in history? Recall that the cultural values that Rickert spoke about as specific to history included meaning configurations like law, aesthetics, religion, and politics. How then does Rickert link the absolute good of truth, which science must presuppose, with the goods realized by historical actors, whose necessity and hence universal objectivity is still in question?

To connect this link, Rickert's next move is to problematize the distinction between the theoretical sphere of science (understood here by the comprehensive form of knowing that the term *Wissenschaft* designates) and the practical sphere of history by showing that the *production* of knowledge is a theoretical *activity* and hence also a *historical act* where the two realms come together. Scientific work is also, alongside all other realms of meaning configurations, a historical development. Now, the value that would guide a thematization of the historical development of science must be an unconditional value, the value of truth, for that is what science seeks, so that a history of science can be shown to be grounded upon the absolute value of truth (*LCF* 223). Rickert goes on to extend this value to the rest of historical reality by showing that the historical nexus development of *wissenschaft* is the most comprehensive development that includes within itself all other possible historical developments, e.g., law, politics, religion etc., as all these realms are possible objects of knowledge, and hence can be included in a historical development of knowledge as such. Rickert explains:

as soon as we treat the real process of knowledge itself as the object of knowledge, we can never consider it solely in a natural scientific fashion...

The totality of cognitive acts is consolidated to form a historical

development, and because this development is necessarily a link in the ‘most general’—that is, most comprehensive—totality of reality, the value perspective, which cannot be viewed as purely individual and arbitrary, is necessarily transposed onto the historical nexus. (*LCF* 223-224)

The transposition that Rickert refers to here is that of transposing the absolute value of *wissenschaft* to all other domains of reality, insofar as these domains can be known and hence are part of the universal historical development of knowledge. Through the universal whole that is the historical development of knowledge that encompasses all of reality, Rickert is able to show that all reality is subject to the unconditional value of truth.

The worry with this solution, which Rickert himself addresses, is that it lends too much of a cognitive dimension to history. After all, there are many different kinds of history, e.g., art history, political history, religious history etc..., each centered around the value intrinsic to their specific domain, and it seems a bit forced to relate all these different histories to the unconditional value of truth, simply because all these domains can be objects of knowledge. Put differently, is Rickert’s solution not the product of the philosopher’s bias in seeking knowledge as the primary value (*LCF* 228)? Does not the intellectualizing of the more practical values of art, politics, and religion not distort their character (*LCF* 228)?

Rickert’s solution to this problem is to show that in the same way that truth is the foundational and absolute presupposition for the theoretical sphere, there is also an equivalent foundational and absolute presupposition in the practical sphere that he calls the autonomous will, a necessary presupposition that makes possible both practical *and* theoretical activity. By showing the primacy of the autonomous will over scientific theorizing, Rickert will argue for the primacy of history over natural science. So what is the autonomous will and what is its relation to truth?

While the *concept* of knowledge presupposes the absolute validity of the unconditional value of truth, the realization of this *act* of knowledge presupposes a valuing cognitive subject that brings forth this act, “either through recognition or through valuation... the

realization of science necessarily includes the concept of a *valuing cognitive subject*" (LCF 230). There is "an objectively valid 'duty' that holds for the person whose only aspiration is the truth" (LCF 230). Rickert is arguing that in the act of knowledge, the mind oriented toward the unconditional value of truth is inseparably linked to an autonomous will that wills or brings about this recognition of this value such that knowing and willing, the practical and the theoretical "now seem to be two different modes in which an autonomous will expresses itself" (LCF 231). By an "autonomous will" Rickert is referring to Kant's idea of a will that is oriented in its activity by reason as opposed to other extraneous considerations like pleasure or desire that would constitute a heteronomous will. Insofar as an autonomous will is determined by reason, it is free because it acts based on its ownmost nature, its true rational self. But the further insight that Rickert adds to Kant is that an autonomous will is not just relevant to the practical sphere of moral action. An autonomous will, understood as a will determined by reason, is also a necessary presupposition for the production of knowledge as this is also a practical activity. As Rickert says, "every real cognitive act whatsoever is preceded by a *will* that desires what it should, an 'autonomous' will that ordains its own law on the basis of an imperative" (LCF 231). In direct opposition to Kant's bifurcation of the practical and theoretical spheres, Rickert is saying that there is one "metalogical" basis that encompasses both the practical and theoretical, both the activity of life and the knowledge of life, and this basis is the autonomous will. If the autonomous will is the most foundational reality of rational life, then it should follow that the most foundational discipline should be one that is, like the autonomous will, oriented toward not just the realization of the unconditional value of scientific knowledge, but the realization of "unconditional values whatsoever" (LCF 232), which is what history does. But how does history do this?

When historians seek historical knowledge of political, legal or economic affairs in prior eras, they study, as Rickert explained, historical individuals or societies who take value positions on a number of issues. These value positions can be any number of things from questions about how a society *should* be organized, how goods *ought* to be distributed, how gender *should* be understood etc. Rickert's point then is that all these historical value positions, insofar as they are claims on what reality ought to be like or how people should

be treated presuppose the formal value of the autonomous will: “cultures exists only in a community whose members regard certain values as a common concern—that is, as normatively general values—and, therefore, freely or autonomously take a value position on them” (*LCF* 234). In other words, all historical value positions, insofar as they are *value* positions, make claims on what is unconditionally valid. In doing so, historical value positions presuppose the ability to make rational decisions based on the reasons of a free will oriented toward the unconditional. So the presupposition that puts all historical value positions in the same space of reasons or the same framework of valuation is the shared formal and necessary presupposition of an autonomous will. This formal presupposition cuts across the uniqueness of each historical event so as to allow for the possibility of forming universally valid judgments about the significance of historical events. As to the question of what grounds the universality of the historian’s value-relevant selection principle, given that historians themselves are also products of particular and historically situated cultures, the answer is their formal presupposition of an autonomous will that is also shared by both the historical individuals they study and by natural scientists.

Like science, historical inquiry also has objectivity insofar as the reality of historical individuals is related to values and values are related to what is unconditionally the case. Rickert adds “They [historical individuals] stand in a necessary relation to what should unconditionally be the case, regardless of whether they advance or inhibit it” (*LCF* 234). History’s claim to objectivity is grounded upon its *relation* to the unconditioned, the formal value of an autonomous will, and not the substantive content of history. The grounds for history’s objectivity is not that its historical subject matter presents to us what is unconditionally the case; rather, history presents us with the claims of prior societies as to what they thought was unconditionally the case. This is no different in principle to what scientific theories do. Scientific theories also provide claims about what is unconditionally the case, but these claims have to be tested, refined, and in many cases overturned. But even the production of what may turn out to be unsuccessful scientific theories is still understood as being errors committed within the sphere of a domain oriented to the pursuit of objective knowledge because what distinguishes this activity as science is its *relation* to the unconditioned. As Rickert explains,

although it is only a relation between reality and some unconditionally valid values or other that remains—in which case the assumption we are permitted to make is purely formal—nevertheless, this relation is sufficient in order to regard the historical conception of the world as having the same necessity as the natural scientific conception. As regards the objectivity of the establishment of natural laws, we needed no metaempirical factors except the formal presupposition that some unconditionally general judgments or other are absolutely valid. All content was taken from the specifics of experience. Correspondingly, as the sole metaempirical factor in empirical history, we can also stop with the purely formal presupposition that some values or other are absolutely valid. In that case, every substantively defined, specific, normatively general cultural value we know of is more or less proximate to, or remote from, the absolute values whose content we do not know. Thus the individuality of all cultural life has a relation to absolute values that is more than arbitrary (*LCF* 235).

Rickert is not taking a stand on which actual historical formation best approximates an absolute good. He says that for his purposes, this is irrelevant as he is simply concerned with establishing the objectivity of history:

Of course, we do not know which *substantively* defined ‘meaning’ the development of human cultural life has; and since in this respect we will always remain historically conditioned beings, we will never know it in absolute completeness. But as long as we are concerned with the objectivity of an empirical science of history, this is not the issue (*LCF* 234-35).

The necessary presupposition of an autonomous will in the making of value claims grounds the fact *that* there is an absolute value, but *what* this absolute value is, is for the material work of history and philosophy of history to decide.

Rickert thinks that his task of showing the objectivity of history, through the deduction of an absolute value from the categorical imperative of truth has been accomplished. In fact, not only is history on par with natural science's objectivity, it is foundational to science because it makes fewer presuppositions than natural science. Whereas history makes the presupposition of the unconditional good of truth and its practical correlate of the autonomous will, as science does, science makes the further presupposition of this absolute good being further differentiated into natural laws which constitute what is common to objects void of their individual reality (*LCF* 236). Rickert ends his treatise with saying that the fact that his account of the objectivity of history is a formal account is a virtue of the theory because "It is precisely the 'emptiness' of the formal values presupposed as valid that gives history the freedom and latitude in the substantive determination of its governing perspectives that are indispensable to its status as an empirical science" (*LCF* 236). As we will see, it is the emptiness of this formalism that Troeltch will critique as insufficient for providing an absolute value for life.

Rickert and Hegel

Though Rickert understands his project as solely establishing the objectivity of historical science and not providing a philosophy of history that provides a substantial account of the meaning of history, his methodological reflections actually do give more substance toward a philosophy of history than he gives them credit for. To show this, I will examine the skirmish that Rickert has with Hegel concerning metaphysical realism. In this dispute, Rickert argues that Hegel is wrong in thinking that one can conceive of a metaphysical essence for the whole of reality and then show how this essence unfolds itself through history. Rickert's polemic against Hegel is part of a broader polemic Rickert has throughout the book against metaphysical realism, or the view that objectivity is measured by how closely our concepts match a mind-independent reality. Rickert's polemic with Hegel is significant because though Rickert argues contra Hegel against a substantive meaning of history, Rickert's formulation of the autonomous will as the absolute value grounding all practical values in history actually comes very close to Hegel's notion of the meaning of history as freedom. For Hegel, freedom is at an ethical register what Spirit is at an ontological register: the grand Concept that encompasses all reality. In coming close to

Hegel's position, Rickert underestimates the resources for a more concrete account of history's meaning from within his own methodological reflections.

In the section of *The Limits of Concept Formation* entitled "Metaphysical Objectivity," Rickert reasserts his view that metaphysical realism is untenable and that objectivity cannot mean the reproduction of reality in terms of scientific concepts. The reason is because concepts cannot reproduce the infinite manifold as concepts are by their very nature discriminating. With this in mind, Rickert gives an immanent critique of Hegel's metaphysical realism, arguing that though Hegel is committed to the reproduction of all reality, it really discriminates within reality to include some elements and not others. Rickert begins this critique by describing Hegel's realism as an account where "Cultural values are linked to the metaphysical 'essence' of the world in such a way that temporal reality can be grasped as a process of development by means of which this essence appears in the phenomena or is temporally manifested in empirical existence" (*LCF* 210). In Hegel's account, the selection principle of the historian is not just the formal presupposition of an autonomous will that knowledge demands; rather, the selection principle actually corresponds to the essence of reality. In Hegel's work, the essence of reality is Spirit coming to its own, to its freedom, and the course of concrete history is the unfolding of this metaphysical essence of freedom, so both the historical inquirer's selection principle and the essence of reality and its temporal unfolding match in Hegel's view.

The consequence that Rickert notices in this account is that if the essence of all reality is the value of freedom, and if all historical events constitute the unfolding of this reality, then this means that every historical event is significant and necessary in that they all take part, as part of a developmental sequence, in manifesting reality's essence of freedom. And this is in fact what Hegel affirms in his famous dictum that "What is rational is real, and what is real is rational" (*LCF* 213). In terms of establishing the objectivity of history, Hegel's system has the advantage that it silences the accusation that the historian's selection principle from which she organizes her historical data is subjective and arbitrary. In Hegel's system, the one all-encompassing absolute value that constitutes reality's essence is freedom, so

insofar as historical work presupposes the autonomous will, it guarantees its objectivity. Is Hegel's appeal to metaphysics for grounding the objectivity of history feasible then?

Rickert does not think so for several reasons. First, it is hard to see how one could get at the metaphysical essence of all reality. Hegel claimed to have shown this in his *Logic*, but Rickert does not make reference to this supposed feat in his discussion, presumably because the problems with Hegel's *Logic* first delineated by Trendelenberg were widely accepted by Rickert's time. Rickert thinks it foolhardy to try to deduce the known (historical representations) from the unknown (metaphysical reality) (*LCF* 211). Second, even if one could produce a metaphysical essence for reality, it is difficult to see what relation the invariant, timeless, and unchanging world of metaphysics could have with the *developmental* reality of history (*LCF* 211). For a relation to exist between the two either history would have to lose its developmental character or metaphysics would need to incorporate change and becoming within itself, which would comprise the timeless objectivity that classical metaphysics maintains (*LCF* 211-212). But the most significant problem that Rickert sees with grounding objectivity on a metaphysical reality is the dissolution of historical concepts.

If we were to take our selection principle for the fashioning of history from the metaphysical essence of reality, we would have to know the law by which historical reality is connected with essential reality. If this law were transparent to us, then, as Hegel claimed, we could see how all things that are real are rational and vice versa. The problem with this move is that if all empirical events are rational, this means that everything that exists is a historical individual having universal significance. Under Hegel's system, every event has universal significance because every event would be rational and rational events are by definition related to universal validity. But if this is the case, then "history no longer exists. For in that event, *everything* in the world is either historical or unhistorical in the same fashion, and everything individual loses its *distinctive* meaning" (*LCF* 213). The whole point of history was to foreground those historical particulars that have universal significance, but if all reality is homogenized to the same level, then one loses the particularity and differentiation between historical events needed to create meaningful

historical wholes. A history based on a deduction from a metaphysical essence would have to include every real event that has ever occurred, but such a history would not have a selection principle, since all events are included, and subsequently no distinct meaning or distinct value. And though Hegel's metaphysical deduction entails this kind of unfiltered history of everything, even Hegel did not, in practice, adhere to this task. As Rickert comments, "If Hegel had ever taken seriously the idea that *everything* that is historically real is 'rational,' his philosophy of history could not have been written. It exists only on the assumption that one configuration of empirical reality is *more* or *less* significant than another" (*LCF* 214). Hence, Hegel's system leads to a contradiction that makes history impossible.

Despite Rickert's criticism of Hegel, Rickert's concluding position about the autonomous will as the overarching value of history actually comes much closer to Hegel's view than his criticism would suggest. Recall that Rickert shows how all concept formation, whether historical or scientific, depends upon the absolute value of truth. Also recall that the judgment of truth presupposes an act of will, an autonomous will that realizes this judgment into actual existence. For Rickert, the significance of the autonomous will is that it functions as the grounding value for all other practical values in history, whether aesthetic, moral, or political values. Through the autonomous will, Rickert is able to show that there in fact does exist an absolute value at least in the domain of historical individuals, just as the absolute value of truth exists for the theoretical realm of natural science. Truth and the autonomous will are two modes of the same phenomenon because truth, understood as an illumination or understanding of what is real, cannot exist without an act of understanding that recognizes it while the will that does the recognizing cannot exist as this recognizing will without it having a truth that it recognizes. So the autonomous will is at the practical level what truth is at the theoretical level.

But what is the autonomous will but the act of freedom? Rickert, as a Neo-Kantian, uses the term "autonomous will" to refer to a will that is oriented toward the universal rationality of truth. For Kant, this was the only kind of will that truly expressed the core of the self, as all other orientations — whether to empirical inclinations, emotions, or particular desires—

fell short of what made human beings distinctively human. What follows from this connection between the self and the rational orientation toward truth is that a will oriented toward the realization of truth is a will oriented toward one's ownmost being; hence, a free or autonomous (self-law) will. What is astounding then is that Rickert's formulation of the autonomous will as the ground for all value realizations in history is equivalent to Hegel's claim that freedom is the meta-value grounding all of history, the same claim that Hegel makes.

The difference is that for Hegel, freedom or Spirit's self-realization encompasses everything that exists whereas for Rickert, freedom or the autonomous will is the ground of objectivity for historical individuals. Hegel's notion of freedom is thicker as it is supposed to be not just an orientation toward which reality is striving for but also constitutive of all of reality. This thicker notion of freedom is due to the metaphysical basis that Hegel uses to deduce this notion. In contrast, the more empirically chastised Rickert limits this notion of the autonomous will to a formal presupposition that undergirds all value claims. At the same time, insofar as the autonomous is a value, it is also a future good that is anticipated in every value claim as well. So while the two thinkers' notion of freedom is not identical, the role that this notion plays in terms of being the absolute value and goal of history is strikingly similar.

Having said this, Rickert's account is still open to the criticism that it is too formal to be of practical use. For the positing of the autonomous will as the meta-value of history still leaves open the material question of what actual concrete values in history one should choose for one's life, society, and civilization. The autonomous will at best gives us the guidance that the more a society approximates the recognition of the value of rationality in both its reason-bearing citizens and in the way they organize themselves in such a way that they are respected as the reason-bearing ends that they are, the better it will be. But this formal guidance is far from a material prescription as to what these societies look like in its details, what political systems best accomplish this, what specific social relations best approximate. This gap in guidance between the is and the ought is the gap that Troeltsch seeks to fill through his own reflections that begin with Rickert's account but take his

thought in a more concrete direction. Troeltsch wants a concrete answer as to how to choose a value from the myriad of meaning configurations that have arisen in history. This then, is where Troeltsch's project starts.

III. Ernst Troeltsch

Haunted by the relativizing effects that historical research had created for Christian faith, Troeltsch's life pursuit was to find a normative set of values that could give direction to European society. Troeltsch believed that the West was at a crossroads. The ravaging historical forces of modernity had put many traditional values in question, and the task for the intellectual was to find a set of legitimate values that could withstand the relativizing effects of history. We can thus see how the context of Troeltsch's crisis of faith led him to the problem of history from an acutely practical concern. Whereas Rickert's problematic was to establish the objectivity of historical science, Troeltsch's entry into the problem was how, as a Western European, ought he to live within modernity's new historical paradigm. Rickert could be satisfied with the result of establishing a formal value of objectivity for history, but Troeltsch's concerns press him to seek the actual and concrete values within history that can provide a normative orientation to Western civilization in a new stage of human development. It is for this reason that Troeltsch feels the need to go beyond Rickert, to fill the formal space that Rickert prepared with actual content. So how does Troeltsch do this?

The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions

One way that Troeltsch does not think one can fill this content is with an evolutionary law, akin to Hegel's philosophy of history, from which an overarching value of history is deduced. Concrete history is too diverse, filled with too many individual historical configurations, and all together lacking a comprehensive narrative that would lead one to extract any kind of universal principle from concrete history.⁸ The kind of law of history that Hegel presumed to have discovered requires understanding history as a series of

⁸ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, trans. David Reid, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 66. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *ABHR*.

developmental stages all interconnected by an overarching *telos*, but historical data simply doesn't manifest this global *telos*. It is simply impossible "to see in the lower stages the higher stages toward which they lead, or to see in the higher a continuation of the lower" (*ABHR* 67) and "the modern study of history gives no indication whatever of any graded progression such as this theory might lead us to expect" (*ABHR* 69).

The reason why this uniformity in history does not exist is because human creativity bursts through the kind of law-like behavior that is found in natural phenomena. Though human life includes nature, insofar as our bodies obey physiological laws, the human creative spirit exceeds our natural basis:

But when it comes to the bursting forth of the higher, creative powers in human life, powers that exist as dynamic principles necessary in themselves and that stand over against the kinds of motivations that derive from nature, the modern idea of history can neither recognize the force behind such eruptions as the force that underlies all causal processes and brings them to fulfillment, nor can it explain this force as a phenomenon that necessarily follows from its basis in nature (*ABHR* 74).

What is peculiar to human beings that make them unsuitable for law-like description is their freedom and personality, which are the features from which the vast diversity of orientations come (*ABHR* 74). The result of these reflections on human diversity is that any "theoretical account of the stages of the evolutionary process which is merely systematic and dialectical represents a doctrinaire assault on real history" (*ABHR* 74). Hegel's philosophy of history ignores real history and can only be applied by forcefully imposing a pre-determined schema of what history ought to look like. But if Hegel's way of finding concrete values in history is unfeasible due to the diversity of human life, what other way can there be to ascertain objectively valid concrete values?

Troeltsch argues that the only way to deal with a problem caused by history is to look for a solution within history. If the goal is to find a set of values that can practically guide one's

life, one cannot be satisfied with Rickert's *a priori* reflections on the necessary existence of a formal absolute value. Concrete values need content. The problem is that our judgments about these values are conditioned by the context of the historical moment in which they are made (*ABHR* 90), and their being historically conditioned puts their universal validity in question. Troeltsch is convinced that, "Absolute, unchanging value, conditioned by nothing temporal, exists not within but beyond history and can be perceived only in presentiment and faith" (*ABHR* 90). Somehow, it must be shown how concrete historical values can point to the absolute, without themselves being absolute values. The crux of the problem then is how to combine the absolute validity of the formal with the relativity of the historical in a "creative synthesis that will give the absolute the form possible to it at a particular moment and yet remain true to its inherent limitation as a mere approximation of true, ultimate, and universally valid values" (*ABHR* 90).

Troeltsch's first step in crafting this synthesis between the formal and historical is to expand one's vision by looking at the most significant value systems in history that have been formulated up to one's time. If the problem is that the judgment of what concrete values to choose is conditioned by the historical circumstances of one's time, then a way to counteract this problem of historical tunnel vision is to broaden one's horizon of knowledge by learning how prior civilizations have formulated their own value systems. As Troeltsch explains:

The important thing is to compare these developments in such a way as to take in the widest possible historical horizon in the hope of discerning not a universal principle of law like that at work in concepts employed in the natural sciences but a principle suggestive of tendencies toward a common goal (*ABHR* 91).

No single development in and of itself will exemplify the absolute, but the exposition of religious developments as a collective should, so Troeltsch thinks, show lines of convergence toward some unifying common goal. This approach has the virtue that it stays within history, which is crucial for Troeltsch's standard that any proposal for an absolute

historical value must use the material from history if such a proposal is to maintain its historical integrity and relation to concrete life.

After having laid out past spiritual developments for the sake of expanding one's horizon, Troeltsch's next step is to choose the concrete absolute value from the comparison of prior concrete value systems. The process thus consists of both an objective and subjective dimension:

we may likewise understand the criterion of evaluation as something that emerges within this movement of life as a result of a universal perspective [the objective scientific dimension of the choice] on the one hand, and involvement in this movement on the other [the subjective 'leap' of the individual scholar]. It can be characterized as the determining of a direction, the setting of a course among the great, dominant tendencies of history (*ABHR* 96).

The individual nature of this choice is quite important as the criterion for an absolute value is chosen in accordance with the scholar's scientific and ethical sensibilities that have been developed by prior historical research. Troeltsch says, "Such a criterion is, then, a matter of personal conviction and is in the last analysis admittedly subjective" (*ABHR* 96). While there is an objective or scientific dimension to this choice in the refining of one's judgment through historical study, the choice of the concrete absolute is ultimately "a personal, ethically oriented, religious conviction" (*ABHR* 96-97). There remains an irreducibly subjective or individualistic aspect to this choice because all judgments in history are indexed to the individual's circumstances of a particular time and place. While an individual can expand one's horizon through historical study, she ultimately cannot fully transcend the particularizing effects of history. The concrete absolute upon which the individual decides remains an approximation of the definitive absolute: "This normative and universally valid goal, considered as something perfect and complete, lies beyond history. Within history it can only be apprehended, at any given time, in forms that are by nature individual and conditioned" (*ABHR* 98) and "this is not an actual universal which is

exhausted in its human realization. It is the concept, rather, of a common, orienting goal that may from time to time manifest itself in history in clear and distinct preparatory forms but always remains a goal 'out in front'" (*ABHR* 99).

Troeltsch thinks that through this process of combining the subjective and objective, he does justice to the duality of history's relativity and the absolute's universality that pushes history along to manifest its diverse configurations. His method is a more concrete way of solving the problem of history, which he understood as defining "the scope of the relative and individual with ever increasing exactness and to understand with ever increasing comprehensiveness the universally valid that works teleologically within history" (*ABHR* 106). From the proper synthesis of the individual and universal, Troeltsch thought that we would "see that the relative contains an indication of the unconditional. In the relative we will find a token of the absolute that transcends history" (*ABHR* 106).

Reviewing Troeltsch's Solution

At this point in Troeltsch's proposal, one must critically examine how he selects the religious developments that constitute the base of historical experience, which he then uses to judge how these developments converge toward a common goal. This step is crucially important because both the goal and the converging lines pointing toward the goal are entirely dependent upon the kind of religious developments that are chosen. It is entirely possible that different religious developments will yield different converging lines and a subsequently different goal, or perhaps no goal at all, so it is important to review the principle of selection that Troeltsch uses in order to assess the validity of his larger project. The worry is that Troeltsch may be presupposing his own parochial assumptions about the nature of the absolute in his very selection of religious developments for comparison. If this were the case, if there were no independent justification offered for a selection principle of the religious developments chosen, then Troeltsch would be begging the question. What then is Troeltsch's selection principle and what is his justification for its use?

In contrast to Rickert, Troeltsch gives a more historically grounded justification for his selection principle. He says:

we will draw together the most outstanding results of man's spiritual development that are known and accessible to us, basing this procedure on the supposition that their being known to us is not a mere accident but is due to the fact that they are the only significant developments which spring from an elemental matrix (*ABHR* 91).

In this explanation, there is a kind of Darwinian justification for the "outstanding" spiritual developments to the effect that we have access to these systems of value because they survived the sifting process of history—a kind of historical survival of the fittest. Even if one accepts the idea that their survival evidences their significance—which is not an altogether evident assumption as the survival of a tradition may evidence its shrewdness in aligning itself with a powerful empire as opposed to any moral or spiritual significance—Troeltsch acknowledges that this justification is questionable since recorded history is a very small sample size of the human race's actual existence. Recorded history only extends to six or seven thousand of the several hundred thousand years that humans have been around, and the future is wholly unknown to us, making future value systems inaccessible to us (*ABHR* 91). Given our precarious knowledge of the past and our lack of access to the future, one is right to question whether a relatively small sample size of recorded history is sufficient to make pronouncements about a set of converging lines headed toward an absolute goal. After all, that which is absolute is normative for all times, so six to seven thousand years of human history seems like an inadequate sample size relative to the goal of producing even a mere approximation of an eternally binding norm.

Furthermore, the Darwinian justification has the further difficulty that there are records of religions that have survived the historical sifting process, but which Troeltsch does not include in his example of traditions of "outstanding results."⁹ Is "outstanding" just another placeholder for what approximates Troeltsch's own historically conditioned value system? If so, then Troeltsch's method is biased in favor of his own parochial value system at the front-end of the process. Near the end of his life, Troeltsch himself remarked on the

⁹ The traditions Troeltsch includes in *Absoluteness* are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Platonism, Stoicism and the religious and philosophical offshoots related to the last two.

problem that even the standards that we use to judge spiritual developments are so deeply conditioned by the culture of our birth that they cannot be neutral arbiters between value systems. What specifically then is the criterion that is being used when the word “outstanding” is attributed to a spiritual development?

With respect to the first objection, about whether we have an adequate sample size of historical experience to make gestures toward the absolute, Troeltsch argues that there is an inverse relationship between the depth of a value and the possibility for variation among these kinds of values. As such, a limited historical record should be no obstacle to gesturing toward an absolute value, given that few of these kinds of values are even imaginable. Troeltsch states:

it would be highly fallacious to think of historical relativism as if it involved a limitless number of competing values. On the contrary, experience shows that such values are exceedingly few in number and that disclosures of really new goals for the human spirit are rare indeed. Only at the lower levels of culture does unlimited multiplicity exist, and this is simply a multiplicity of externals or forms that signifies, in actuality, a stark monotony. Not till we come to the higher stages do there appear great, formative powers of the inner life, and breakthroughs to these stages are by no means numerous. Those who really have something new to say to men are exceptionally rare, and it is astonishing that man lives, in fact, by so few ideas. (*ABHR* 92)

Although there may be more variability among the “lower levels of culture,” these configurations need not trouble the philosopher of history interested in the absolute. Troeltsch says, “Polytheism and the numerous religions of uncivilized peoples are irrelevant to the problem of highest religious values” (*ABHR* 92). The key in Troeltsch’s theory that needs to be discerned is what he means by “lower” and “higher” values. If Troeltsch is simply using “higher” as a placeholder for his own values, then his whole use of history to discover an absolute value reduces to a question-begging legitimation of his native Christianity.

To substantiate this worry, there are a number of places where Troeltsch's use of "higher" coincides with elements of the specifically liberal and individualist version of Christianity that he holds. In contrasting the lower polytheistic religions with the higher religious values, Troeltsch says "As for religions of ethical and spiritual greatness, which posit a higher world in antithesis to the merely given world of physical and psychological nature, we find only a limited number" (*ABHR* 92). In this instance, Troeltsch takes it for granted that what differentiates a higher religious value is a belief in a non-physical world antithetical to the natural realm. In fact, it is from this criterion that Troeltsch derives the specific spiritual traditions to be examined for the sake of discerning an absolute value: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Platonism, Indian philosophy of religion, and Stocism. Though Troeltsch includes certain philosophical schools, he gives greater weight to historical religions as these have a greater historical community, a deeper religious impulse, and subsequently a higher capability to sustain entire spheres of culture (*ABHR* 92-93). But if the identification of a higher religious value with Christianity's non-physicalism were not independently defended, then Troeltsch would be begging the question. Another instance where Troeltsch appears to equate higher values with those of his liberal Christianity is in the following: "Not till we come to the higher stages do there appear great, formative powers of the inner life, and breakthroughs to these stages are by no means numerous" (*ABHR* 92). In this passage, Troeltsch assumes that spiritual developments that emphasize inwardness, as opposed to, say, ritual activities, manifest higher values. But this identification is made without any argument that independently justifies it.

Unfortunately, Troeltsch does not justify his use of "higher values." Having said that, there is a sense in which one can charitably interpret Troeltsch's claim about the inverse relation between higher values and possibilities of variation so that it has *some* non-question begging justification. If we think of "higher values" in terms of the most global cosmic questions that religions often pose that are then used to organize ways of life within a civilization, then the global nature of what is being asked for will be limited in variability insofar as an increasing level of universality encompasses within itself a wide array of

particulars. This is because the more global the question, the less variation there is in the type of answer that can be given. For example, as science progresses and new relations between phenomena are found that allow them to be placed under more global categories, the more these global theories collapse into one another such that many scientists anticipate finding a unified theory of everything shortly. Likewise, insofar as religion is a sort of theory of everything at the cultural level of meaning, there is a limit on the variability that this global theory can express in terms of the big questions that religion asks.

Now, there is still the problem of there being many more religions recorded in history than the basis of comparison that Troeltsch provides. In this case, the best defense that he can give, given the historical parameters and limitations that he sets for himself, is the kind of practical “proof is in the pudding” justification that he in fact provides. So this idea of justification would be that the value of a religion, at least for the purposes of considering it for forming one’s own synthesis, can be measured by the extent to which it in fact has organized societies, where extent is measured both in terms of the number of people and length of time. As mentioned before, this justification is tenuous because the prominence of institutions does not necessarily correlate with normative value as institutions like slavery and patriarchy show. But Troeltsch is stuck with this deficient justification that appeals to historical influence because he purposely casts aside the kind of formal rational justification that would give him a stronger argument. Historical justifications are going to be, by their very nature, probabilistic and more easily questionable. Troeltsch appeals to history because he wants to avoid Rickert’s *apriorism*: “The criterion by which these differences are to be weighed cannot, of course, be a theory of religion deduced *a priori* from some place or other”(ABHR 95). But when it comes to justifying a selection principle, Troeltsch does himself a disservice because Rickert’s work could supplement Troeltsch’s project.

Recall that Rickert provided the deduction of the autonomous will from the very idea of truth as the absolute value in the practical sphere that grounds all other values. It is from the idea of this unconditional value—unconditional because any conditions one may wish

to attach to it already presupposes its validity—that the very idea of normativity in the practical sphere is derived. As mentioned before, this absolute value in the practical sphere is the autonomous will or the value of freedom which includes the non-interference with the potential intrinsic to a human life, the emancipation of the unique potential of every human life, and the valuing of this life as a sacred obligation on all. This autonomous will, as Kant showed, constitutes a social existence because the self that acknowledges the value of truth is not just an individual psychological self, but the species of all rational beings, so we regard not just ourselves as endowed with the moral sacredness in virtue of our autonomous rational nature, but also every other rational being that is similarly endowed. Rickert's deduction of the autonomous will opens the way to using Kant's moral ideal of a kingdom of ends, the idea that all human beings are ends in themselves and not merely means, as a way to independently verify Troeltsch's selection principle.

The use of the Kantian criterion would show that nearly all the religions Troeltsch proposes for the basis of comparison are problematic to some extent. World religions are highly internally differentiated, so it is difficult to bless an entire religion, like Hinduism or Christianity, as all meeting in their entirety the kingdom of ends criterion. This is so because there are parts of Hinduism that emphasize caste and the treatment of human beings as mere means just as some of Christianity's teaching along with actual practice in history presuppose patriarchy and slavery. At the same time, much of Hinduism's other teachings, as in the Upanishads or in its poetic traditions as well as the more democratic aspects of Christianity are much more conducive to meeting the test of the categorical imperative. At any rate, connecting Rickert's concept of the autonomous will with Kant's ethics, and using this as an independent check on both the selection principle and the subjective judgment that Troeltsch claims is inevitable would ameliorate the arbitrariness that an appeal to one's intuition risks.

Now, Kant's ethics is certainly not without its objections, but its virtue as a supplement to Troeltsch's criterion of selection is that it grounds its claims on rationally adjudicable argumentation. This is a considerable improvement from the vague selection principle of choosing those religious traditions arbitrarily defined as manifesting "higher values,"

which, because this criterion is so vague and undefined, lends itself more easily to choosing religions according to one's own chauvinistic impulses. By using this aspect of Rickert's *apriorism*, Troeltsch could have provided a more rigorously defensible justification for his project while still keeping its historical focus. There is no reason why this partial and particular use of the *a priori* would prevent Troeltsch from examining history and gathering the data to see what traditions, in practice, best exemplify the unconditional good. Otherwise, without a clearly defined and rationally defended criterion, one is open to every sort of arbitrariness.

The worry with this use of the *a priori* might be that it pre-determines an absolute value before history is consulted. But because this *a priori* principle is formal, it is by nature empty and hence would not be wholly determinative. Even with the aid of an *a priori* principle, the concrete nature of this principle still needs to be discerned in history. Even with the idea of the autonomous will or freedom as the meta-value of history, one still needs to interpret what this means for particular societies, for how legal systems are structured, what economic systems best accomplish this value, what cultural rituals best promote this value. There would still be questions about how to negotiate individual liberty and social obligations as the idea of an autonomous will grounds both dynamics. In fact, the very idea of "freedom" could be given content and further differentiated by a comparison of different traditions, as the idea of an autonomous will is admittedly empty of content. Hence, the fear that an appeal to an *a priori* supplement would undermine the importance of historical research is unfounded.

The irony is that at the end of his life, Troeltsch did reflect on the possibility of Kant's ethics as a way to limit the vast streams of historical possibilities into a set of values that one could maintain. But despite these reflections, Troeltsch grew ever more skeptical of even finding converging tendencies among traditions. After finishing *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Troeltsch confessed to becoming more impressed with the thoroughness by which a culture's values are determined by their historical situation. Even the criterion that one might use to judge between different values, as he had argued for in *Absoluteness*, is so thoroughly a product of one's own tradition that any appeals to it as a

neutral arbiter are futile. Troeltsch was led to the growing realization of the individuality of the historical particular over and against any common goal that could be gathered from the distinctiveness of historical individuals.

Troeltsch's final years provide crucial insights about history, so I will examine some of these final conclusions, starting with his reflections on the potential that Kant's ethics has to dam the historical stream of values, followed by his insights into the individuality of historical life and the problems this poses for his prior conclusions, and finally his last attempt at containing the relativity of values. What I aim to show is that Troeltsch's final reflections are a result of a heightened individualism and nominalism that reaches its peak in his last years. Troeltsch's growing relativism is a result of these developments, but I will argue that Troeltsch's individualism needs to be complemented by a more thoroughly categorial vision of reality where the commonalities of individuals are also accepted alongside their distinctness.

IV. Troeltsch's Final Writings

Before laying out his doubts about the possibility of Kantian ethics to limit the streams of historical relativity, Troeltsch builds the case for how this morality might be used for this purpose. Troeltsch rightly sees that the end of Kantian ethics is the actualization of freedom in human life and the attainment of a free personality, "which has its foundations in itself and possesses a certain unity of its own."¹⁰ Although Kantian ethics is often the foil to Aristotelian virtue ethics, the two systems agree that the value of a thing depends on how closely it approximates its function. Furthermore, both systems see the distinctiveness of human beings in terms of their rational capacity, so that reason is the unique function of the human being. This endowment then entails that the moral worth of a human being depends on how closely she approximates her innate function of reason. What is distinctive about Kant's conception of reason is that what he sees as distinctive of the rational capacity is its spontaneous ability to determine its own ends. Kant lived in a time when Newtonian

¹⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, "The Morality of the Personality and the Conscience," in *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, trans. Baron F. Von Hügel and Ernest Barker, ed. Baron F. Von Hügel (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 77. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *MPC*.

physics had become recognized as one of the most important discoveries of the modern period. While many marveled at the ability of Newton to explain the physical universe in one equation, Kant worried that this discovery implied determinism. In turn, the deterministic outlook on reality threatened human knowledge, morality, and freedom. For if our actions are pre-determined by physical conditions, then we are ultimately not responsible for our actions. If our actions are realized by physical determinants and not our intentional choices, then our moral behavior lacks responsibility, our theoretical behavior lacks intelligence, and the human being is qualitatively indistinguishable from inanimate objects. This backdrop explains why Kant closely associates reason with freedom. The unique dignity of human beings consists in their ability to choose the ends of their actions, and not to have these ends chosen for them by nature's physical laws. Furthermore, the only end which humans can choose that allows them to be free or to be truly who they are is the very end of reason itself, which Kant conceives as the principle of universalization: acting only on those ends which one can will to be universalized. For acting on any other end is acting on the basis of that which lies beneath one's own true self and dignity, acting on the basis of heteronomy (other law) as opposed to autonomy (the self law of reason). What Troeltsch does then with this Kantian basis for normativity is to see how far it can be used to produce concrete norms for actual living.

Troeltsch's Critique of Kant's Ethics

The first line of guidance that Troeltsch sees in the Kantian option is that it tells us the kind of personality to develop and in this directive, gives us some guidance as to what kind of end we should work to realize in life: a personality constituted by freedom. Already in this goal, there is an obstacle to overcome because human beings are both rational and natural biological beings, so the goal of freedom would entail a certain degree of emancipation from one's more primordial biological drives. Troeltsch says:

Freedom and creation constitute the secret of personality, but this self-creation of personality is, of course, no absolute creation in us finite creatures who emerge from the stream of life and of consciousness. It is a creation which takes place in obedience and in devotion to an attraction

towards emancipation from merely natural and accidental determination—
an attraction to the imperative ‘ought’ which is analogous to the attraction
towards logical truth and correctness, and arises, like the latter, from the
deeper spiritual levels of our being. (*MPC 77-78*)

For the sake of achieving this formal goal of developing a free personality, the inner
imperative that binds the will toward ethical action shows itself to be classifiable into two
major categories of duties: those duties toward oneself and those toward one’s neighbor
(*MPC 79*). All moral commandments are reducible to this one law of action (*MPC 79*).

The imperative of freedom is binding on any group of people just as much as it is binding
on any particular person, and this allows the imperative to be the basis for social ethics
(*MPC 79*). The imperative of freedom calls one recognize the moral worth of an
autonomous end wherever it may be found, whether in one’s own empirical self or in
another’s, so reason demands one to treat one’s neighbor always as an end and not merely
a means (*MPC 80*). Troeltsch explains:

This recognition is the justice which everywhere establishes a certain
proportion, corresponding to the whole ethical value of the several persons...
In so far as this justice is joy in the moral dignity of one’s neighbor... it
becomes kindness; and from this connection with justice even kindness and
benevolence become a duty, which persists so long as we are not obliged to
convince ourselves of the opposite and of the impossibility of improving our
neighbor. (*MPC 80-81*)

An additional social consideration to be gained from the imperative of freedom is that one’s
community is ultimately not reducible to a natural basis—that of blood and soil, tribe and
clan—but rather, a community of moral union (*MPC 81-82*). Kant’s ethics not only provide
a formal goal to achieve, but also guidance on the kind of life to avoid, that life based on
pure self-interest or herd instinct (*MPC 82*). Troeltsch even says that “all further moral
theories and lists of the virtues and the duties, such as are dear to ancient and modern

moralists, are only further elaborations of these simple fundamental ideas..."(MPC 81). Despite the praise Troeltsch lavishes on Kantian ethics, he is still skeptical about its possibility to stem the tide of historical relativity. Troeltsch offers two interrelated lines of criticism for why it fails to solve the problem of history.

Troeltsch's first line of criticism is his familiar critique, already directed at Rickert, that Kantian ethics are too formal to provide concrete ethical values in history. Troeltsch summarizes Kant's ethics as "a purely formal aim of independence from mere fate, and of self-determination from within, through the ideal of an internal unity and clarity of our being, which ought to be, and obliges us" (MPC 78). But he goes on to say, "It is a distinct and independent question what are to be the concrete single ends by which certain qualities are to be acquired that will strengthen and bring out the general independence" (MPC 78). Assuming that the self-determination prescribed by the categorical imperative is to be our guiding light, what precisely does this mean for how the specific cultural values of the family, state, law, the economy, science, art, and religion ought to be organized? The sole guidance of proceeding in accordance with the principle of universalizability is of little help in organizing a concrete society. The concrete factors, how important each is, what their consequences are, and their weighted role in deciding a concrete course of action is not prescribed by the principle of universalization. In lived life, one must consider concrete circumstances and the consequences of one's action; one does not have the luxury to merely consider the purity of one's will. Thus, the problem Troeltsch sees in Kantian ethics is that in the abstract, it is quite clear what morality requires, but in actual practice, the diversity and complexity of circumstances often leaves one clueless as to what to do.

For this reason, Troeltsch thinks that the good will cannot consist of just acting on good intention and that no absolute purity of goodness can be ascribed to this. The good will is always a relative act "realizing ethical purposes as far as possible" (MPC 90); it consists "in the will to responsibility and decision, where the compromise between Nature and Reason is struck according to the circumstances of the moment" (MPC 90-1). Troeltsch says, "What gives responsibility and ethical quality to our actions is just that, in a given situation, we undertake to find the right way *to the best of our knowledge and conscience*, and that we

voluntarily make ourselves answerable for solving the conflict between Nature and Reason” (MPC 90). The acts of limitation are always different and vary according to “circumstances, maturity of development and difficulties of life” (MPC 91). It has an ethical quality only in its personal decision:

In the act of decision we may thus certainly trace a factor of fundamental definition and precision of direction, but not a timeless, eternally valid, abstract program, in the light of which, at any point, on the assumption of goodwill, the problem of historical perplexities can be solved, or which, again, as the final triumph of progress, can, in any conceivable future, perfectly organize the whole of humanity. (MPC 92)

Hence, the formalism of Kant’s ethics is not sufficient to meet the demands of concrete life.

Troeltsch’s second line of criticism focuses on the intrinsic unrealizability of Kant’s ethics. The essence of Kant’s ethics consists in the emancipation of the human being from her mere natural instincts, interests, and drives. Kant demands that these be reoriented by rational and universal considerations. But Troeltsch notices that the ideal of emancipation necessarily and dialectically co-implies the natural basis from which one is emancipated. He explains, “The very conception of this morality means that it can never be simply victorious. Victory would be the end of struggle and freedom” (MPC 88). Troeltsch is saying that the very idea of freedom requires the enslavement from which one is freed; otherwise, what does one gain freedom from? If this is the case, then the natural enslavement from which Kant seeks emancipation will always be co-implicated by this same ideal of freedom. But if the enslavement of the passions were an ontological condition of freedom, then Kant’s ideal of freedom would be self-defeating. The categorical imperative would command that which if realized would negate itself. Hence, the supreme principle of morality would fail its own test and show itself to be immoral.

However, I do not think Troeltsch’s charge is correct. Though our *concept* of freedom is inseparable from a condition of enslavement, one can imagine a perpetual state of non-

enslavement that would surely have a different conceptualization for one who has never encountered the idea of slavery, but whose reality, if actually realized, would still be constituted by the rational and universal state that the categorical imperative commands. Kant's constant elucidation of duty to the moral law is perpetually presented in the context of the struggle with our heteronomously self-interested nature because that is the only condition with which we are familiar and because the principle of duty can better be illustrated with the foil of heteronomous self-interest. But this juxtaposition is perpetuated for pedagogical purposes and not because heteronomous self-interest is an ontological condition constitutive of our duty to the moral law.

Nevertheless, Troeltsch offers a second charge of unrealizability, one that is not based on an *a priori* conception of freedom that is much more compelling. With respect to the natural basis of human existence, he says:

These instincts and needs have, and they continue to maintain, their own independent justification in the nature of man, as it struggles for room, for food, for life, for more life; and in man's earthly life they can never be completely excluded or rationally organized. The conflict between Nature and Morality, between the demands of subsistence and the shaping of moral personality, can never be completely solved. (*MPC* 88-89)

The idea is that so long as humans continue to be the dual physical-psychical beings that we are, so long as our rational activity depends upon the physiological functions of our physical organs, the self-interested needs of nature must be met to some degree, so the idea of complete freedom is an unrealizable goal.

Interestingly enough, the impossibility of fulfilling the moral law in this life is a point that Kant also saw, and it was for this reason that he deduced, on a practical basis, the necessity of an afterlife in which the moral would be fulfilled completely. Kant reasoned that only this practical presupposition could make sense of morality in this life. Additionally, Kant's regulative ideal of the fulfillment of the moral law also makes sense of our experience of

moral progress. Without this regulative ideal, there would be no standard by which to measure moral change as progress. But whatever one makes of Kant's *als ob* argumentation, there is another sense in which Kant's ethics can be defended against Troeltsch's objection.

The Kantian principle of universalizability includes one's own interest within its scope. Kant's alternative formulation of the categorical imperative, treat human beings as ends and not merely as a means, includes treating oneself as an end. What the categorical imperative prohibits is not all self-interest, but an undue regard for one's own interest. The overcoming of nature has to do with eliminating the disproportionate regard for our own natural desires but not with eliminating nature as such. The trick is *how* to negotiate one's own self-interest with respect to others, and this dynamic will vary depending on the context. In this respect, Troeltsch is correct that the mere formulation of universal law does not give concrete guidance since a universal law, by its very nature, abstracts away from concrete circumstances. For the choosing of concrete values, Kant's ethics do have to be supplemented by historical reflection.

But what I find problematic about Troeltsch's view is his disregard for Kantian ethics as a supplement alongside historical reflection. From the fact that Kant's ethics cannot serve as a permanent stopgap, Troeltsch despairs of any hope of grounding a set of values on a rational basis. At times, he even questions the cross-cultural validity of logic:

Indeed, even the validity of science and logic seemed to exhibit, under different skies and upon different soil, strong individual differences present even in their deepest and innermost rudiments. What was really common to mankind, and universally valid for it, seemed, in spite of a general kinship and capacity for mutual understanding, to be at bottom exceedingly little, and

to belong more to the province of material goods than to the ideal values of civilization.¹¹

Troeltsch also proposes that the end of an autonomous personality prescribed in Kant's ethics is itself a contingent byproduct of the historical conditions of the West only valid for us:

The idea of Personality, which, in the form of Freedom, determines everything in the morality of conscience, and, in the form of Object, everything in the ethic of values—this idea is, after all, a Western belief, unknown in our sense, to the Far East, and pre-eminently and peculiarly the destiny of us Europeans. But in view of the whole of our history we cannot but believe that it is for us the truth.¹²

Although Troeltsch nominally rejects relativism and argues that truths that are merely valid *for us* are no less the Truth,¹³ his thought was clearly headed in a relativistic direction before he prematurely died. Before stating my disagreement with Troeltsch's dire formulation of the problem of history, it is important to analyze the reasons for his increasingly relativistic tendencies and his growing doubts about a common normative goal for humanity.

Troeltsch's Individualism and Nominalism

In a lecture posthumously entitled *Christianity among World Religions*, Troeltsch recounted the development of his thought from the writing of *Absoluteness*, which included his increasing realization of the individualistic character of historical phenomena and the degree to which the enacting of values is determined by historical and cultural conditions. At the beginning of this lecture, Troeltsch assures his hearers that there is nothing

¹¹ Ernst Troeltsch, "Christianity Among World Religions," in *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, trans. Mary E. Clarke, ed. Baron F. Von Hügel (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 53. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *CWR*.

¹² Ernst Troeltsch, "The Ethics of Cultural Values," in *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, trans. Maximilian A. Mügge and Miss Doran, ed. Baron F. Von Hügel (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 120-21. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *ECV*.

¹³ "I hope you feel that I am not speaking in any spirit of skepticism or uncertainty. A truth which, in the first instance, is *a truth for us* does not cease, because of this, to be very Truth and Life" (*CWR* 63).

substantial that he wishes to retract from *Absoluteness*, but there are a number of modifications that he feels forced to make (*CWR* 51). For one, he is much less sanguine about the possibility of finding a common goal toward which world religions are headed: “whilst the significance for history of the concept of Individuality impresses me more forcibly every day, I no longer believe this to be easily reconcilable with that of supreme validity” (*CWR* 51). The immediate cause of this change was Troeltsch’s historical studies in his *Social Teachings* as they showed him “how thoroughly individual is historical Christianity after all, and how invariably its various phases and denominations have been due to varying circumstances and conditions of life” (*CWR* 51-52). Troeltsch sees the historical matrix as determinative of the kind of religion that arose:

Whether you regard it [Christianity] as a whole or in its several forms, it is a purely historical, individual, relative phenomenon, which could, as we actually find it, only have arisen in the territory of the classical culture, and among the Latin and Germanic races. The Christianity of the Oriental peoples—the Jacobites, Nestorians, Armenians, Abyssinians—is of quite a different type, indeed even that of the Russians is a world of its own. The inference from all that is, however, that a religion, in the several forms assumed by it, always depends upon the intellectual, social, and national conditions among which it exists. (*CWR* 52)

In this passage, Troeltsch emphasizes the effects that concrete historical circumstances have on an abstract idea. When an idea is put into concrete life, its distinct permutations are bound to proliferate in proportion to the different contexts the idea is placed in.

This point was previously alluded to in Troeltsch’s discussion of how even with the guidance of a unitary set of ethics like Kant’s, the application of this principle in concrete situations will produce individual realities not predictable by universal moral law:

The morality of conscience becomes individualized in its application, but this individualization is simply a limitation and definition of direction in the face

of conflicting alternatives for which the individual conscience is responsible. The ethic of cultural values, on the other hand, leads us into the realm of the historical Particular in the more radical sense of a molding of universal tendencies into historical creations of culture—a molding which is peculiar, unique, and *sui generis*... Here [in the concrete cultural atmosphere] there is nothing independent of time and universally valid except the stimulus and obligation to create a system of culture. (ECV 105-106)

For Troeltsch, historical context acts as the individualizing principle of abstract laws and values. Furthermore, the diversity that is possible for a value entering historical life is infinite because insofar as every temporal moment is unique, every application of a given value in that moment will also be unique. This is why Troeltsch even questions the universal validity of logic. Insofar as particular humans apply logic in particular historical contexts, the application of logic at a given point in time is going to be different than applications actualized at other times. The difference between two moments in time is not just the abstract difference between two empty temporal moments; it is rather a material difference since each temporal moment is not empty, but suffused with a substantive cultural matrix of historical, social, political, economic factors that never remain exactly the same for any two moments.

What this means for the project of finding a common goal for humanity is that our capacity to judge, even after having examined vast amounts of historical data, is not suited to finding a universal goal because any proposed common goal that we find is going to be grounded on a value system that springs from a specific historical matrix of conditioning factors. Since no historical-cultural matrix is exactly alike, the hope of finding even a set of converging tendencies among cultures is dim. This is the basis for Troeltsch's statements about the particularization of validity, i.e., validity *for us*, as the only one that is available to us, since all our judgments are culturally conditioned. Troeltsch explains:

But so far as human eye can penetrate into the future, it would seem probable that the great revelations to the various civilizations will remain

distinct, in spite of a little shifting of their several territories at the fringes, and that the question of their several relative values will never be capable of objective determination, since every proof thereof will presuppose the special characteristics of the civilization in which it arises. (*CWR* 62)

This statement is complicated by the fact that in a number of places, Troeltsch appears to grant the existence of a universal goal toward which religions are moving.¹⁴ But perhaps the most that can be said about these statements are that they are expressions of his faith or hope: “In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not One, but Many. But to apprehend the One in the Many constitutes the special character of love” (*CWR* 63).

Troeltsch’s last stab at damming the vast streams of historical relativism was to acknowledge the fact that many synthetic solutions to the problem of values will be made by the countless unions, interest groups, and associations that are increasingly populating modern culture. The best that one can do is to craft a functional synthesis of the minimum content needed to organize society between these groups through conversation and education led by leading personalities.¹⁵ This unity will undoubtedly be relative and evolving, but there is no other way as the destiny of the West has called us to this fragmented predicament that will only get worse, leaving the common content that binds us together as a society to ever narrower circles (*CS* 145).

Critique of Troeltsch

Having laid out the reasons for Troeltsch’s increasing relativist tendencies, I now wish to explain why I think he overstates the case for the radical diversity of history and culture. Though Troeltsch nominally held to a universal goal for humanity as something to be

¹⁴ “I only wish to emphasize now more strongly than I did then that this synthesis cannot as yet be already attained in any one of the historical religions, but that they all are tending in the same direction, and that all seem impelled by an inner force to strive upward towards some unknown final height, where alone the ultimate unity and the final objective validity can lie. And, as all religion has thus a common goal in the Unknown, the Future, perchance in the Beyond, so too it has a common ground in the Divine Spirit ever pressing the finite mind onwards towards further light and fuller consciousness, a Spirit Which indwells the finite spirit, and Whose ultimate union with it is the purpose of the whole many-sided process” (*CWR* 61).

¹⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, “The Common Spirit,” in *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, trans. H.G. Atkins, ed. Baron F. Von Hügel (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 143. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *CS*.

anticipated, his last writings flirt with the thesis of the incommensurability of conceptual schemes. My critique will consist of three parts: 1) First, I will critique Troeltsh's individualism, arguing that this way of looking at phenomena privileges tokenization (to be explained shortly) and this in turn limits one's vision from the start to focus on difference and exclude commonality. 2) Secondly, I will argue that the idea of "validity for us" is incoherent and cannot express normativity in a meaningful way. Insofar as Troeltsch uses this particularized concept of validity, he replaces his original quest of finding norms for the affirmation of one's cultural identity. 3) Finally, I will present a counter-example in Kant's work, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, to Troeltsch's claim that the formalism of Kantian ethics is helpless in delineating a common goal for humanity or in delineating tendencies in history, given the enormous complexity and diversity of the historical process.

My first line of criticism is to argue that Troeltsch is led to focus exclusively on the distinct individuality of phenomena and hence on their differences because he is gripped by a tokenizing orientation. This concept can be explained by the following example: How many words are there below?

Green Yellow Green Green Green Green

The answer depends on one's orientation. If one is inclined to see things in terms of tokens, i.e., the physical scribbling on a page, then one will say that there are six concrete words: 1) Green, 2) Yellow, 3) Green, 4) Green, 5) Green, 6) Green. A tokenizing orientation leads one to see things in terms of their brute materiality, and as a result of this orientation, one's ontology of what is real is vastly proliferated in accordance with the number of materially individuated entities. This approach to seeing phenomena is what, I'm suggesting, leads Troeltsch to see endless diversity and subsequently leads him to a near hopeless relativity.

However, there is another way of answering our original question. If one is led to see phenomena in terms of their intelligible content, or the idea that is represented in a token, i.e., a type, then one will see two words: 1) Green and 2) Yellow. In this simple example, we can see how a type orientation vastly reduces the number of individuals from seven to two.

In this example, it is quite easy to see that all five “Green” words are one idea because apart from brute physical differentiation, there is nothing else to distinguish them as the font, size, and combination of capital and non-capitalized letters are the same. But identical concepts can also be represented in different ways. For example, one could have:

GReEn VeRde vert Grün *Green* VERDE

Once again we could ask: how many words are above, and it is highly likely that this new example would lead more people to answer in a tokenizing way, in which case many would say six. This answer is likely because the words look different, they are in different languages, the fonts are not the same, and the letters alternate in size. This example heightens our sensitivity for difference, but despite the material differentiation that is easy to see, all these tokens represent one single type or concept, just like the prior example of “Green.” This then is what I suggest is going on with Troeltsch during the last years of his career: his greater exposure to historical studies influences him to see in a tokenizing way the vastly different fonts, languages, sizes, and varying combinations of letters of the world’s cultural values, and this causes him to despair of ever finding a common token “Green” toward which they are heading. Of course, what this tokenizing approach to reality fails to take into account is that a singular concept can be multiply instantiated through highly differentiated tokens.

We could also frame this issue in terms of failing to see the genus within a range of species. For example, one could marvel at the nearly infinite number of shades of green, red, yellow and come to the conclusion that there is nothing these hues have in common, all the while neglecting both the immediate category of the specific color that they fall under and the broader category of color of which they are all instantiations. One could argue that the category color is not real because it is not visible as such: one sees red, yellow, green, but never the category color as such. But this argument fundamentally misunderstands the genus/species distinction in that a genus or broader category is not one among the many instances within its category. Rather, color is a way of being that is shared by the instances

of red, green, and yellow. Qualitatively, they are all visible hues. Physically, they are constituted by different wavelengths of light, and genetically, they are all produced by the interaction between different wavelengths of light and the retina. Troeltsch's radically individualistic approach to historical phenomena is due to his tokenizing approach and his neglect of the broader categories within which phenomena occur.

Baron F. Von Hügel, a contemporary of Troeltsch, also criticized his inattention to categorial commonalities. Von Hügel gives the following example:

I behold an orange and I do so by seeing, simultaneously both its particulars and what it shares with the lemon and the lime. The family of citrate fruits is as little a mere creation of my mind as are the orange, the lemon, and the lime in their distinctions each from the others and from the family of which, notwithstanding, they are members. The general citrate qualities, affinities, effects do not indeed exist separately, but all the same they do exist within the particulars as really as these orange, lemon, lime particulars exist within the general citrate qualities.¹⁶

From this example, Von Hügel goes on to critique Troeltsch's actual claims:

Dr. Troeltsch maintains that the Russian Church is *utterly* different from the Latin Church, and *a fortiori*, of course, that Christianity, taken as a whole, is *utterly* different from Judaism and Mohammedanism. Yet how can we fail to find real qualities really common to all the ancient episcopal, sacramental Christian bodies—qualities as real as are the qualities peculiar to the Roman Catholic Church, to the Graeco-Russian Church, and to the other similar institutional Christian bodies severally?"¹⁷

¹⁶ Baron F. Von Hügel, *Introduction to Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, ed. Baron F. Von Hügel (New York: Living Age Books, 1957), 21-22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

Thus, Troeltsch's historicism is due to a radical individualism.

Von Hügel goes on to ground this critique on a powerful analytic basis. While acknowledging Troeltsch's focus on the uniqueness of the creativity of the human spirit and its distinction from natural phenomena, Von Hügel argues:

Nevertheless, these religions and religious institutions cannot consist of differences alone; the differences must appear within some qualities: for how otherwise could Dr. Troeltsch so acutely feel these religions to be different? Every comparison, of no matter what two things, involves some element common to these two things. It would surely be simpler to insist upon the utter unknowableness of all religions, indeed of all that, according to him, is entirely individual, i.e., of everything that exists at all, than thus to insist that objects of any kind, sufficiently known by us for even the simplest predication, are, or ever can be, utterly unique.¹⁸

This statement is quite terse, but very profound, and it will be worth spending some time digesting it. Von Hügel's idea is that a comparison, by its very nature, presupposes a basis of similarity that allows the comparison to be meaningful and thus take place. Consider the following comparison: Peter is taller than Paul. This comparison certainly expresses a difference – Peter's size is different than Paul's size. In fact, Peter is taller than Paul. At face value, the comparison seems meaningful and quite sensible. But what makes it meaningful and sensible is that Peter's tallness and Paul's tallness are being compared on the basis of the common quality of height.

To see how indispensable this *common* quality is, take another comparison: Peter is taller than yellow. What does this mean? This proposition is intrinsically nonsensical because the basis of comparison is *not* a common basis. The color yellow has, in and of itself, no spatial dimensions (yellow surfaces may, but not the color itself), so it is impossible to compare

¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

Peter's height with yellow since the latter lacks size. This comparison is a category error and conveys no meaningful information. The crucial point then is that Troeltsch's conviction late in life that a historical comparison of the world religions yields the result that they are grounded in utterly different value systems and that a rational adjudication of them is impossible because of a lack of a common evaluative standard *must* be false on purely analytic grounds. The reason for this is that Troeltsch is led to this conclusion *through* a historical *comparison* between the different world religions, and as Von Hügel explains, the very act of comparing one thing to another performatively presupposes a commonality between them. As Von Hügel points out, this commonality is not just an abstraction that the mind imagines; the commonality is as real as Peter and Paul both having the quality of size inherent in their particular heights.

There is another analytic objection that I would like to explore about Troeltsch's tokenizing orientation. One could reasonably ask why Troeltsch is not entitled to a tokenizing orientation toward phenomena. After all, it is not immediately clear why in our original example of "Green" and "Yellow" words, one is not allowed to answer the question with a tokenizing orientation. If we insist on a type orientation to this question, are we not simply begging the question? No, we cannot answer this problem in terms of a tokenizing orientation because the question that Troeltsch asks, is there an absolute norm in history?, is asking for an ideal, a universal whose very nature it is to be multiply instantiated. Norms, by their very nature are counter-factual; they operate in the world of *ought*, the ideal, and not in the physical and natural domain. Insofar as this is the case, a token orientation that focuses on the materiality of an instance is by definition not a norm, and hence can never be used to answer Troeltsch's question. The proper orientation to the question Troeltsch asks is a type orientation because this orientation allows access to the domain of the normative. For this reason, Troeltsch's tokenizing orientation is inconsistent with the question he asks. The scenario is akin to asking whether there are any colors in the world and then blinding oneself to limit one's engagement with the world to the sense of touch. Sure enough, given a tactile orientation, one will never find any colors in the world, but this is a problem with the method of inquiry and does not prove the absence of color.

This discussion of norms leads us to a closely related issue concerning validity, and specifically Troeltsch's claim that there can be such a thing as "validity *for us*" which can still be "very Truth and Life." Recall that this claim appears in the context of Troeltsch's discussion of how all "our" [read European Christian] standards of evaluation have been thoroughly suffused with Christian ideas:

All our thoughts and feelings are impregnated with Christian motives and Christian presuppositions; and, conversely, our whole Christianity is indissolubly bound up with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe... Our European conceptions of personality and its eternal, divine right, and of progress towards a kingdom of the spirit and of God, our enormous capacity for expansion and for the interconnection of spiritual and temporal, our whole social order, our science, our art—all these rest, whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, upon the basis of this deorientalised Christianity. (*CWR* 54)

From this all-encompassing influence of Christianity on European thought, Troeltsch produces a theory of what validity means: "Its [Christianity] primary claim to validity is thus the fact that only through it have we become what we are, and that only in it can we preserve the religious forces that we need" (*CWR* 54).

There are two important and related claims in these quotes. The first is the reduction of the concept of validity to the pervasiveness of Christianity's influence on normative thought. Validity is not independent of religious tradition; rather, validity for Europeans just is a projection of Christian ideas to the normative realm of standards of valuation. While Troeltsch is speaking here as a European Christian and is expressing how the religion of his civilization has constituted his value system, he also extends this dynamic to all other religions.¹⁹ In other words, this dynamic of validity being a universal projection of religious ideas is a universal dynamic among all religions. The second point Troeltsch makes is to

¹⁹ "On the other hand, a study of the non-Christian religions convinced me more and more that their naïve claims to absolute validity are also genuinely such" (*CWR* 52).

explain the nature of validity in terms of the role religion has in forming one's identity. The question to which this is an explanation is: what gives validity its binding quality? When we engage in argumentation with one another and contest each other's claims, we appeal to common standards of reasoning that we deem valid for those engaged in the argument. But the question arises, if validity is truly nothing but the projection of one's own religious ideas onto the domain of the universal, then what gives validity its binding force to compel assent from all those engaged in argumentation?

Prior thinkers like Windelband, Rickert, and Husserl believed that there is no further primitive that gives validity its binding power to rationally necessitate agreement based on reason. Validity is a primitive property inhering in the nature of logic because any theory that reduces this concept to something more primal must presuppose the concept of validity that it seeks to explain in order for its reductive theory to be rationally compelling. However, Troeltsch does not follow the Neo-Kantians in this respect. Instead, Troeltsch claims that the "primary claim to validity is thus the fact that only through it have we become what we are" (*CWR* 54). In other words, the force of validity is reducible to the affirmation of one's identity, fashioned by the religion of one's birth. Only through this affirmation "can we preserve the religious forces that we need" (*CWR* 54). Troeltsch is offering a pseudo-Darwinian account to explain the binding power of validity summarized in the following steps: 1) religion helps us become a certain kind of person, 2) we wish to survive and continue our existence as the kind of person that we have become as a result of our religion, and 3) thus, we will propagate the religion of our birth through the concept of validity (which is really just a universalized projection of our religion onto the normative sphere) to continue our existence as the kind of person fashioned by our religion as we know of no other way of being a person than that which was fundamentally impressed upon us in our most formative years by our civilization.

This I take to be Troeltsch's idea of validity *for us*, but the next step is to understand how this relativized validity can connect us with objective reality, or as Troeltsch says, "very Truth and Life." Having seemingly relativized Christianity into a merely cultural phenomenon, Troeltsch now reintroduces Christianity's truth by appealing to its exemplary

effects on its adherents: "Christianity could not be the religion of such a highly developed racial group if it did not possess a mighty spiritual power and truth; if it were not, in some degree, a manifestation of the Divine Life itself... The evidence we have... is the evidence of a profound inner experience" (*CWR* 55). Despite conceding the relativity of Christianity's validity, Troeltsch still wants this relative validity to hook on to objective reality or truth. He does this by stating that Christianity is:

God's countenance as revealed to us; it is the way in which, being what we are, we receive, and react to, the revelation of God. It is binding upon us, and it brings us deliverance. It is final and unconditional for us, because we have nothing else, and because in what we have we can recognize the accents of the divine voice. (*CWR* 55)

What I would like to suggest is that Troeltsch connects 1) the normativity of values and 2) his reduction of normativity to religious identity through a doctrine of providence. Troeltsch is affirming that validity boils down to being a certain kind of a person fashioned by the religion of one's birth, but this identity still has normative power because God providentially provides for the forming of one's identity, particularly if one is a member of "such a highly developed racial group" (*CWR* 55). Religiously formed identity can be normative then because this is what God has given us, this is "God's countenance as revealed to us."

This theological connecting point between the normative and relative is where Troeltsch the philosopher of history disappears and Troeltsch the theologian emerges. The connecting point is not so much an argument as it is a declaration of faith. It is the witness of a believer, and Troeltsch tells us as much, starting from his reflections in *Absoluteness* to *The Ethics of Cultural Values* (one of his last writings), respectively:

Such a criterion is, then, a matter of personal conviction and is in the last analysis admittedly subjective (*ABHR* 96)

That the claimant himself is “of the truth” is a thing which he can only believe and finally prove by throwing his life into the scale... Here, too, it is faith that ultimately decides; and here, too, it is likewise faith that justifies.... But for both [Catholics and Protestants] the proof of Authority is Faith—an inward personal experience and a personal attitude; and in both this Faith proves itself by its fruits. (*ECV* 119-120)

To recap this train of thought then, Troeltsch connects a relative validity with an absolute norm by showing how: 1) validity is first reduced to the universalized projection of one’s religious ideas, 2) one then perpetuates one’s religious identity by appropriating exogenous thoughts and ideas in accordance with the religiously laden norms that one uses as standards of evaluation, and 3) this affirmation of one’s religious-cultural identity, which is a relative validity, nevertheless connects with an absolute norm on the basis of the believer’s faith and her trust in an implicit doctrine of providence that God has revealed himself through this religious-cultural identity that is being perpetuated.

Before beginning my critique of these points, I first need to articulate what Troeltsch gets right. It is true that in the search for concrete norms, one *must*, at some point, use one’s best non-rule guided judgment because processes of deliberation cannot be pursued purely on *a priori* grounds all the way through. Even if Rickert’s autonomous will can give us broad guidance as to what formal features a concrete norm should possess, the application of this formal guidance to concrete circumstances requires the use of judgment that is not strictly prescribed by formal considerations. In *The Critique of Pure Reason’s* section on the schematism, Kant also argues for the point that the application of a rule cannot itself be subject to a rule indefinitely because this leads to an infinite regress that would paralyze us from ever acting. Hence, I take this point to be non-controversial. Even the fact that Troeltsch uses the language of faith for this dynamic need not deter the non-believer from seeing the validity of Troeltsch’s point since the faith-language, in this case, is translatable into a rationally accessible insight.

But granting the fact that we must ultimately use a non-rule guided judgment *does not* entail that the results of this judgment must perpetuate a pre-given religious identity. Troeltsch vastly underestimates the critical power of rational deliberation and the emancipatory effects that being exposed to new cultures and historical horizons can have on one's parochial religious beliefs. In speaking of "validity for us," Troeltsch appears to essentialize the "for us" thereby disregarding the intrinsic capacity of human beings to reinvent themselves and choose their cultural and religious identity. Troeltsch treats human beings as natural facts, distributed into regions of the world where specific religions will determine their identities. In doing so, he misses the essential trait that distinguishes human beings from animals, the ability to take a stand on their being (as Heidegger will say). Though born into religious cultures, human beings have the power to contradict their religious beliefs, to acquire radically different ones, or to lose all association with a religious identity.

Troeltsch overestimates the determining power that religion has on determining one's norms which puts into question his subsequent thesis that rational deliberation *just is* the rationalization of religious norms for the perpetuation of one's religious identity. Apart from this point being based on a faulty anthropology, if rationality were reduced to the rationalization of religious identity, this would, in a self-defeating way, dissolve reason. It is in the very nature of reason and argumentation to look for the unconditioned, to seek for that which is true independently of individual and subjective hopes, preferences, and predispositions. If reason were reduced to the promulgation of parochial religious belief, this would also call into question the very validity of Troeltsch's own reflections, as they cannot purport themselves to be valid without presuming the unconditional nature of truth that they aspire to capture. After all, Troeltsch thinks his conclusions about the historical nature of the word, the outdated nature of a supernaturally based Christian orthodoxy, and the individuality of historical phenomena are all really true *facts* and not just a mere expression of his liberal religious identity. It is because these developments are facts that demand recognition from all that he is so bothered by history and sees his civilization in crisis.

My intuition is that Troeltsch feels the paradoxical conclusions that his historicist trajectory leads him to, and this is why he appeals to providence to reassert some level of normativity back into his reflections, but this also will not do. Apart from the fact that Troeltsch's appeal to God is a declaration of faith and has no argumentative force, this appeal is demonstrably insufficient and possibly dangerous. It is demonstrably insufficient because all that the appeal to providence is doing is justifying the religion and culture in which one is born. But clearly, many religions and cultures have produced massive evil and error, so merely baptizing these traditions with theology is useless for establishing their validity, and possibly dangerous. With the hindsight of the twentieth century's atrocities, most readers today will likely grimace at Troeltsch's self-justification of his German people as "such a highly developed racial group" (*CWR* 55). In response, Troeltsch may say that the appeal to providence should be limited to those groups that have proven themselves of their value through their vast influence and longevity. But this again is confusing a normative matter with a naturalistic one, and this is a profound error as it justifies a conservatism that can claim legitimacy for ancient and widespread institutions like racism, slavery, misogyny, and colonialism. Hence, Troeltsch's reduction of validity to a naturalized account of religious affirmation and undergirded by divine providence is deeply problematic and unworkable as a foundation for norms.

Having delineated my first two lines of criticism, I will now pursue the third line which is that Troeltsch underestimates the power of *a priori* considerations in guiding one's search for concrete norms. This is an important point to consider because much of the criticism I have given to Troeltsch rests on analytic grounds, but as we saw in our analysis of his writings, one of Troeltsch's main complaints against Rickert is his focus on *apriorism* and its helplessness in producing concrete norms. As such, it seems appropriate then to show how *a priori* grounds can help us in guiding our choice of concrete norms, and I wish to make this point through an analysis of Kant's *Towards Perpetual Peace*. My purpose in briefly looking at this work is to show how Kant uses his own formalistic moral theory in developing concrete norms for international relations between states. This work does not just produce concrete norms from abstract considerations; it essentially has predicted the major contours of international foreign policy for the last one hundred years, largely based

on the *a priori* insight of the law of freedom. Because of its predictive power, *Toward Perpetual Peace* is a strong counter-example to Troeltsch's declaration that because of the vast complexity and contingency of history, no law could ever be inferred from it.²⁰

Perpetual Peace

In *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Kant's primary purpose is to outline practical principles, derived from his law of freedom, by which states can organize themselves as a global community to produce what is contrary to human nature: perpetual peace. Kant begins from the premise that the natural state of human beings, both within a state and between states is war: "The state of peace among men living side by side is not the natural state (*status naturalis*); the natural state is one of war."²¹ Kant then articulates three practical principles or "definitive articles" needed to secure peace:

- 1) The civil constitution of every state should be republican
- 2) The law of nations shall be founded on a federation of free states
- 3) The law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality

The three principles are directed at an increasingly expanding set of concentric circles: first the relations within a nation, then the relations between existing nations, and finally relations between existing nations and any other people groups. These three circles encompass the whole world. The three principles encapsulate how the law of freedom works in each respective concentric circle.

In the first circle, Kant advocates a representative republican form of government that separates the executive power from the legislative power. This government is based on a constitution, "which is the act of the general will through which the many persons become

²⁰ "We simply cannot formulate the world-process, because the cultural systems show such an enormous complexity in their interconnection and in their particular individual characteristics; and because, again, no goal common to all Mankind can be indicated" (*ECV* 115).

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, trans. Mary Campbell Smith (Filiquarian Publishing 2007), 13. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *PP*.

one nation" (PP 15). The representative quality of the government is what concretizes the form of law, the law of freedom (PP 15). Without representation, the government loses its universality and the state is reduced to the whims of a singular despot.

In the second circle, Kant advocates an international constitution among states, similar to the civil constitution of a state, in which each state's rights can be secured, just as individual rights are secured in a civil representative constitution. Kant is careful to clarify that he advocates a *league* of nations, and not one massive world-state as the latter would force individual states to lose their sovereignty. This would contradict the national sovereignty of each state (PP 17). In terms of the law of freedom, the one world-state is equivalent to a universal monarchy to which all individual states are subject (PP 39). This nullifies the law of freedom as the free sovereignty of each state is neglected, so Kant is careful to advocate a league, not a unitary world government.

What is truly astounding is that Kant is quite sure that this development of a league of nations will happen in history. He thinks it will spread to the whole world, based on the validity of the law of freedom universally existing in all human beings and on extrapolating from the way people were already acting out in accordance with this law in his day by forming republican states. He says,

The practicability (objective reality) of this idea of federation, which should gradually spread to all states and thus lead to perpetual peace, can be proved. For if fortune directs that a powerful and enlightened people can make itself a republic, which by its nature must be inclined to perpetual peace, this gives a fulcrum to the federation with other states so that they may adhere to it and thus secure freedom under the idea of the law of nations. By more and more such associations, the federation may be gradually extended. (PP 19-20)

And:

For states in their relation to each other, there cannot be any reasonable way out of the lawless condition which entails only war except that they, like

individual men, should give up their savage (lawless) freedom, adjust themselves to the constraints of public law, and thus establish a continuously growing state consisting of various nations (*civitas gentium*), which will ultimately include all the nations of the world. But under the idea of the law of nations they do not wish this, and reject in practice what is correct in theory. If all is not to be lost, there can be, then, in place of the positive idea of a world republic, only the negative surrogate of an alliance which averts war, endures, spreads, and holds back the stream of those hostile passions which fear the law, though such an alliance is in constant peril of their breaking loose again. (PP 20-21)

Kant's prediction here is prescient as the first form of a world federation was actually called the League of Nations and the international developments thereafter have included the UN, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the European Union, and the federations still in existence today continue to expand from their original members. Founded in 1945 with fifty-one original members, the UN today comprises one hundred and ninety-three sovereign states, exemplifying the increasing federalization that Kant predicted.

In the third and last concentric circle, Kant describes the law of world citizenship as a condition of universal hospitality to show how scattered people in the world, not already members of the world community, can eventually join the world community so that the law of freedom can be realized throughout all groups of people in the world. Kant says that peaceful strangers in a land have the right of temporary sojourn by the host nation, "a right to associate, which all men have" (PP 21). Humankind has this right "by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, as a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse," (PP 21) so they must tolerate one another's presence. Through this universal law of hospitality, the "distant parts of the world can come into peaceable relations with each other, and these are finally publicly established by law. Thus the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a constitution establishing world citizenship" (PP 22). This third article does not refer to a specific domain as the first two domains, but rather the

condition for establishing the third domain of all people groups in the world united by a relation of universal law between them.

For my purposes, the key article that I wish to discuss is the second one, which is both a prescription for how best to maintain international stability but also a prediction of what will happen in international relations. This successful prediction is important because Troeltsch specifically referred to the uselessness of Kant's *a priori* reflections on the law of freedom in finding a concrete norm in history and discovering any type of historical law or tendency among the different religious-cultural groups in the world. But as we just saw, *Towards Perpetual Peace* contradicts Troeltsch on both these points. Our purpose now then is to understand how Kant was able to derive this successful prediction about the behavior of vastly diverse people-groups centuries before these developments took place.

Fortunately, Kant includes a First Supplement to his three Definitive Articles for perpetual peace where he describes how nature is gradually exemplifying the law of freedom through the selfish and evil inclinations of vastly diverse people-groups. In this explanation, Kant will appeal to many basic human commonalities that contradict Troeltsch's increasing relativism about values and human nature. So how does Kant ground his conclusion about the role of the law of freedom in producing an increasingly globalized world?

Kant begins with the premise that human beings are deeply selfish and highly averse to obeying the moral law. Nevertheless, nature uses this selfish inclination toward the end of establishing peace between people (*PP* 37). Nature does this first by arranging that human beings live in vastly differently different regions of the world in light of their warring with one another. Human beings are able to adapt to different conditions and environments, so they can populate different areas of the world (*PP* 34). While living in distinct regions of the world, human beings form into organized states with public laws so as to quell internal discord within their group and also to defend themselves against attacking groups (*PP* 37). While living together in these discrete groups, human beings develop a common language and religion that brings people within a state together but *also* separates and distinguishes them from other groups (*PP* 39). Eventually and for purely self-interested reasons, neighboring groups begin to form peaceful agreements between themselves to reduce their casualties of war (*PP* 39). This move of lawfulness between states parallels the move

between individuals where because of their internal discord they decide to submit to a public state law. For the same reasons, groups of nations will enter into treaties with other groups so as to reduce warfare, and this dynamic will continue until the world is united by a fully international law.

Kant reminds us that this peace is secured through the selfish ambitions of individuals and states, and that the agreements made are the product of deep mutual hatred between groups who despise each other's differences. He says,

These differences involve a tendency to mutual hatred and pretexts for war, but the progress of civilization and men's gradual approach to greater harmony in their principles finally leads to peaceful agreement. This is not like that peace which despotism (in the burial ground of freedom) produces through a weakening of all powers; it is, on the contrary, produced and maintained by their equilibrium in liveliest competition (*PP* 39).

Despite the evil motives of people, nature uses this distrust to bring humans together in an increasingly global way. The existence of difference is essential to international law because different self-interested groups with their respective interests check each other so as to produce the results of universal law even if such a procedure disregards morality's demands of having disinterested motives. Kant explains:

The idea of international law presupposes the separate existence of many independent but neighboring states. Although this condition is itself a state of war (unless a federative union prevents the outbreak of hostilities), this is rationally preferable to the amalgamation of states under one superior power, as this would end in one universal monarchy, and laws always lose in vigor what government gains in extent; hence a soulless despotism falls into anarchy after stifling the seeds of the good (*PP* 39).

So we see that nature uses the diversity of human beings, their distinct interests, and their distinct social, religious, and cultural backgrounds to form a common global state of affairs where the law of freedom intrinsic to their human nature can be expressed.

Kant's reflection on the operation of the law of freedom within vastly diverse cultural groups presents important considerations for Troeltsch's project. Kant agrees with Troeltsch that there is a vast diversity of cultures and groups that are separated by language and religion. But for Kant, the differences of these groups are a means toward the end of a greater unity between them. The reason why this dynamic is possible is because what Troeltsch derides as useless, the *a priori* law of freedom, can actually cut across all the diversity of culture, language, religion, and race precisely because of its formality. This law is a common *human* endowment, and the last one hundred years of foreign policy has shown us how real this law is in directing the course of human events.

What's powerful about Kant's account is that it does not succumb to naïve sentimentalism about the goodness of human beings; Kant is an adamant realist about the selfishness of people and refers to human beings at one point as a "race of devils." But along with humanity's heteronomous impulses, human beings are also endowed, through our reason, with the idea of normativity as such. In the practical realm, this normativity works itself out in the law of freedom, which appears to us as a demand that binds us to conform our life and relations with one another in accordance with this ought. At the very least, what Kant's work shows, in contradiction to Troeltsch, is that there is a tendency in world history, a tendency to exemplify this principle of freedom. And this tendency, a tendency toward the actualization of the autonomous will, is the same unconditional value that Rickert deduced in his reflections. But in addition to *a priori* rational justification, this tendency now has empirical support as the rise of globalization and the increasing establishment of international law show.

I call it a tendency of world history and not a law because while the law of freedom itself is necessary and normatively binding, its full actualization in history is not. While the tendency is for human beings to exemplify this law, this is not a necessary tendency as human beings have the capacity to completely annihilate the world and with it any sentient

being that could recognize this law. While the law demands and prescribes recognition, human beings have the power to contradict it. Furthermore, human history also does not progress linearly in accordance with the law of freedom; there are dark periods in history where freedom, law, and truth (all different formulations of the categorical imperative) regress, and this is to be expected from, as Kant says, a “race of devils.” But collectively and cumulatively, the rational capacity of human nature allows our race to learn, and we use this capacity, even if it is only for our own survival as Kant shows, to progress. This then is the tendency in world history, the common value that is being exemplified in humanity that Troeltsch overlooks, and it is not only arrived at through the *a priori* reflections that he discounts as useless, but it has also been given empirical exemplification through the course that concrete history has taken.

Conclusion

In chapter 6, I will elaborate further on the *a priori* grounds of normativity as a way to solve the problem of radical historicity. What I will show there is that this line of thought, starting from Kant, Hegel, and Rickert to the Frankfurt school that connects freedom and reason has the potential to explain how common universal values in ethics and reasoning can hold as valid amidst a vast plurality of historical and cultural difference. But before this conclusion, it is important to take stock of where Troeltsch leaves the problem of history because Troeltsch embodies a historicist tendency that will only become more radical in the twentieth century.

The problem of historicism in Troeltsch’s hands comes to a very important inflection point. While Hegel recognized the problem that history posed for norms, his approach to solve it was heavily criticized by the nineteenth century as not paying enough attention to actual history. Hegel was accused of deducing history from his metaphysical system of Spirit and thereby vitiating actual history. As a result, much of the latter half of the nineteenth century consisted of a critique of system building, either through the Neo-Kantian route that emphasized the particular disciplines of natural science, or the historical school that focused on the particulars of historical research. Troeltsch is emblematic of this tendency

of the nineteenth century as his focus on historical particularity and criticism of Hegel's formalism shows. As we saw, Troeltsch's focus on historical particularity only grows stronger during his lifetime, so much so that he held out little hope in his last writings for any kind of normative value that could transcend distinct historical epochs. What Troeltsch contributes to the problem of history then is a wrestling with the problem of history with a much greater awareness of historical variability and diversity, and it was this realization that led him to near despair of a solution.

But despite his increasing skepticism about finding the absolute in history, Troeltsch still presupposed the need for a normative goal, and the fact that this seemed rationally unattainable was something to lament. After Troeltsch, a new generation of thinkers will arise that will change the goal posts. As will be evident in Heidegger's engagement with history, the problem of historicism will be radically reconfigured. Heidegger changes the very nature of the problem of historicism by questioning the ontology from which it originates. In doing so, Heidegger dissolves the problem of historicism by reducing the goal of a trans-historical norm to the inauthentic temporality of Da-sein. In doing so, he inaugurates a new era of thought that reconfigures the most fundamental concepts of reason, truth, and knowledge. For Heidegger, radical historicity is not a problem to be solved; it is rather the very ontological constituency of Being. To this new chapter in historicism's history we now turn.

Chapter 3: Heidegger and the Dissolution of Normativity

Introduction

In the period prior to the publication of *Being and Time*, historicism was viewed by many as a relativizing phenomenon that threatened the objectivity and universal validity of truth. Thinkers like Hegel and Troeltsch wrestled with how to reconcile the universal validity of truth claims with the historical situatedness of the empirical subject. Their prevailing assumption had been that universal validity was a necessary given since the idea of universally valid truth lay at the core of rationality itself. To deny universal validity was to deny reason and capitulate to cognitive nihilism. The goal then was to show how empirical and historically contingent subjects could have access to universal validity despite their historical situatedness. With the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger changed this goal and radically reconfigured the issue of historicism.

Heidegger's project addressed the issue of historicism but from an oblique angle because the central question of *Being and Time* is not historicism *per se* but fundamental ontology. In this work, Heidegger asks the question of the meaning of Being, or "that which determines beings as beings, that in terms of which beings have always been understood no matter how they are discussed."¹ Heidegger seeks for the basis upon which beings are made intelligible, and to do this project, beings must be "interrogated with regard to their being" (BT 5). As the project proceeds, it becomes clear that the being of choice for this interrogation will be the human being which Heidegger designates as Da-sein or "the there." Da-sein is uniquely suited for this interrogation because it is distinguished from all other beings "by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being" (BT 10). Da-sein is chosen for the *Seinsfrage* because "*understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Da-sein*" (BT 10). In light of this rationale, *Being and Time*

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 4-5. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *BT*.

proceeds as an existential analytic of Da-sein with the expectation that Da-sein's phenomenological clarification will open the appropriate horizon to question Being itself. As the Da-sein analytic proceeds, Heidegger will argue for a radically new understanding of the elements central to the issue of historicism including universal validity, logic, transcendence, and truth. Understanding Heidegger's contribution to historicism thus requires one to follow his pursuit of fundamental ontology as laid out in *Being and Time*, which may initially seem oblique to our central issue, but is really at its core as will subsequently be shown.

I. Being and Time's Ontology

Heidegger characterizes Da-sein as a holistic phenomenon denoted by the compound phrase being-in-the-world. Traditional Western ontology understood beings in terms of two central categories, substance and property. Substance is the independent and essential substratum of an entity without which it would cease being that entity. A property is an attribute predicated of a substance, e.g., the apple is *red*, which depends on a substance for its subsistence as a property. For traditional ontology, the world is a collection of independent substances, which includes human beings. This ontology led to skeptical questions, particularly from Descartes forward, as to how mental substances (*res cogitans*) could interact with material substances, (*res extensa*). It is this view held by the Western philosophical tradition that Heidegger flips on its head by describing Da-sein's being as primordially unified with the world, thereby denying the existence of independent substances as the primordial state of entities.

In being-in-the-world, the "in" of being-*in* does not refer to the in of objective presence (the mode of being of substances) as when we say that water is *in* a bucket. Rocks and stones are objectively present in rooms, but Da-sein's way of being-in consists in its absorbed coping in its pragmatic affairs as it goes through doors, uses tools, talks with others, and handles situations all for the sake of taking a stand on the kind of being that it will be. Da-sein's being-in is an existential quality, which denotes Da-sein's familiarity with its world (*BT* 51), and the "world" in being-in-the-world is that which is disclosed by Da-sein's being-

in. The phenomenon of world consists of the entities toward which Da-sein is absorbed, and like Da-sein, these entities do not primordially have their being in the mode of scientific objective presence; their being is that of handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) (BT 67). Hammers are primordially what they are “in themselves” by the activity of hammering and the holistic context within which activities like hammering are made possible. They are not, primordially, independent substances split off from Da-sein or a social context. Both Da-sein’s being-in and the handiness of entities form the holistic primordial phenomenon of being-in-the-world on the basis of which an understanding of entities as objectively present can be made. Da-sein’s being is such that it cannot but be being-in. As such, Da-sein’s very essence is to world the world. Thus, Da-sein’s constitution of being is existential and not substantial; its way of being is being-in-the-world.

Heidegger’s description of Da-sein and its entities as a compound phenomenon is his first step in chipping away at the tradition’s view of beings as independent and self-sufficient substances, and he continues this attack by describing Da-sein and its equipment as always part of a broader referential totality. The world in which Da-sein carries out its activities is one where innerworldly entities are interconnected and refer to each other in light of a background of social practices that reveals a holistic environment. As an example, Heidegger speaks of a car’s red arrow that indicates which direction the car will take. This arrow makes reference to the existence of cars, which in turn presupposes drivers, which in turn presupposes the existence of other drivers and non-drivers who need guidance as to whether to yield or remain standing, which in turn makes reference to an infrastructure of streets, intersections, pedestrian sidewalks, and ultimately an entire social structure that accommodates all these elements (BT 73). Da-sein’s social background is the condition for the possibility of entities becoming meaningful for it as well as the condition for the possibility of Da-sein taking a stand on its own being. But even this stand-taking is not a product of mental intentionality (which the tradition would ascribe to a self-sufficient subject); rather, Da-sein’s taking a stand on its being is a pragmatic activity that is elicited by the affordances of the entities and social situations within which Da-sein finds itself.

In addition to its primordial relation to equipment, Da-sein is also primordially related to others as its taking a stand on its being is also closely linked with an interpersonal existential structure that Heidegger calls *Mitsein*, being-with. To ask about the kind of stance that Da-sein takes toward its own being in its being-in is to ask: “*Who* is it who is in the everydayness of Da-sein” (BT 107)? Previously, the handling of equipment, like turning on a car arrow, showed that what may initially appear like an encounter with a discrete object is always already an activity situated within a whole referential totality of meaning, i.e., a world. But Da-sein’s world also includes people: “others are ‘also encountered’ for whom the ‘work’ is to be done” (BT 111). These others are “neither objectively present nor at hand, but they *are like* the very Da-sein which frees them—*they are there, too, and there with it*” (BT 111). And like the compounded phenomenon of being-in-the-world, the others with whom Da-sein is being-with are not the *others* over against an independent I. The others are “those from whom one mostly does *not* distinguish oneself, those among whom one is too” (BT 111). Being-with is not a quality of objective presence. Like being-in, being-with is an existential quality of Da-sein, a quality primordially inherent in Da-sein’s activity of being absorbed in a world, circumspectly taking care of things (BT 112). Da-sein’s world is a *with-world* where “being-in is *being-with* others” (BT 112). Da-sein’s being-with others makes the who of Da-sein someone other than itself.

Because its everyday mode of being is being-with-one-another, Da-sein exists in subservience to an anonymous set of others which Heidegger calls the-they (*Das Man*). As part of its pragmatic absorption in the world, Da-sein gets absorbed by “those who *are there* initially and for the most part in everyday being-with-one-another” (BT 118). But this group of others, the-they, become less distinguishable as a definite group of others the more Da-sein gets more absorbed into its surrounding world until they disappear into an anonymous *they* which includes Da-sein itself. With this point of indiscernibility between oneself and the-they, a collective identity is formed where Da-sein loses any self-appropriation over against the others, making it possible for the-they to exercise “true dictatorship” (BT 119). Heidegger describes this state of unreflective compliance as follows:

We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* enjoy themselves. But we also withdraw from the 'great mass' the way *they* withdraw, we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (BT 119)

The-they constitutes the who of Da-sein's everyday mode of being, and being in the-they creates averageness. This averageness squashes exceptions, uniqueness, and new possibilities in what Heidegger calls "the leveling down of all possibilities of being" (BT 119). This leveling down of possibilities is what creates Da-sein's constancy (the constancy of personal identity), which has nothing to do with the constancy of a substance's objective presence (BT 120). The who of everyday Da-sein is constituted by the constancy given by the-they which "articulates the referential context of significance" (BT 121), and this picture of Da-sein always already being-in a world being-with-others rounds out a preliminary picture of the compound phenomenon of being-in-the-world. This picture of Da-sein's primordial unity with its equipment and with others, and the claimed source for Da-sein's personal constancy in the-they (which is an answer to philosophy's perennial question of what grounds personal identity) will become important for the question of historicism because Heidegger will build his reconceptualization of the central notions in the historicism discussion upon the foundational ontology that has been heretofore delineated.

II. The Ontological Reconceptualization of the Terms of Historicism

Armed with the revolutionary insights of the Da-sein analytic, Heidegger goes on to show how this analysis solves some of the most trenchant philosophical problems in the tradition. Among these are the problem of the external world, the problem of other minds, and the issue of historicism. What is common to all these problems is that they posit two radically distinct entities with no clear guide as to how to reconcile them to form a unified and coherent world. In the problem of the external world, the issue is how to show that a subject can transcend or "jump out" of his subjectivity in order to grasp the truly objective

world as it is in itself and not just as how consciousness subjectively represents it. In the same vein, the problem of other minds asks how an independent subject can come to know the mind or subjectivity of another person if subjectivity is internal and restricted to a first person's experience. The issue with these problems is that they rest on a faulty ontology of substance that undergirds the understanding of "subject" and "object" as independent entities. But the Da-sein analytic shows that Da-sein is a primordially unified phenomenon, always already in a world *and* always already with others, so fundamental ontological analysis dissolves these pseudo-problems. Similarly, Heidegger will argue that the quest for eternal truth in historicism rests on problematic assumptions about terms like universal validity and eternal truth that need ontological clarification, so addressing historicism will require further ontological investigation that will uncover some of Da-sein's most primordial existential structures.

As a continuation of his analysis of being-in-the-world, Heidegger goes on to explain how the validity of logic is actually a derivative and de-worlded mode of being-in-the-world, and how there is no further transcendent ground other than the primordial unity between Da-sein and its world. But in order to set this analysis up, Heidegger must first clarify the traditional understanding of validity. In the tradition, logical validity has held a privileged place in philosophical discourse since it appears to be a necessary presupposition for valid argumentation. Heidegger recognizes that logical validity is often held as a primal presupposition, but he thinks, "it owes this role only to its ontological lack of clarity" (*BT* 146). So how has the tradition characterized the way of being of validity? Heidegger lists three prominent characteristics of logical validity in the tradition:

- 1) It is "the '*form*' of the reality which belongs to the content of the judgment since it has an unchangeable existence as opposed to the changeable 'psychic' act of judgment" (*BT* 146). In short, this characteristic presents validity as the way of being of the ideal, but the tradition has failed to clarify what it means by "ideal."

2) Validity is also used to refer to the correctness of the meaning of a judgment in relation to the object that such judgment picks out. Validity used in this way “receives the significance of ‘*objective validity*’ and objectivity in general” (BT 146).

3) Finally, validity also denotes the quality that binds rational agents to assent to a valid judgment: “the meaning thus ‘valid’ *for* beings, and which is valid ‘timelessly’ in itself, is said to be ‘valid’ also in the sense of being valid *for* every person who judges rationally” (BT 146). Because of its timeless nature, this bindingness is imposed universally on *all* rational judges. Even potential judges not yet born seem anticipatorily bound by this rational duty since the bindingness is not restricted to any temporal horizon, which would imply that future horizons are also covered by this duty.

These then are the distinct senses of validity that have been used by the tradition, but they are highly problematic concepts because they lack ontological clarification and an existential grounding, which Heidegger proposes to give. The first sense of validity, i.e., that it is the unchangeable “form” of reality belonging to the content of the judgment, will be treated by Heidegger in his discussion of the origination of the judgment from circumspect interpretation. The second sense of validity, i.e., that it refers to a correct judgment/object correspondence and the third, i.e., that validity necessarily demands universal and timeless assent to what is true, will be treated in Heidegger’s discussion of truth as disclosedness.

Heidegger’s discussion of judgment, which he also refers to interchangeably as “statement” (BT 144), is set within a triad of activities: understanding, interpretation, and the thematization of statements. Heidegger’s goal is to show how judgment is a derivative product of interpretation, and interpretation is in turn a derivative product of understanding. Understanding is the most primordial of the triad since this activity is actualized through Da-sein’s bare being-in, i.e., its pragmatic absorption in the world that has always already been there; the there of the world disclosed by understanding is correlative to Da-sein as “the-there.” As Heidegger says, “understanding always concerns the whole of being-in-the-

world. In every understanding of world, existence is also understood, and vice versa” (BT 142).

Interpretation is a development of understanding where Da-sein takes care of things in its world with an explicit view of the in-order-to structure of the things at hand (the referential totality implicit in every entity) allowing these to become visible *as something* (BT 139). The *as-something* seeing is an interpretive seeing that picks out entities in their active relations to other things within a referential totality, e.g., a washing machine, a dishwasher etc., in contrast to a supposed “simple perception” that abstracts from these relations, e.g., a cubical object. Heidegger argues that interpretive seeing precedes thematic statements, e.g., the hammer is heavy, where the statement has a subject and predicate structure pointing out what is experienced. This claim is correlative to his earlier claim that Da-sein’s being-in mode of existing is prior to a substantial mode of being where Da-sein can be thematically analyzed as an objectively present entity. Just like objective presence is a derivative mode of being-in, so also is the thematic statement a derivative mode of interpretation.² Heidegger states, “what logic makes thematic with the categorical statement, for example, ‘the hammer is heavy,’ it has always already understood ‘logically’ before any analysis” (BT 147). According to Heidegger, the heaviness of the hammer is pre-predicatively perceived by interpretation as it becomes unhandy for a task. Though interpretation does not make any theoretical judgments, it can experience the hammer as *too* heavy for a given task and consequently seeks another, more appropriate hammer for the task. Heidegger states, “The primordial act of interpretation lies not in a theoretical sentence, but in circumspectly and heedfully putting away or changing the inappropriate tool ‘without wasting words’” (BT 147).

² Heidegger’s claim that judgment is a derivative and hence subsequent product of more primordial existential structures will have the consequential claim that truth is not primarily a property of judgments, as traditionally thought. Traditionally, truth was identified as a property adhering in a judgment that corresponds the content of the judgment with a mind-independent reality. But this view, identified by Daniel Dahlstrom as “the logical prejudice” will be the object of Heidegger’s attack throughout *Being and Time* and beyond. For a detailed historical overview of the development of the logical prejudice from Lotze to Heidegger, see Dahlstrom’s *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth*.

But when the shift is made to thematize interpretation's results, the "something *at hand with which* we have to do or perform something, turns into something 'about which' the statement that points it out is made" (BT 147). In the shift from the with-which to the about-which, a transformation is made such that Da-sein's pragmatic absorption of using the hammer within a referential totality is covered over by a new way of looking at the hammer in abstraction from its referential totality where the hammer is isolated from other entities and from Da-sein's own pragmatic orientation toward it (BT 148). This de-worlded state of the hammer is what allows predicates (or qualities) to first arise (BT 148). In this de-worlded state, the existential-hermeneutical as-structure of interpretation changes into an apophantical-as that levels down the possibilities of what is seen to the mere form of being objectively present (BT 148). The function of the apophantical-as is limited to "just letting what is objectively present be seen by way of determination" (BT 148).

By deriving judgment from understanding and interpretation, Heidegger believes to have shown that "the 'logic' of *logos* is rooted in the existential analytic of Da-sein" (BT 150). Now, the question is how this analysis has any bearing on clarifying the tradition's understanding of logical validity. Recall that the tradition's first sense of logical validity, as delineated by Heidegger, consisted of "the '*form*' of the reality which belongs to the content of the judgment since it has an unchangeable existence" (BT 146). The major breakthrough is that if logical validity in the sense of the unchanging form of reality (what Heidegger describes as objective presence) is really merely a way of covering over the real phenomena of Da-sein's being-in-the-world, then the mode of being of unchanging existence is a ruse. The unchangeableness of existence is not something that really inheres in the primordial reality of the phenomena; rather, this unchangeableness of form is something that is imposed onto an always-already pragmatically active and dynamic world by covering over the existential-hermeneutical as-structure of entities with the objectively present apophantic-as structure. This conclusion, if right, is a major breakthrough because it follows from this that the tradition's long-sought-for quest to reconcile historical existence to the unchangeableness of the "form of reality" was misguided by an ontologically unclarified assumption about what "form of reality" is.

In Heidegger's view, there is no reconciliation to effect between the eternality of the formal and the temporality of empirical content because the tradition's understanding of the unchanging formal content of reality is really a derivative and subsequent product and a covering over of the more primordial phenomenon of being-in-the-world. Specifically, the logical form or content of judgments is derived from the activities of understanding and interpretation that disclose the world and make it possible for something like a judgment with its abstracted about-which content to arise. As it will be shown later, the ultimate primordial phenomenon revealed by the Da-sein analytic is temporality temporalizing itself, which then means that the so-called unchangeableness of the "form of reality" is really a derivative, subsequent, de-worlded, and veiled mode of the being of temporality. Having clarified the tradition's first sense of validity, Heidegger will go on to deconstruct the tradition's two other senses of validity which are 2) the correspondence between judgment and reality and 3) the universal bindingness of truth.

According to the tradition, the concept of truth has its locus in the propositional statement because the essence of truth lies in the "agreement" of the statement/judgment with its object (*BT* 198). To this understanding of truth, Heidegger critically asks: If truth is understood as an agreement between the mental representation made in a judgment and an object out in the external world, then "with regard to what do *intellectus* and *res* agree" (*BT* 199)? The problem that arises in the correspondence theory of truth arose previously in the epistemological problem of the external world of how an ideal content agrees with a real object, and if a radical difference between the ideal and real is presupposed, then the problem seems intractable. But like his solution to the external-world problem, Heidegger also proposes to solve the problem of the correspondence theory of truth by appealing to a holism that denies an intermediate mental representation between the statement and the object. Just like there is no private self-sufficient subject that stands against an external world, so there is no private self-sufficient mental representation that stands against the object it represents. Heidegger states:

Representations are not compared, neither among themselves nor in relation to the real thing. What is to be demonstrated is not an agreement of knowing

with its object, still less something psychical with something physical, but neither is it an agreement between the 'contents of consciousness' among themselves. What is to be demonstrated is solely the being-discovered of the being itself, *that being* in the how of its being discovered (BT 201).

Representational statements in a judgment are not ideal entities distinct from real objects; representational statements are simply expressions of the being-discovered of the being itself, so "to say that a statement is *true* means that it discovers the beings in themselves" (BT 201).

Now, if being-discovered is the essence of a judgment, what or who is the discoverer that is actualizing the being-discovered of entities? Under Heidegger's analysis "Being true (truth) means to-be-discovering," (BT 201) and this "discovering is a way of being of being-in-the-world" (BT 203). The discoveredness of innerworldly beings is only made possible by discovering, and this discovery is constitutive of Da-sein's very being as it is the entity which worlds the world (BT 203). Heidegger explains, "the discoveredness of innerworldly beings is grounded in the disclosedness of the world. However, disclosedness is the basic character of Da-sein in accordance with which it *is* its there." Thus, "the disclosedness of Da-sein is the *most primordial* phenomenon of truth attained" and the discoveredness of innerworldly beings is only a secondary sense of truth (BT 203). What Heidegger thus attempts to accomplish is to redefine truth from being a property of correspondence inhering in a judgment to a primordial existential disclosure, which is none other than Da-sein as the disclosedness of the world. At the most primordial level, truth just is Da-sein's disclosing a world.

This analysis shows that the tradition's understanding of validity as the necessary correspondence between judgment and reality (second sense) is mistaken because there is no correspondence as such but rather an identity between entities (what the tradition understands as external reality) and their being-discovered (what the tradition understood as the ideal content in a judgment) as both these elements come together in Da-sein's disclosedness. Through this analysis, Heidegger shows how correspondence theories of

truth have failed to clarify the meaning of “truth,” “*intellectus*,” and “*res*.” Contrastingly, Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis not only clarifies these terms, but also brings them together into a unified and holistic theory of truth.

This identification of truth and Da-sein is going to have a very important implication for the idea of eternal truth (which is a crucial idea in the question of historicism), because if Da-sein is the truth, then it seems like eternal truth could only exist if there were an eternal Da-sein, and Heidegger will shortly argue for the impossibility of eternal truth given Dasein’s finitude. But before Da-sein’s finitude is addressed, Heidegger will explain why the tradition produced its sense of validity as a bindingness, or rational necessity, imposed on all rational agents (third sense). This demystification is also important because the defenders of eternal truth have argued against relativism and skepticism based on the rational necessity of truth and the bindingness of this necessity for all those who engage in *any* kind of argument, including skeptical arguments. If Heidegger is able to de-necessitate this rational necessity, or at least show how it is necessary in an alternative existential way, then another milestone will have been achieved in reformulating the problem of historicism, namely, historicism will have been shown to be a non-issue that arose from a problematic ontology (since history has no eternal truth to which it must be reconciled).

Because the validity of truth (in the tradition’s sense of correspondence) is ultimately a derivative product of Da-sein as the primordial truth, all claims to truth must presuppose the fact of truth. But in Heidegger’s analysis, this fact of truth is rethought as the fact of Da-sein (or to be more precise, the ex-sistence [the standing out] of Da-sein), and this is a necessary presupposition for all beings with the mode of being of Da-sein. According to the tradition, the third sense of validity was that quality which universally binds all rational agents to assent to truth. Truth is a necessary presupposition that we, as rational agents, must make. But with the analysis of primordial truth at hand, Heidegger is able to show how this phenomenon that the tradition understood as a necessary and transcendent presupposition “is rooted solely in the fact that Da-sein can discover and free beings in themselves. Only thus can this being in itself be binding for every possible statement, that is, for every possible way of pointing them out” (*BT* 209).

When the tradition claimed that, “we must presuppose truth,” the “we,” according to Heidegger, is none other than Da-sein, while the “must presuppose” is also derivative from Da-sein’s way of being. Since Da-sein, as the disclosedness of the there, just is primordial truth, it cannot but be itself in its being the-there: “‘We’ presupposes truth because, ‘we,’ existing in the kind of being of Da-sein, are ‘in the truth’” (BT 209). Da-sein is its there in every claim it makes and in every activity it does; there is never a there (an intelligibly disclosed world) wherein the-there (Da-sein) is not there. Truth claims are only made possible in light of a disclosed world, but the disclosed world just is Da-sein as the primordial truth of the there, so all truth claims “presuppose” or are made possible on the necessary condition of Da-sein, the disclosedness of the world, the primordial truth. For Da-sein to be in the truth is to disclose a world, and the disclosure of world means to discover or un-conceal the intelligibility of beings, i.e., to free beings from concealedness. Thus there is a sense in which the tradition’s posit of a presupposed necessity to truth is correct, but this necessity does not point to any transcendent reality outside of Da-sein’s disclosedness. The necessity of truth is the necessity of Da-sein’s disclosedness for there to be any unconcealment of anything, but this necessity is strictly an immanent one as Heidegger argues, “We do not presuppose it [truth] as something ‘outside’ and ‘above’ us to which we are related along with other ‘values’ too” (BT 209).

Through this analysis, Heidegger shows that the traditions’ necessary presupposition of truth that binds all rational agents (validity in the third sense) is actually derivative on the more primordial presupposition of Da-sein. The phrase, “the presupposition of Da-sein” must be understood as an objective genitive, and not subjective genitive, because “We do not presuppose truth, but *truth* makes it ontologically possible that we can *be* in such a way that we ‘presuppose’ something. Truth first *makes possible* something like presupposition” (BT 209). Humans are never in a condition in which they can decide upon their way of being as the clearing as Heidegger rhetorically asks: “Has Da-sein as itself ever freely decided and will it ever be able to decide whether it wants to come into ‘Da-sein’ or not” (BT 210)? Like the tradition’s first two senses of validity (unchangeability of form and correspondence), the third sense of validity is also guilty of an unexamined ontology of objective presence.

Heidegger's reinterpretation of the tradition's concept of validity and truth are monumental because if his novel ontological analysis of these notions is correct, then the problem of historicism, like the perennial problems of external reality and other minds, is due to a faulty ontology. If this is the case, then all that needs to be done, which is what Heidegger claims to have done, is to clarify our notions of truth and validity, and the problem of historicism is dissolved because there is no higher ideal of knowledge to which historical Da-sein is to be reconciled as there is no truth but Da-sein's own disclosedness. If historicism showed that knowledge is historically situated, Heidegger's ontology doubles down on this observation by showing that "true knowledge" is not just situated but actually is, as Da-sein, the situation. True knowledge is a derivative product of the more primordial disclosing phenomenon of Da-sein that exists as a holistic unity with its environment.

Heidegger's ontology accepts finitude and change, and specifically temporal change, as primitives of reality, but I will argue that this "solution" to historicism is untenable by offering three major lines of criticism. First, I will critique Heidegger's notion of truth as primordial disclosedness in line with Ernst Tugendhat's well-known objection that this conception of truth dissolves any normative ground for distinguishing true claims from false ones, so mere disclosedness cannot function as a theory of truth. Secondly, I will argue that Heidegger's reduction of truth to Da-sein's disclosedness results in a subjective/Da-sein idealism that is at odds with Heidegger's realist aspirations and his general aspirations to de-center the metaphysical subject away from the privileged place it has held in the philosophical tradition. Finally, I will also critique Heidegger's view that human finitude entails the non-existence of eternal truths. To do this, I will analyze Heidegger's derivation of finite primordial temporality as the most primordial ground for Da-sein's existence and then examine what consequences this finitude has for our capacity to attain truth. I will argue that the finitude that Heidegger derives as Da-sein's most essential quality does not entail the kind of determinate limitations needed to circumscribe Da-sein's possibilities to a closed horizon.

III. Critique of Heidegger

Tugendhat's Critique of Truth as Primordial Disclosedness

In "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," Ernst Tugendhat argues that Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosedness loses the specific sense of truth because it lacks the property of bivalence, or the possibility of meaningfully distinguishing true propositions from false ones, which is an essential property that any concept of truth must have. Tugendhat understands "truth" through Husserl's notion of the difference between a preliminary givenness or intention and the givenness of and by what is given itself, i.e., the actual matter.³ When one's preliminary intention of the matter is fulfilled in the actual matter as it is in itself, then the result is a true judgment (*HIT* 90-91). When they do not, a false judgment results. Assertions claimed as true must be able to be put to the test as the very need for a concept of truth is a result of the fact that one's intended or immediate judgment, i.e., the preliminary givenness, is not always fulfilled by the actual matter that is intended. It is in light of these two real possibilities, of empty intentions (false judgments) and fulfilled intentions (true judgments), that a concept of truth, as denoting the state of affairs in which an intended judgment is fulfilled in the actual givenness of the subject matter, becomes meaningful. For these reasons, Tugendhat argues, the specific sense of truth must include within itself the possibility to meaningfully distinguish between true from false judgments.

Tugendhat's problem with Heidegger's understanding of truth as disclosedness or uncovering is that mere uncovering cannot discriminate between true and false judgments. According to Tugendhat, Heidegger uses "uncovering" in an ambiguous manner (*HIT* 89). On the one hand, uncovering is used in the sense of *apophansis* or pointing out entities. On the other hand, uncovering is also used in the sense of *aletheia* to refer to true propositions, and its opposite notion, covering-over, is used to refer to false propositions (*HIT* 89). But these two senses are never differentiated in Heidegger's concept of truth as disclosedness, with the result that false assertions, insofar as they also point to entities, are also capable of

³ Ernst Tugendhat, "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, trans. Christopher Macann, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 86. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *HIT*.

disclosing the world. But this consequence, Tugendhat argues, dissolves the specific sense of truth because “if one limits oneself to the two concepts of unconcealment and concealment, there remains absolutely no possibility of determining the specific sense of falsehood, and therefore also of truth” (*HIT* 89). In other words, Heidegger’s concept of truth as disclosedness allows for false assertions to also be considered as true, insofar as false assertions are also capable of pointing to entities. But if this is the case, then Heidegger’s concept of truth is incoherent and meaningless because a minimal function of any concept of truth should be the ability to distinguish true propositions from false ones.

Tugendhat’s critique is not with the idea of disclosedness as such, but rather with the identification of truth with disclosedness. For the mere disclosing of an entity says nothing about whether the entity is being uncovered *as it is in itself* or whether the initial disclosure of the entity turns out to be something else. For example, one can take a person from far away to be one’s wife, only to find out upon a closer look, that all along it had been a stranger that merely looked like one’s spouse. In this case, a preliminary disclosure occurred, a judgment was made, but the truthfulness of said judgment never materialized. But Heidegger’s notion of truth as disclosedness is so general that there are no grounds to discriminate between false and true judgments in the specific sense since the stranger that one takes to be one’s wife is also an instance of disclosure. For this reason, Tugendhat rejects identifying disclosedness with truth because the latter does not discriminate between entities in themselves and entities as they initially may appear. Although disclosure is a necessary condition for formulating true judgments, it is not a sufficient condition because it lacks a counter-principle, i.e., the possibility of error, since disclosure makes both veridical and erroneous judgments possible. And without the possibility of error, disclosure fails as a sufficiently specific concept for truth.

Tugendhat’s objection raises the problem that without a specific sense of truth, one loses the normative dimension of truth that makes truth claims meaningful. As Christian Skirke explains, “A true assertion about a given subject matter has critical force if false claims about the same subject matter can be contested as unjustified or infelicitous by making the assertion. This is not possible if the contradictory of the true assertion also can be

maintained, along with the true assertion.”⁴ For example, when Heidegger asserts as true the fact that Da-sein is mortal (call this truth claim M), he implicitly excludes by this truth claim the contradictory claim that Da-sein is immortal $\sim(\sim M)$. Heidegger’s mortality claim excludes immortality from Da-sein because truth claims are meaningful insofar as they exclude their respective contradictory claims. If Heidegger were to say that Da-sein is both mortal and immortal in the same way, at the same time, in exactly the same way, his claims would contradict each other and be void of meaning. Yet, this is precisely what Heidegger’s understanding of truth as disclosedness threatens to do. Heidegger’s claim that truth is disclosedness is such a general criterion for truth that it can lead to contradictory claims about the same subject matter since both true and false propositions can point out entities and as such, they both pass the test of truth as disclosedness, thereby making both true and false propositions true in Heidegger’s sense.

The theory of truth as disclosedness has fatal consequences for Heidegger’s own project since throughout *Being and Time*, Heidegger is making a series of substantial truth claims that exclude their respective contradictory claims. But truth as disclosedness does away with this exclusion since it states that so long as propositions point out entities somehow, they are both true. Heidegger himself says something to this effect when he states that, “The full existential and ontological meaning of the statement ‘Da-sein is in the truth’ also says equiprimordially that ‘Da-sein is in untruth’” (*BT* 204). As Christian Skirke explains, what Heidegger *wishes* to say by this statement is not that Da-sein exists in contradiction (since Heidegger is not assuming the specific sense of truth that makes contradiction possible but is rather identifying truth with the general criterion of disclosedness), but rather that the existential possibilities that bring Da-sein closer to authentic Being are equally realized in it as those existential possibilities that distract Da-sein from Being (*TUG* 834). The problem is that without the specific sense of truth, Heidegger has no normative basis to say that some existential possibilities are closer to Being, i.e., are anymore valid, than others since being in the truth and being in untruth are both equally genuine manifestations of Da-sein existence (*TUG* 835). Without the specific sense of truth, Da-

⁴ Christian Skirke, “Tugendhat’s Idea of Truth,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 24:4 (2016): 834, doi: 10.1111/ejop.12136. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *TUG*.

sein's resolute existence in its anticipation of death is just as valid and as authentic a mode of being as a life of uncritical and subservient immersion in the-they. Without the specific sense of truth, Da-sein's existence as a finite temporal being constituted by care is just as valid as the tradition's posit of an eternal soul since both of these are manifestations of Da-sein's being in the truth and untruth. Without the specific sense of truth, all of Heidegger's insights are just as valid as their respectively contradictory claims since both manifest Da-sein's being in the truth and untruth. As Skirke recounts, "Disclosedness enables both, opposition to untruth and opposition to truth, in equal manner, and in this sense is indifferent to the opposition between truth and untruth" (*TUG* 835).

In defense of Heidegger, Daniel Dahlstrom argues that his theory of truth as disclosedness does exemplify some notion of bivalence. To start, Dahlstrom points out that at the propositional level, bivalence surely applies in Heidegger's account as the uncovering of entities presupposes that they can be covered over.⁵ Nevertheless, it is true, Dahlstrom says, that at the existential-primordial level of disclosedness, falsity does not quite apply since in both true and false judgments, the existential disclosedness of being-here is equally presupposed (*TRU* 401). Despite this concession, Dahlstrom insists that disclosedness can be meaningfully labeled "truth" because "it discloses itself and, indeed, as it is in itself" (*TRU* 402). After all, Heidegger's entire analysis in *Being and Time* is conducted in thematic propositions that presume to interpret disclosedness *as it is in itself*—finite, mortal, ahead of itself—and free of error and obfuscation (*TRU* 406). There are a number of ways to talk about disclosedness, some ways will obscure this event, but others will bring great clarity, and disclosedness itself will be the standard which judges the accuracy of any thematization. Hence, though Dahlstrom concedes that disclosedness makes possible both the covering and uncovering of entities (true and false propositions), he still thinks that Heidegger is entitled to bivalence, insofar as we can talk about disclosedness with varying degrees of accuracy, which in turn makes the *as it-is-in-itself/as-it-initially-appears* distinction (an existential equivalent of the propositional true/false distinction) still applicable to disclosedness.

⁵ Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 399. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *TRU*.

The problem with Dahlstrom's argument is that it confuses *discourse* about disclosedness, which operates at the propositional level and holds to bivalence as any coherent propositional discourse about anything will, and the *existential primordial event* of disclosedness, for which, as Dahlstrom himself concedes, propositional bivalence is inapplicable because it is that which makes propositionally bivalent judgments possible. Affirming the applicability of bivalence to *discourse* about disclosedness does nothing to defend Heidegger because Heidegger's claim is that the *existential event* of disclosedness is primordial truth, and not the discourse about it. For Heidegger, this point is crucial because his argument is that existential disclosedness is the condition of possibility for the discourse about the correctness of propositions as true in opposition to false propositions. Dahlstrom tries to smuggle some form of bivalence into disclosedness on the basis that Heidegger seeks to characterize disclosedness *as it is in itself* as opposed to some other obfuscating way, and this action is supposed to show how the as-it-is-in-itself/as-it-initially-appears distinction is still applicable to disclosedness. But if this defense is predicated upon the *discourse* about disclosedness, then the defense fails because Heidegger's claim is that primordial truth is the *existential event* of disclosedness, not the *propositional* discourse about disclosedness.

Nevertheless, Dahlstrom suggests that bivalence inheres not just at the propositional level of truth, but also at the primordial existential level because the two levels are intimately related. From the fact that Heidegger characterizes the event of disclosedness with determinate characteristics like being finite, mortal, and ahead of itself, Dahlstrom draws the natural conclusion that these determinate characteristics exclude their opposites (*TRU* 402). Then, after discussing the problems inherent in mediating between propositional assertions and existential phenomena, Dahlstrom concludes that, "The import of these reflections on the problem of thematization is patent: the equiprimordiality of existential truth (the self-disclosedness of timeliness as the sense of being) and propositional truth (the possible presence of what is asserted) must be upheld" (*TRU* 451). So in response to my objection, Dahlstrom counters that Heidegger holds bivalence not just at the level of discourse about disclosedness, but in some way also at the existential level of disclosedness since the propositional and existential are equiprimordial.

But this response also fails because Dahlstrom's affirmation of bivalence at the existential level either contradicts Heidegger's own argument in *Being and Time*, or is inconsistent with the transcendently grounding function that disclosedness is supposed to provide for propositional discourse. With respect to the first objection, I have tried to show, in my exposition of Heidegger's reconceptualization of the tradition's normative terms, that the reduction of terms like truth and validity to temporalized existential phenomena is central to Heidegger's task of undermining the tradition. In his concept of disclosedness, Heidegger thinks that he has reached a more primordial level than the traditional bivalent concepts of truth and falsity, and he says as much when he tells us that ontologically, to say that, "Da-sein is in the truth" also says equiprimordially that "Da-sein is in untruth" (BT 204). If Heidegger were supposing bivalence and the specific sense of truth in this statement, then Heidegger's ontological statement would attribute contradictory properties to Da-sein, which would be just as meaningful as saying that Da-sein is both mortal and immortal, finite and infinite, or ahead of itself and not ahead of itself. Clearly, Heidegger supposes himself to be saying something intelligible, so it is unlikely that he has the specific sense of truth in mind in this statement. More likely than not, Heidegger has his more general understanding of truth as disclosedness in mind and not the specific sense of truth, since disclosedness is indifferent to true and false propositions as both can point out entities equally well.

If one concedes this point, but argues that Heidegger's account can be revised by accepting bivalence at the existential level, then this innovation makes Heidegger's transcendental grounding for propositional truth through disclosedness redundant. As Skirke explains, "disclosedness should play the role of the enabling condition that explains why ordinary true judgments are opposed to ordinary false judgments" (TUG 841). However, if both the transcendental ground (disclosedness) and that which is being grounded (bivalent propositional discourse) presuppose the same logical concept (bivalence), then there is no explanatory relation between these two levels, so disclosedness cannot rightfully claim to be a condition of possibility for bivalence as bivalence would not be in need for such a condition since it already exists at the most primordial existential level.

Dahlstrom is a *very* charitable reader of Heidegger, and gives him the benefit of the doubt by arguing that Heidegger's *performance* of delineating the truth about disclosedness and authentic existence argues for his acceptance of bivalence, even if his stated claims do not (TRU 449). But this may be too charitable of a reading because the jettisoning of bivalence at the existential level is not a casual mistake Heidegger makes. Rather, the architectonic of *Being and Time* is designed to give the explanatory transcendental conditions of possibility for the tradition's concept of truth as correctness, which includes the property of bivalence. As such, it is critical for Heidegger, if he is explaining the rise of bivalence from primordial existential structures, not to presuppose bivalence at this primordial existential level. The fact that Heidegger fails to ground the specific sense of truth in primordial disclosedness is more indicative of the irreducibility of the specific sense of truth and the performative contradiction that awaits those who seek to reduce this logically primitive feature of rationality, than that Heidegger always accepted the specific sense of truth as primitive but expressed himself ambiguously on the matter.

Like Dahlstrom, Greg Shirley also defends Heidegger's account of truth as disclosedness, but unlike Dahlstrom, Shirley is faithful to the Heideggerian project of deriving bivalence from primordial ontological structures and not presupposing bivalence at the ontic and ontological levels, as Dahlstrom does. Shirley's argument consists of two claims: "(i) *not-being* is a mode of being and (ii) uncoveredness is fundamentally *bimodal*, where bimodality at the primordial level of understanding makes bivalence possible at the secondary level of discourse thought/language."⁶ Concerning the first claim, Shirley argues that for Heidegger, the nothing (*das Nichts*) does not just refer to the absence of an entity or for that matter pure non-being. Rather, *das Nichts* refers us to that quality in which Being is other than entities (HAL 84). Being is that in virtue of which entities are intelligible as entities, so Being, as a condition of possibility for entities, cannot itself be an entity, and *das Nichts* is that concept which refers us to this ontological difference between Being and beings (HAL 84). If *das Nichts* is a quality of Being, i.e., its otherness than entities, than it cannot be non-being, but must be a mode of Being (HAL 81). Being then is characterized by

⁶ Greg Shirley, *Heidegger and Logic: The Place of Lógos in Being and Time* (London, United Kingdom; New York, USA: Continuum, 2010), 80. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as HAL.

a negative mode, in which it expresses an otherness to entities, and presumably a positive mode, in which it disseminates a positive intelligibility to entities.⁷

As far as the second claim goes, Shirley explains that human beings can never conceive of *das Nichts* in itself because this would require us to think of the negation of entities as a whole, and our finitude limits us from thinking of either entities as a whole or the subsequent negation of entities as a whole that would be required to think of *das Nichts* (HAL 84-85). Consequently, we human beings think of *das Nichts* derivatively, “as alterity in the sense of differentiation *within* and *among* beings, as the ontological ground of individuation” (HAL 85). Though we can never conceptualize *das Nichts* in itself, *das Nichts* nevertheless functions as the ontological ground that allows us to think of a differentiated particular as having a determinate content that excludes contradictory content. As Shirley explains, “To be something is to be a *this* and *not* a *that*: for something to be it must be *what* it is *as* it is, and so must *not be* something else or in some other way” (HAL 85). Hence, Shirley’s account aims to show how the property of bivalence that exists at the level of propositional discourse is a product of a deeper and fundamentally differentiated ontological structure that undergirds the propositional realm (HAL 80). Using Heidegger’s reflections on *das Nichts*, Shirley provides an explanatory account of *how* bivalence arises from primordial ontological structures, which makes his account more faithful to Heidegger’s *modus operandi* than Dahlstrom’s.

As ingenious as Shirley’s defense is, its problem is that though Shirley’s account is supposed to show how bivalence is produced from deeper ontological structures, Shirley presupposes bivalence from the very ontological beginning of his account, so it cannot be taken to be a successful *derivation* of bivalence since bivalence is presupposed throughout the whole of his account. As an example of this claim, take Shirley’s description of what the nothing or *das Nichts* is: “*not-being* is not the *absence* of being but a *mode* of being” (HAL 81) and “as *other than* entities as such, *the nothing* characterizes *being as such*” (HAL 84). In

⁷ I qualify this sentence with presumably because though Shirley speaks about uncoveredness as having a bimodality, and he tells us that one mode of this bimodality is not-being, he does not clearly explain the second horn of this bimodality and what exactly that means.

order for us to understand what is meant by “the nothing,” we must have some concept that excludes contradictory claims. Consequently, Shirley describes *das Nichts* positively, in terms of what it is as a “mode of being,” and he also tells us what is to be excluded from this concept, that *das Nichts* is “other than entities.” In defining *das Nichts*, Shirley presupposes bivalence, not just in terms of his propositional description, but also in terms of what it is, at an ontological existential level. After all, it is *das Nichts* that is a mode of being, not the description of it, and it is *das Nichts* that is not an entity, and not the description of it. But these two properties of *das Nichts* presuppose bivalence, and if bivalence is presupposed at the ontological level, then Shirley’s claim—and for that matter Heidegger’s as well—to show how bivalence is *derived* from primordial ontological structures fails.

Shirley cannot appeal to the defense that it is our *discourse* about *das Nichts* that must employ bivalence, but not the ontological phenomenon itself, because without our bivalent discourse corresponding to a bivalent reality, that reality becomes unintelligible. If I speak about a “lion” but also add that this word of propositional discourse does not correspond to the determinate bivalent characteristics that we associate with lions (its typically having four legs and not ten, it being more like a large cat and not a mosquito, etc.) that in fact, this word is utterly and structurally discontinuous from the reality that we associate with its conventional signification, then I lose all intelligibility as to what I am talking about when I use the word “lion.” Therefore, Shirley, in his account of *das Nichts*, must, for the sake of saying anything intelligible, presuppose bivalence at the ontological level and not just merely at the propositional level of discourse. If he does not, then the link between language and world is broken, and this leads to the result that though we may know what our speech about *das Nichts* means, we would be utterly clueless as to what the ontological reality of *das Nichts* could be (for all we know, given a discontinuity between world and language, it could be a pebble).

Besides the aforementioned difficulties with reducing bivalence and the specific sense of truth to disclosedness, it is worth noting that despite the ingenious efforts of faithful Heideggerians to rescue Heidegger from Tugendhat’s challenge, Heidegger himself

admitted to being wrong two months after becoming aware Tugendhat's criticism in "Heidegger's Idea of Truth." In response, Heidegger conceded:

Insofar as truth is understood in the traditional 'natural' sense as the correspondence of knowledge with beings demonstrated in beings, but also insofar as truth is interpreted as the certainty of the knowledge of Being, *aletheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the opening may not be equated with truth. Rather, *aletheia*, unconcealment thought as opening, first grants the possibility of truth.⁸

Heideggerians acknowledge Heidegger's concession, but they still attempt to resurrect his view of truth. Despite these attempts, I do not think that Heidegger's view of truth is salvageable because it faces acute difficulties in producing a derivation for what appears to be a logically primitive concept that has to be presupposed insofar as the derivation itself presupposes truth claims that employ the specific sense of truth. Heidegger's failed reduction of the normativity of the specific sense of truth to existential structures means that a key term in the question of historicism, truth in the specific sense, still maintains its primitively normative feature. This means that the tradition's second sense of validity (in Heidegger's delineation of the tradition's three senses of validity) as "the correctness of the meaning of a judgment in relation to the object that such judgment picks out" (*BT* 146) remains unaffected by Heidegger's failed reduction.

Heidegger's failure to rebut the tradition's second sense of validity also has repercussions for his reduction of the third sense of validity, which he delineated as "the sense of being valid *for* every person who judges rationally" (*BT* 146). Recall Heidegger's claim that though the tradition was not wrong to affirm that all truth claims necessarily presuppose the fact of truth, the tradition never fully understood the ontological meaning of this statement and hence were misled to affirm the third

⁸ Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 69.

sense of validity as the necessary and universal recognition of truth as something that is logically primitive and inescapable for anybody making truth claims. In light of Heidegger's clarified ontology, what is necessarily presupposed in the making of truth claims is indeed truth, but truth is the disclosedness of Da-sein. Hence, what the tradition correctly affirms but misunderstands is that all truth claims (claims to discovery) presuppose truth (disclosedness), and this truth, at a primordial level is Da-sein, so in other words, the discovery of world presupposes the disclosedness of Da-sein. Hence, the rational and universal necessity that the tradition understands as the third sense of validity is really reducible to the fact that the discovery of entities presupposes disclosedness (Da-sein), but far from being rationally necessary or universal, this disclosedness is the contingent, historical, mortal, and finite existence of Da-sein.

But Tugendhat's critique also invalidates Heidegger's third reduction of validity because if the normativity of the specific sense of truth is not reducible to existential disclosedness, if this normativity is something that is logically primitive and not reducible to Da-sein's facticity, then Heidegger also fails to de-necessitate the rational and universal necessity of the specific sense of truth. If one rejects the universality of validity, one is effectively acknowledging that all of one's truth claims should be qualified with the proviso, "but that's just for me or my community." One can only *argue* for the rejection of universality at the cost of performatively contradicting one's own criticism. Therefore, the universality of the specific sense of truth is rationally necessary even for its fiercest critics, and as I have shown, all three Heideggerians, Heidegger, Dahlstrom, and Shirley, presuppose the logically primitive normative properties of the specific sense of truth—law of non-contradiction and universal recognition (insofar as all three purport to describe reality *as it is in itself*).

Finally, Heidegger's description of the tradition's first sense of validity told us that this constitutes the "form" of reality "which belongs to the content of the judgment since it has an unchangeable existence" (*BT* 146). For this sense of validity,

Heidegger attempted to undermine the claim of immutability by showing how judgments themselves are abstractions from the more concrete domains of understanding and interpretation that actually constitute the very changeable and historical domain of being-in-the-world. In other words, judgments can only have this putative immutable validity because they abstract from the concrete and mutable world from which they arise. But it seems to me that this line of argument misrepresents what the tradition claims is immutable. The content of a judgment can be either a static-like claim, like a mathematical equation, or it can be something deeply historical, like Heidegger's claims that Da-sein is finite, mortal, and the being that is constituted by care. What the tradition claims is that if these claims are true, then their validity, or their obtaining as true, does not change. But this constancy of validity is fully compatible with the content of propositional discourse being dynamic and existentially rich, as the judgments and propositional discourse in *Being and Time* show. Presumably, Heidegger thinks that when he claims that the being-here of Da-sein is mortal and finite, these structural claims about the mode of our being-in-the-world do not just hold true until Tuesday. Presumably, these claims, if true, do not change in their validity. Otherwise, if validity itself changes, then all of *Being and Time's* claims are put into question. Therefore, Heidegger's attempted derivation of judgments as abstractions from our historical being-in-the-world cannot, at the cost of performative contradiction, undermine the constancy of claims that are true.

The Problem of Subjective/Da-sein Idealism

Another problem with Heidegger's identification of truth with the disclosedness of Da-sein is that this view leads to a subjective/Da-sein idealism, or the view that Da-sein is all there is. This is a problem because Heidegger has realist aspirations as evidenced by his claim that "'There is' [*es gibt*] being-not beings-only insofar as truth is. And truth is only because and as long as Da-sein is" [italics added] (*BT* 211). Heidegger distinguishes between Being, which is dependent on Da-sein, and beings or entities, which are not, and this distinction is supposed to ground Heidegger's realism. However, I will argue that Heidegger is not allowed this distinction given the dependency that he claims Being has on Da-sein. Idealism

is problematic for Heidegger because not only does it contradict his realist aspirations, but also because it contradicts *Being and Time's* aim to decenter modernity's fixation with the subject. Toward the end of analyzing these issues, I will also review William Blattner's work on what he calls the unanswerable question in *BT 196*: do entities depend on Da-sein? I will use some of the conceptual tools he develops in *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*⁹ to reinforce my claim that Heidegger cannot have any kind of meaningful realism.

Because Being depends on truth, it is important to review the relationship of co-existence between Da-sein and truth. Our first point of departure will be *BT 208*:

'There is' ['gibt es'] truth only insofar as Dasein is and as long as it is. Beings are discovered only when Dasein is, and only as long as Dasein is are they disclosed. Newton's laws, the law of contradiction, and any truth whatsoever, are true only as long as Dasein is. Before there was any Dasein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is no more. For in such a case truth as disclosedness, discovering, and discoveredness cannot be... before Newton his laws were neither true nor false. [italics are Heidegger's] (BT 208)

If truth and falsity are co-extensive with Da-sein, did entities exist prior to Da-sein? Heidegger thinks so:

The fact that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false cannot mean that the beings which they point out in a discovering way did not previously exist... With the discoveredness of beings, they show themselves precisely as the beings that previously were. To discover in this way is the kind of being of "truth." (*BT 208*)

⁹ William D. Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *HTEMP*.

Though truth is limited to Da-sein's existence, that which truth reveals, i.e., the entities described by Newton's laws, did exist prior to Da-sein. But how can this be, given Heidegger's claim that Being depends on truth?

Heidegger distinguishes between 1) Being, by which I take him to mean intelligibility,¹⁰ and it is Being as intelligibility that is disclosed in truth, and 2) beings, or physical entities, which somehow are not disclosed in this truth. Recall our first quote: "'There is' [*es gibt*] *being*—not *beings*—only insofar as truth is. And truth *is* only because and as long as Da-sein is. Being and truth 'are' equiprimordially [*italics are mine*]" (BT 211). The likely solution then is that the intelligibility of beings, i.e., how they be, is co-extensive with Da-sein, but their sheer thatness or the sheer fact that they exist, is independent of Da-sein's existence. But this solution is problematic because if one eliminates *all* intelligibility from the universe (which is the hypothetical imagined in a Da-sein-free universe), one also eliminates the intelligible basis upon which one can claim the mere existence of an entity, its sheer thatness. Following Heidegger's mode of questioning, what would be the sense and mode of the "is" ascribed to pre-Dasein entities in a universe void of all intelligibility? By definition, there simply can be *no* way of being for this "is" because ascribing existence to pre-Dasein entities is to ascribe to them some form of intelligibility, however minimal. But this contradicts the hypothetical scenario of a universe void of all intelligibility.

Heidegger is fully aware of this predicament, so he again distinguishes between the current Da-sein-illuminated universe we live in that includes the ability to posit pre-Da-sein entities within this universe, and a Da-sein-free universe where, strictly speaking, nothing can be said or negated about anything, precisely because the intelligibility required for

¹⁰ By taking "Being" to mean intelligibility, I am siding with Dreyfus, Richardson, and Frede. By intelligibility, I do not simply mean that which is strictly speaking pertaining to a subject's understanding of a subject matter as one cannot really cast Heidegger's notion of being into either subjective or objective mode since his being-in-the-world ontology is supposed to precede and in fact make possible the subject-object distinction. Instead, I am using the term "intelligibility" in its more ambiguous sense in the way that a biologist may remark that DNA appears like a language that showcases intelligence and hence is intelligible *and* in the way that we may remark that something that was not understandable to us is now, with a new flash of insight, clear to our understanding and intelligible *to us*. It is precisely this kind of subject-object ambiguity that I find fitting to describe Heidegger's compound ontology. This point will become very significant in my review of Blattner's commentary on the "*then, now*" passage in BT 196.

these judgments is missing. Just like Heidegger distinguished between Being (as intelligibility) and beings (merely existing entities), he also distinguishes between reality, which is dependent on Da-sein, and the real, which is not (BT 196). Concerning these last two categories, Heidegger says, “The fact that reality is ontologically grounded in the being of Da-sein cannot mean that something real can only be what it is in itself when and as long as Da-sein exists” (BT 196). Somehow, “something real” or entities can be what they “are” apart from Da-sein, but without Da-sein, these entities are void of all intelligibility and as such cannot be known or spoken of in any ordinary sense, which is why Heidegger will always use quotations when referring to these entities in the context of a Da-sein-free world. The following passage illustrates this point:

If Da-sein does not exist, then there ‘is’ no ‘independence’ either, nor ‘is’ there an ‘in itself.’ Such matters are then neither comprehensible nor incomprehensible. Innerworldly beings, too, can neither be discovered, nor can they lie in concealment. *Then* [the pre-Da-sein universe] it can neither be said that beings are, nor that they are not. *Now* [the Da-sein illuminated universe], as long as there is an understanding of being and thus an understanding of objective presence, we can say that *then* beings will still continue to be (BT 196).

This is a crucial passage that I will come back to in my discussion of Blattner’s work, but for now, it is important to note how Heidegger is trying maintain a certain Da-sein-independent existence to entities *now* (in a world constituted by Da-sein’s intelligibility), while also denying that “independence” can have any meaning in a Da-sein-free universe *then*. I take Heidegger to be mirroring Kant here in affirming an intelligible world whose intelligibility is made possible by the human being, but whose sheer *thatness*, or its thing-in-itselfness is independent of the human being. Heidegger is attempting to be a realist because he thinks that the disclosed world *now* shows us that entities are not dependent on Da-sein.

The problem is that the way the universe is disclosed to us *now*, with all the physical entities' way of being in the mode of objective presence, is simply a derivative and contingent feature of Da-sein's finite and contingent being-in-the-world. Even if in the *now* we observe a physical entity appearing under the guise of Da-sein's disclosure as objectively present and as capable of preceding Da-sein's existence, we know that objective presence is not primordially real because Heidegger has shown us how objective presence is a mere derivative product from more primordial existential structures that are themselves temporally—not objectively—grounded. Hence, we cannot really trust the objective presence disclosed in the *now* standpoint since this feature is a derivative product of a contingent Da-sein whose primordial existence is constituted by a fleeting temporality that is opposed to the mode of being of objective presence.

We also cannot trust securing objective presence from the *then* standpoint since thinking of physical entities existing, without any intelligibility, is impossible: "*Then* [the Da-sein-free universe] it can neither be said that beings are, nor that they are not" (BT 196). If Da-sein exhausts intelligibility, then a world existing independently of Da-sein is by definition unthinkable, and if a Da-sein-independent world is unthinkable, then one cannot *think* that Dasein-independent entities can exist at the cost of a performative contradiction. If Da-sein-independent entities are radically unthinkable, then one has no rational justification or basis for belief that entities existed prior to Da-sein. The problem then is that neither the *now* or *then* standpoint can secure objective presence in any meaningful sense, so there are no grounds, no phenomena whatsoever to support Heidegger's minimal realism and conversely, his rejection of the claim that, "something real can only be what it is in itself when and as long as Da-sein exists" (BT 196). On the contrary, the logic of his ontology leads precisely to this claim.

In his commentary on the "*Then... Now*" passage, William Blattner also concludes that asking whether entities depend on Da-sein from the *then* standpoint is contradictory, but he assigns blame to the inappropriateness of the question whereas I assign blame to Heidegger's ontology. The first point that must be clarified in Blattner's discussion is his understanding of Heidegger's concept of Being. Blattner takes issue with understanding

Being as intelligibility, and instead opts to understand Being as the ontological framework or “a configuration of items in virtue of which an entity is an entity and one of the sort it is” (*HTEMP* 4). The problem that Blattner has with Being as intelligibility is that this makes Being a relational property of Da-sein, and if this is all that Being means, then it would be true, but trivially true, that entities have no being apart from Da-sein. For “if the being of an entity is that entity’s intelligibility to Dasein, and if Dasein does not exist, then the entity has no being, because it would not be, in that case, intelligible to Dasein” (*HTEMP* 242). In this case, Heidegger’s argument would be deflationary and uninteresting (*HTEMP* 242).

But there need not be a point of contention between Blattner and myself on this matter because by intelligibility, I understand not just a relational property of Da-sein but also the way the world discloses itself. Heidegger’s being-in-the-world ontology does not allow one to make intelligibility either a subjective property or objective property, so my use of “intelligibility” to describe Being trades on the ambiguity of this concept. As I use it, intelligibility refers to both the intelligibility in our acts of understanding *and* to the intelligibility of the subject matters that our acts of understanding illuminate, so I think that my latter clause approximates Blattner’s own objective emphasis of Being as an ontological framework. Therefore, in the way that I understand “Being,” Heidegger’s realist question translates to: can we affirm entities existing independently of the subject-object intelligibility of being-in-the-world. His answer is, yes from the *now* standpoint, but impossible to say from the *then* standpoint as the *then* standpoint makes the question itself meaningless. My response is that neither standpoint can ground a meaningful realism. In this exchange, neither Heidegger’s response nor my own is rendered trivial or uninteresting by my understanding of Being,¹¹ which I think approximates Blattner’s own definition.

¹¹ I also think that I am on firm grounds in understanding Being as intelligibility because Heidegger’s original question that prompts the investigations of *Being and Time* is the question of the *meaning* of Being. In *BT* 298, Heidegger tells us that, “meaning is that in which the intelligibility of something keeps itself, without coming into view explicitly and thematically.” This definition of meaning aligns with Heidegger’s complaint that we have lost sight not just of Being, but even the question of the meaning of Being. Therefore, in asking the question of the meaning of Being, we are asking for the intelligibility in which entities keep themselves.

Having cleared these preliminary matters, Blattner gets into the heart of the “*Then... Now*” passage and speaks of two standpoints, the empirical and the transcendental points of view. According to Blattner, Heidegger’s reference to the *now* time refers to our common ordinary empirical perspective in which we can speak of entities pre-existing Da-sein because of our understanding of objective presence. When we discover entities, under the empirical standpoint, we discover some of them, say the sun, moon, or the earth, as the kind of entities that existed before us. However, the *then* perspective introduces a second standpoint, the transcendental one, in which the question of whether entities depend on Da-sein, makes presuppositions that make the question itself senseless, and it is for this reason that Blattner labels this the unanswerable question. Questions are made in terms of frameworks, and the framework in which it is transcendently asked whether entities exist apart from Da-sein presumes a framework in which Da-sein is thought away. But “to think away Dasein, however, is to think away time, which entails thinking away being, and that is in turn the framework on which depends the truth value of answers to the question Do entities then depend on Dasein”(HTEMP 246)? Transcendentally asking whether entities exist apart from Da-sein is akin to asking who the president of England is—both questions presuppose incoherent starting points (HTEMP 243).

As I have tried to show through my own exegesis of the “*Then...Now*” passage, I also think that no answer can be given to the transcendental question of whether entities exist apart from Da-sein, but this is a problem with Heidegger’s ontology and not the question itself. In Blattner’s example of asking who the President of England is, the question is illegitimate because the reality to which the question is directed is one where England has no president. In Heidegger’s case, asking whether entities exist apart from Da-sein is only an illegitimate question given Heidegger’s claim that Being, and in turn intelligibility, and in turn truth depend on Da-sein. If Being and truth were not inseparable from Da-sein, then the non-existence of Da-sein would not negate the intelligible structure of a Da-sein-independent reality, so then the question of whether entities depend on Da-sein would not only be sensible, but also answerable. The unanswerable question only arises in an ontology where the human being is a necessary condition for the intelligible structure of the world. While I agree with Blattner that the question as Heidegger sets it up is

incoherent, this incoherency is a result of attributing Being's exhaustive dependency on Da-sein, which leads to a subjective/Da-sein idealist position.

Idealism is a problem for Heidegger because he has some realist aspirations, and how Heidegger fails to be a realist can be further clarified using Blattner's empirical/transcendental distinction. Recall that though Heidegger claims that reality is grounded in the being of Da-sein he adds that this "cannot mean that something real can only be what it is in itself when and as long as Da-sein exists" (BT 196). Using Blattner's distinction, we may charitably interpret Heidegger to be speaking from the empirical standpoint. But as I have pointed out, the empirical standpoint is merely the contingent and finite standpoint that gives us nothing but derivative appearances of a mortal being that itself is fleeting and has no claim to eternal truth (BT 208), so Heidegger cannot ground the objectivity of the objective presence of entities from this standpoint. We also know that this standpoint does not show us what is primordially true by the very fact that there is a further standpoint, the transcendental one, which not only transcends it, but also makes the empirical standpoint possible. But from this transcendental standpoint, nothing can be said about mind-independent entities as well since any such statement is strictly meaningless. And if the objective presence of the empirical standpoint is nothing but an abstraction that covers over the primordial existential disclosure of the transcendental standpoint, then there is no significant sense (other than a misleading appearance) in which entities exist apart from Da-sein.

The empirical/transcendental distinction can also be used to analyze Heidegger's statement that, "'There is' [*es gibt*] being-not beings-only insofar as truth is. And truth is only because and as long as Da-sein is," (BT 211). What standpoint is this spoken from? It cannot be spoken from the empirical standpoint since Heidegger is speaking about the chain of dependency from Being to truth to Da-sein, which is a transcendental chain. But the transcendental viewpoint encompasses *everything* that is intelligible, so if "beings" are to mean anything, they must also depend on truth, which in turn depends on Da-sein. Since Da-sein is the transcendental condition of all intelligibility, entities could only be excluded from being dependent on Da-sein at the cost of having the word "entities" signify nothing

and hence refer to nothing. Of course, Heidegger does want to mean something by “entities,” namely mind-independent realities that lack intelligibility, perhaps akin to Kant’s noumenal realm. But like Fichte pointed out with Kant’s noumenal realm, the affirmation of a thing-in-itself with the causal power of generating a phenomenal world in an epistemology that locates all intelligibility, including causal conceptualization, as internal to the transcendental subject is incoherent. Likewise, Heidegger’s relocation of all intelligibility to Da-sein disqualifies the word “entities” from having any meaning or reference apart from its transcendental dependency on Da-sein. Thus, Heidegger’s realist intentions fail, and he ends up being a subjective/Da-sein idealist because he cannot establish any meaningful sense in which beings are not dependent for their meaning or reference on Da-sein.

Da-sein’s Finitude and Eternal Truth

Heidegger tries to be a realist about beings but an idealist about Being, and I do not think that he succeeds in the former endeavor. But insofar as he thinks of Being and truth as dependent on Da-sein, he argues that the tradition’s understanding of truth as eternal, transcendent, and universally valid was profoundly mistaken. If truth just is the disclosedness of Da-sein, then truth could only be eternal if it could somehow be proven that Da-sein is eternal. Heidegger says, “As long as this proof is lacking, the statement [that there are eternal truths] remains a fantastical assertion which does not gain in legitimacy by being generally ‘believed’ by the philosophers” (BT 208). Truth is not “outside of Da-sein” but is rather radically immanent to Da-sein as it is its way of being: “We do not presuppose it as something ‘outside’ and ‘above’ us to which we are related along with other ‘values’ too” (BT 209).

Furthermore, the tradition’s posit of a universal epistemological formal subject as the *a priori* of all truth claims, which the tradition was led to by its faulty understanding of validity, is also spurious. Heidegger says:

is it not a *fantastically idealized* subject? Is not precisely the *a priori* character of the merely ‘factual’ subject, of Da-sein, missed with the concept of such a

subject? ...The ideas of a 'pure ego' and a 'consciousness in general' are so far from including the *a priori* character of 'real' subjectivity that they pass over the ontological character of facticity of Da-sein and its constitution of being, or do not see it at all. [Italics are Heidegger's] (BT 210)

So long as the tradition clings to its idealized *a priori*, it fails to see the real concrete and finite *a priori* of Da-sein which the tradition avoids because of its adherence to Christian theology: "The contention that there are 'eternal truths,' as well as the confusion of the phenomenally based 'ideality' of Da-sein with an idealized absolute subject, belong to the remnants of Christian theology within the philosophical problematic that have not yet been radically eliminated" (BT 211). Heidegger's strong repudiation of the tradition and its transcendent goals showcases his immanent leanings and his disdain with universal values.

Instead of the universal subject, Heidegger maintains the groundlessness of finite Da-sein void of any universal validity or eternal truth. The only truth about Da-sein is that it itself is truth, but its truth is a contingent, finite, and mortal one. As a groundless being, Da-sein is always seeking a ground in the-they or the social contexts in which it finds itself, and in its inauthentic way of being, Da-sein takes these contingent contexts as absolutes upon which it organizes its life. These absolutes can be religious worldviews, political ideologies, or even metaphysical systems, but in the final analysis, they are all cover-ups for Da-sein's groundlessness. Dasein's existence is always already in a state of dying; its life is a finite whole, with a beginning and an end, and through this whole, it lives a vulnerable existence in which it can cease to be at any point. This is its only truth. Its lack of eternal or universal Being and the fact that it is in a continual state of dying is its only authentic way of being. All aspiration for the universal and eternal is simply a cover up to avoid facing death. The issue that historicism posed, of how to attain eternal truth within a historical existence, is just another example of Da-sein's incessant desire to cover up its own mortality, finitude, and contingency.

But to complete the Da-sein analytic, Heidegger must ground all these claims about Da-sein's temporal finitude, dying as its state of being, and its involvement in a perpetual

cover-up in fundamental ontological analysis. Otherwise, these claims fare no better than the tradition's dogmatism about validity. Hence, what follows is an exposition of Heidegger's ontological grounding of these claims, followed by a critique of his conclusions. As part of my analysis, I will consider Carl Page's critique of the conclusions Heidegger makes from Da-sein's finitude, namely that Da-sein's finite existence localizes all of its acts to a closed temporal horizon. Page is right in questioning this connection, but his argument is somewhat underdeveloped, so I will show how it can be made stronger. My goal in this section is to conclude the exposition of the Da-sein analytic while simultaneously critiquing Heidegger's reformulation of historicism by refuting his claim that Da-sein's finitude entails the impossibility of achieving a truth that transcends the closed horizon of its finite life.

The Ontological Ground for Da-sein's Finitude

Da-sein cannot obtain eternal truth because it is finite, and its finitude is grounded in its ownmost possibility of death. Death is Da-sein's ownmost possibility in virtue of its unique and inalienable character (*BT* 243). No one can die for me but me. Death is a potentiality-of-being that Da-sein must immanently take solely from itself, so it lays a unique claim and thereby individualizes a particular Da-sein as a unique and nonrelational someone (*BT* 243). Death constitutes Da-sein's most extreme possibility, for it is the possibility of absolute impossibility (*BT* 232). When Da-sein becomes free for its own death, when it stops evading it with inauthentic narratives about itself, it becomes free to authentically understand all of its other possibilities in light of the horizon of mortality (*BT* 243-44). Accepting one's death has the revelatory effect of revealing all of one's possibilities as "determined by the *end*, and so understood as *finite*..." (*BT* 244). Death circumscribes Da-sein's whole existence as a *finite* whole. But in what way does death reveal one's possibilities as finite and *determine* them as such? Why should an event in the future have a determining effect on one's present and past?

In summary, the answer to be developed in the coming paragraphs is that though human life is commonly understood as a sequential phenomenon, it is, at the existential level, a unified phenomenon that will first be clarified as the structural whole called care, and then care itself will be grounded in an even more primordial whole called primordial

temporality. Heidegger will argue for a holism of Da-sein's life in which death is not an event that happens to Da-sein, but the state of being in which Da-sein exists, as a finite temporalized site of disclosedness. Heidegger argues that at the most primordial level, Da-sein's existence is constituted by finite primordial temporality. But before getting to this conclusion, we must first look at how Da-sein is characterized by care, then in turn how care is grounded by primordial temporality, and then how primordial temporality is permeated by the finitude of death.

In the section on understanding and interpretation, Da-sein found itself in an interpreted world of social practices within which it absorbedly carried out its pragmatic tasks of handling equipment. The interconnectedness of equipment revealed by interpretation showed that there is an in-order-to structure inherent in equipment that comprises a referential totality. In its handling of equipment, Da-sein is absorbed in this in-order-to structure for a for-the-sake-of-which, which comprises Da-sein's pragmatic goals in its day-to-day tasks. Through these tasks, Da-sein reveals itself as "the constitution of being of understanding as self-projective being toward its ownmost potentiality-for-being" (BT 179).

That is to say, through an analysis of Da-sein's everyday activities, Da-sein's being is revealed to be a potentiality-for-being. Da-sein's being is not static; it is a progressive actualization of itself, of its ownmost potentiality-for-being. What is revealed in this way of being is that "Da-sein is always already *ahead* of itself... is always already 'beyond itself'" (BT 179). This is the futural element of care. But *being-ahead-of-itself* always takes place *in-already-being-in-a-world* [the past element] as is shown by the fact that Da-sein projects its possibilities from within the always-already referential totality in which it carries out its practical projects. In this way, the futural element of care is holistically integrated with and even determined by the past element: "Existentiality [*being-ahead-of-itself*] is essentially determined by facticity [*already-being-in-the-world*]" (BT 179). Finally, Da-sein's *being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world* "is always already also absorbed in the world taken care of [the present element]" (BT 179). Da-sein projects possibilities from within a thrown background in which it handles equipment and deals with innerworldly things. This

present element of care, Heidegger calls *being-together-with* (BT 180). Though the phenomenon of care is analyzed in distinct parts, it itself is an always-already unified phenomenon that is expressed by the compound phrase *being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being-together-with* (BT 180). This is the expression of the unified being of Da-sein. But the fact that each element of care makes reference to a temporal horizon indicates that care itself is made possible by a deeper, more primordial phenomenon, which Heidegger calls primordial temporality.

In his analysis of the ground of care, Heidegger attempts to show that the past, present, and future horizons of the common understanding of time, i.e., what he will call ecstasies, along with their sequentiality, are derived from a unified non-sequential, yet temporal phenomenon which he will call primordial temporality.¹² This move is critical within the larger argument for Da-sein's finitude because if it can be shown that the temporal ecstasies are derivative from one unified phenomenon, then it can also be shown that the finitude of existence that is understood by inauthentic Da-sein to occur solely in the futural event of "death" is actually co-present in all of Da-sein's temporal ecstasies, i.e., past, present, and future. If death permeates Da-sein's entire lifespan, then it is not just an event that occurs at the end of one's life but *the* state of being throughout Da-sein's lifespan. What Heidegger means by arguing for death, or more specifically, being-toward-death as the state of Da-sein's existence will be explained shortly, but the key point for now is that if he can show that death is the state of being of Da-sein, then he can prove that finite primordial temporality is the ultimate meaning of Da-sein. This would give a firm phenomenological grounding for Da-sein's finitude and its inability, because of the kind of being that it is, to access eternal and universal truth.

So how does Heidegger proceed to find the meaning of care as temporality? First, it is important to get clear on what is being asked for in the "meaning" of care. Heidegger says, "meaning is that in which the intelligibility of something keeps itself, without coming into

¹² This is a key move in Heidegger's central thesis that time is the horizon under which being is disclosed, and according to William Blattner, it is at this stage of the argument, in the derivation of vulgar time's sequentiality from a unified primordial temporality that the argument fails. For his detailed account, see Blattner's *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, specifically chapter 3.

view explicitly and thematically” (BT 298), so the question of the meaning of care is asking “*what makes possible the totality of the articulated structural whole of care in the unity of its unfolded articulation*” (BT 298). Because Da-sein was shown to be the being concerned about its being, the future has a privileged place in the components of care as Da-sein seeks its ownmost potentiality of being (BT 299). Heidegger explains, “The self-project grounded in the ‘for the sake of itself’ in the future is an essential quality of existentiality. *Its primary meaning is the future*” (BT 301). Now, Da-sein’s most eminent potentiality-of-being is its death in virtue of death’s unique and inalienable character and how it individualizes Da-sein. Death permeates Da-sein’s futural horizon, but this future is not “a now that has *not yet* become ‘actual’ and that sometime *will be* for the first time, but the coming in which Da-sein comes toward itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being” (BT 299). Da-sein’s coming-toward-itself (in its being-toward-death) reveals what it always already was in its thrownness, and this is the fact that Da-sein is a groundless nullity whose being is defined by vulnerability. Heidegger says, “Authentically futural, Da-sein is authentically having-been. Anticipation of the most extreme and ownmost possibility comes back understandingly to one’s ownmost *having-been*. Da-sein can *be* authentically having-been only because it is futural. In a way, having-been arises from the future” (BT 299). The future horizon opens up Da-sein’s past in what it always already has been, and this realization of its always already thrownness releases Da-sein’s present and allows for the presencing of innerworldly beings: “Only as the *present*, in the sense of making present, can resoluteness be what it is, namely, the undistorted letting what it grasps in action be encountered” (BT 300).

Heidegger’s analysis shows that the previously distinguished components of care, the always-already (past), the being-with (present), and the being-ahead-of-itself (future) are primordially the temporal elements of past, present, and future, with the future having a privileged place. These temporal elements are interlocked and co-imply one another. Because of their going out into one another, Heidegger calls these temporal elements ecstasies (BT 302). The tight inter-relation between these elements shows that they arise from a further and singular primordial phenomenon: “Having been arises from the future in such a way that the future that has-been (or better, is in the process of having-been)

releases the present from itself. We call the unified phenomenon of the future that makes the present in the process of having-been *temporality*" (BT 300). In this way, "*Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care*" (BT 300). Temporality temporalizes itself into its distinct temporal ecstasies, which allows for the "multiplicity of the modes of being of Da-sein" (BT 302). In fact, the essence of temporality is "temporalizing in the unity of the *ecstasies*" (BT 302). To distinguish this unified primordial time from the common understanding of time as a series of nows in the mode of objective presence, Heidegger calls the former "primordial time" (BT 302).

So far, two major clusters of claims have been made that are significant for the argument that Da-sein is finite and can never obtain eternal truth. First, the primordial being of Da-sein is primordial temporality. This claim was supported by an analysis of Da-sein as care, and care was found to be constituted by past, present, and future ecstasies, and these ecstasies are made possible as discrete elements by a unified phenomenon called primordial temporality. Second, within the ecstasies of primordial temporality, the future holds a privileged place because Da-sein's being is a potentiality-for-being, so the future opens up both its past and present horizon. Closely related to this claim is that among its various possibilities, death constitutes Da-sein's ownmost possibility because of its unique and inalienable character. From these two clusters of claims, Heidegger can now draw the further claim that primordial time is essentially finite. This is so because if Da-sein's future holds a privileged position in disclosing Da-sein's past and present, if death is its ownmost future possibility, and if that which primordially constitutes Da-sein is a unified primordial time, then it follows that death, as Da-sein's ownmost not-yet possibility, discloses Da-sein's primordial temporality and hence all of its ecstasies as finite, given the unified nature of the past, present, and future ecstasies.

By finitude, Heidegger does not mean a once-in-the-future event of ceasing to exist but rather the way of being of Da-sein's primordial time as such. He explains, "The primordial and authentic future is the toward-oneself, toward *oneself*, existing as the possibility of a nullity not-to-be-bypassed" (BT 303). The primordial future looks toward one's ownmost potentiality-of-being which is death, and this ownmost possibility of impossibility reveals

one's always-already nullity or groundlessness. The primordial future "closes the potentiality-of-being, that is, the future is itself closed and as such makes possible the resolute existentiell understanding of nullity" (BT 303). In other words, Da-sein's future horizon is shown to be a nullity not to be bypassed, but the unified nature of primordial temporality shows that this nullity is not confined to the future, but also extends to the past and the present. Dasein's entire existence, including all its possibilities, is thus shown to be a finite, groundless nullity: "The 'end' of being-in-the-world is death. This end, belonging to the potentiality-of-being, that is, to existence, limits and defines the possible totality of Da-sein" (BT 216). If Heidegger succeeds in showing that all of Da-sein's possibilities are limited by this finitude, then he has phenomenologically secured his claim that as a finite nullity, Da-sein is incapable of ever attaining universal or eternal truth.

Da-sein's Finite Existence and the Quality of its Acts: Carl Page's Critique

According to Carl Page, Heidegger fails to support the connection he draws between the finitude of Da-sein's life and the reduction of Da-sein's acts and possibilities to a similarly finitely closed horizon. Heidegger merely assumes that our life's possibilities are localized and finitely determined by the finitude of our life, "as if the latter's finite quantity is the final measure of its quality as well..."¹³ The fact that our actions take place within a finite lifespan does not entail that the *quality* of our actions or their consequences will also be limited to our finite lifespan. There are many possibilities within our finite life whose effects and significance transcend our death: "Aspiration to virtue, the forms of love and friendship, and struggles for reputation and mutual recognition all contain components that reach beyond mortality and simple timeliness..." (PHFP 142). Even to consider one's posthumous reputation shows that, "the horizons of self-worth are set beyond the bounds of survival" (PHFP 142). On its face, Heidegger seems guilty of a *non sequitur* in thinking that a finite lifespan entails the finitude of human possibilities and their consequences. Nevertheless, Heidegger's argument appeals to the ontological connections he thinks he has demonstrated that show that the whole of Da-sein's existence—and hence all of its

¹³ Carl Page, *Philosophical Historicism and the Betrayal of First Philosophy* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1995), 141. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as PHFP.

possibilities—are *nothing but* finite primordial temporality. If this is the case, then Page’s criticism must directly engage Heidegger’s ontology, and Page does dive deeper.

Page is aware of the connections that Heidegger makes between care and primordial temporality, and then death and care to yield finite primordial temporality as the most primordial grounds of Da-sein’s existence (*PHFP* 143), but Page argues that Heidegger does not justify these connections because he arbitrarily assumes that care is exhausted by death. He says, “There are other possibilities proper to Dasein as the meaning of its potential authenticity: one does not perfect oneself by suicide” (*PHFP* 141). According to Page, finite primordial temporality cannot be identified with care “because it leaves out all connection with Dasein’s ownmost possibilities besides death, possibilities that Heidegger himself has admitted” (*PHFP* 143). For Page, the fact that Heidegger argues for an authentic dimension of Da-sein’s existence where it can separate itself from its immersion in the they and become true to itself is evidence of both “intimations of immortality as well as a Being-towards-death” (*PHFP* 143). Just what exactly Page means by “intimations of immortality” will be explained shortly, but the relevant point currently is that Page seeks to undercut Heidegger’s connection between care and death because if these phenomena are severed, then Heidegger has no basis to claim that “the possibilities made real within existence are themselves finite in the manner of life’s mortality, localized by the untimely timeliness of death” (*PHFP* 143). Page thinks that Heidegger himself undermines his privileging of death as Da-sein’s ownmost possibility by his characterization of the rich phenomenon of care as filled with a plethora of other possibilities not having to do with dying (*PHFP* 143).

While I ultimately agree with Page’s point that Heidegger does not properly ground the bounded nature of all human possibilities, I do not think that Page adequately characterizes Heidegger’s understanding of death and hence Da-sein’s finitude, so a clarification on what Heidegger means by death is needed before Page’s criticism can be adequately assessed. Previously, Page argued that Heidegger chooses death as the meaning of care, and that this is an arbitrary choice because care is constituted by many possibilities other than simply dying. The problem with this criticism is that Heidegger does not conceptualize death as

one *event* among others that happens at the end of Da-sein's life. To think of death this way is to think of Da-sein not as *existing* (being-in) but as an objectively present being. Instead of being an event tagged on at the end of Da-sein's life, death is constitutive of Da-sein's way of being as it inheres in "every stage" of its life. To see why Heidegger thinks this, we must briefly examine his phenomenology of death.

In order to understand what it means for Da-sein to die, Heidegger first reflects on what an end or a "not-yet" means by looking at different entities whose being is characterized by becoming (*BT* 226). First, Heidegger examines the end of a fruit, which we understand as its ripening (*BT* 226). The end of a fruit, its not-yet, is not something external to it since a fruit's ripening is intrinsic to the fruit itself. This end cannot be externally added to the fruit because its end of ripening constitutes the fruit's nature. These considerations show that the fruit's ripening is always had by the fruit, and by this fact, we can also see that the fruit's unripeness is also intrinsic to it. In a like manner, Da-sein's end is also not something external to it, but rather intrinsic to Da-sein at every stage of its development (*BT* 227). Nevertheless, Da-sein's not-yet is different than the fruit's in that ripening is the fruit's fulfillment, but Da-sein can hardly be said to be fulfilled by its death since death takes away all of Da-sein's possibilities. Additionally, death cannot be the fulfillment of Da-sein since "Even 'unfulfilled' Da-sein ends" (*BT* 227).

Da-sein's not-yet is intrinsic to it, so death cannot be a mere stopping at an end as it would be the case with beings that are objectively present. Objectively present entities exhibit several different ways of stopping, all of which are antithetical to Da-sein's way of being. As examples, Heidegger says we say that the rain stops when it is no longer objectively present, or the bread is finished when it is not on hand anymore (*BT* 227-228). Stopping in these cases has the connotation of the disappearance of objectively present objects. On the other hand, stopping can also mean the demarcation or establishment of objectively present entities, as is the case when we say that the road stops or the painting is finished, respectively (*BT* 227). But the problem with applying these senses of stopping to Da-sein is that they presuppose the way of being of objectively present entities, a mode of being antithetical to Da-sein's way of *existing* (*BT* 228). As disclosedness itself, Da-sein is not an

objectively present entity but is rather what makes objective presence possible in the first place. This means that Da-sein's death cannot be understood as something that happens to it at the end of its life, or what Heidegger calls "being-at-an-end" (BT 228). Da-sein's essence as existing means that its death must be understood as intrinsic to its being, just as the fruit's end of ripening was intrinsic to it.

In light of these considerations, Heidegger concludes that death must be understood not as a "being-at-an-end" of Da-sein's life, but rather a "being-toward-death." As Heidegger explains, "Death is a way to be that Da-sein takes over as soon as it is. 'As soon as a human being is born, he is old enough to die right away'" (BT 228). Da-sein's unique way of being forces us to rethink what we ordinarily think of as death. If death is the way that Da-sein exists, then death is more like the perennial quality of vulnerability that inheres in human life. For Heidegger, death is more like the potential for human life to be extinguished at any moment from the time it is born. Death characterizes Da-sein's entire life and subsequently, the disclosedness of the world itself because Da-sein is disclosedness. If the very nature of disclosedness is to be finite, then this means that everything that is intelligible, that is illuminated by Da-sein's finite light, will also bear the marks of finitude. In this way, Heidegger's phenomenology of death shows why care—and hence all human possibilities and all that can be disclosed—must be identified with the finitude of death. This in turn shows why the meaning of care must be understood as *finite* primordial temporality.

Thus, Page's original critique that Heidegger arbitrarily assumes that being-toward-death is care is misguided. Page argues that one cannot deduce the finite *quality* of human possibilities from the finite *quantity* of human life. But Heidegger makes no such inference since his understanding of death pertains to the *quality* of Da-sein's way of being, not its *quantity*. To think of death in terms of the quantity of a lifespan would be to treat Da-sein as an objectively present being, something Heidegger explicitly rejects. Heidegger's phenomenological exposition of death attempts to show that Da-sein—and hence of all its possibilities since Da-sein is its possibilities—is characterized by the finitude of death, which is to be understood as being-toward-death and not being-at-an-end. Therefore, Heidegger's argument for why care is identical to being-toward-death is far from arbitrary.

Not only does Heidegger argue for the finitude of primordial temporality, but once he has phenomenologically secured the links between death, care, and finite primordial temporality, he goes back to the structures of care that he delineated in Division I and shows how finite primordial temporality produces these structures. He does this by showing the implicit temporal dynamics behind the existential structures of understanding, attunement, falling prey, and discourse that constitute care. Heidegger even shows how Da-sein's everydayness, the vulgar concept of history, the vulgar concept of time, and even space itself is derivable from finite primordial temporality. Page's critique that Heidegger arbitrarily identifies death with care misses the mark because Page misunderstands what Heidegger thinks death is and subsequently, how the finitude of death permeates the entirety of Da-sein's way of being. As I will explain shortly, I still think that Page's argument, once recalibrated, is effective against Heidegger. However, before getting to Page's argument, I will show that Heidegger's own phenomenology of death undermines his attempt to interpret human finitude as a limiting bookend for all of its possibilities

In his phenomenology of death, Heidegger gives us a novel concept of death that is proper for a being who *exists*, but in his exposition of what death means at an existential level, Heidegger illicitly imports content from the ontic conception of death, thereby illicitly importing the boundedness of ontic death to all of Da-sein's existential possibilities, giving us a picture of Da-sein's finitude that is inappropriately taken from an ontic view of death. This is inappropriate because an ontic conception of death as a demarcated boundary is only suitable for objectively present entities but not for Da-sein as an existing being. Heidegger tells us that unlike the rain that stops, Da-sein's life never disappears like this: "In death, Da-sein is neither fulfilled nor does it simply disappear" (*BT* 228). Instead, Heidegger tells us that death is Da-sein's way of being "that Da-sein takes over as soon as it is" (*BT* 228). By this claim, I understand Heidegger to mean that death is a kind of vulnerability that Da-sein's life has from its inception,¹⁴ which is why he clarifies his

¹⁴ A number of prominent Heidegger scholars including Hubert Dreyfus, Carol White, and John Haugeland agree with some version of the thesis that death for Heidegger refers to human life's intrinsic vulnerability. See Hubert Dreyfus's forward to Carol White's book, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

statement with the quote that “As soon as a human being is born, he is old enough to die right away” (*BT* 228).

But what is Da-sein vulnerable to? Well, presumably Da-sein is vulnerable to “death” in the old fashioned sense, which is to say a complete cessation of possibilities. If this were not so, what else would Da-sein be vulnerable to? Just like when the rain stops and disappears, when Da-sein dies (in the ontic way), so also its possibilities stop and disappear just like the rain. If this is the case, then Heidegger’s concept of death as vulnerability presupposes the ontic concept of death as a disappearance of Da-sein’s possibilities. If existential death is to be meaningful, it must presuppose that Da-sein’s life has a potential bookend (a cessation of possibilities), which could arrive at any time from the time it is born. Existential death is Da-sein’s way of being, so if existential death presupposes a bookend, this means that Da-sein’s life—and hence its possibilities—also presupposes this same bookend. In fact, it is in virtue of this ontic presupposition of a bookend illicitly imported into the existential concept of death that allows Heidegger to claim that Da-sein’s existential possibilities are similarly bounded and limited by Da-sein’s mortality and finitude.

But this importation of the ontic content of boundedness and demarcation into the existential concept of being-toward-death and therefore into Da-sein’s possibilities is a problem because Heidegger argues extensively against interpreting Da-sein’s way of being as bounded and demarcated in the way that a road is. To think of Da-sein as bounded in this way would be to treat it like an objectively present entity, which it is not. So if Heidegger is to remain consistent with his claims that Da-sein’s way of being is not bounded, then neither can he say that Da-sein’s possibilities are bounded either as Da-sein is its possibilities. Heidegger’s own considerations against interpreting Da-sein’s death as a bookend to a life lived makes it problematic to import the admittedly closed and demarcated horizon of being-at-an-end to all of Da-sein’s possibilities which it has in its way of being of being-toward-end. And if this is the case, then Heidegger has no basis to interpret Da-sein’s *finite* possibilities as qualitatively bounded. Heidegger’s own reflections dictate that if Da-sein is finite, this finitude cannot be interpreted in terms of a bounded or

demarcated finitude, as this interpretation of finitude is only applicable to objectively present entities which Da-sein is not.

If Heidegger were to insist on interpreting Da-sein's finitude as a limiting booked for all of its possibilities, then this would lead to a self-refutation of all of his claims in *Being and Time's*. If the human being has no access to truth beyond its own mortal horizon, then the claims of *Being and Time*, including the claims about finite primordial temporality constituting all human possibilities, also fall subject to this verdict. At the level of primordial temporality, Heidegger faces anew Tugendhat's critique that if he successfully reduces the conditions of validity (truth as correctness, non-contradiction etc...) to the conditions of meaning (Da-sein's finite temporality), then he undercuts his own argument by making validity a contingent affair. Validity cannot be reduced in this manner because finite primordial temporality makes possible both authentic existence and inauthentic existence, and without a normative concept of validity, Heidegger has no normative basis to say that one form of existence is any more true or authentic than the other as both equally manifest primordial temporality. Hence, even if Heidegger can show that human existence is constituted by contingency and finitude, this cannot, at the cost of performative contradiction, entail that all human possibilities, including our search for authenticity and truth, are rigidly circumscribed by a closed horizon.

These considerations vindicate Page's argument that Da-sein exhibits both a being-toward-the-death *and* "intimations of immortality," insofar as making truth claims presupposes a validity that transcends one's mortal horizon. But if Da-sein exhibits both, and if Heidegger is correct in his claim that vulnerability and finitude characterize all of human life, then it is important to analyze how these two characteristics cohere with one another. To show this coherence, we must analyze the character of human finitude and what kind of limits this finitude sets for human possibilities. Page does an excellent job of this by pursuing two lines of inquiry, which I will follow. These are 1) to what degree are human beings localized in their thought to their immediate environment? and 2) what does this mean for the human capacity for transcendence?

Page begins, in a very Heideggerian way, by asking about the meaning of Heidegger's use of "finitude." What kinds of limitations are imputed to Da-sein by attributing finitude to it (*PHFP* 144)? Da-sein's finitude cannot mean that it is radically and inescapably absorbed in its immediate environment because Heidegger himself speaks about the possibility of the call of conscience to bring Da-sein out of its immediate immersion in the-they and into an authentic understanding of itself (*BT* 251). The call of conscience shows Da-sein that it has not been true to itself, and it further reveals to Da-sein its possibility "of taking over in existence the thrown being that it is..." (*BT* 264). But while this shows *some* level of transcendence, Da-sein is still unable to fully take over its thrownness from the ground up (*BT* 262). This is because Da-sein never exists prior to its thrownness; Da-sein exists "only *from it* and *as it*. Thus being the ground means never to gain power over one's ownmost being from the ground up" (*BT* 262).

For Heidegger, Da-sein does not have a self-subsistent existence, it "is not itself the ground of its being, because the ground first arises from its own project, but as a self, it is the *being* of its ground" (*BT* 262). But if Da-sein just is its thrownness, i.e., "the being of its ground," what does Heidegger mean when in the call of conscience, Da-sein brings "itself back to itself from its lostness in the they" (*BT* 264)? What or who is the self which Da-sein brings itself to when it escapes its lostness in the they (which after all is the social dimension of Da-sein's thrownness) if Da-sein's being a self is nothing but its thrownness? Heidegger seems to be saying that Da-sein brings its thrownness back to its thrownness, so what could this possibly mean?

This circular movement of Da-sein bringing itself back to itself is what Heidegger describes as Da-sein's heritage and fate. Da-sein reaches an authentic understanding of its existence as a nullity when it accepts its ownmost possibility, which is its death. But the nullity is only the negative aspect of Da-sein's new authentic understanding of itself. The positive content which fills this new authentic understanding must be *chosen* by Da-sein from its heritage, i.e., its thrown background set of possibilities. As Heidegger explains, "the finitude of existence thus seized upon tears one back out of endless multiplicity of possibilities

offering themselves nearest by—those of comfort, shirking, and taking things easy—and brings Da-sein to the simplicity of its *fate*” (BT 351).

Da-sein never escapes its thrownness but the difference is that in its lostness in the-they, Da-sein is assimilated heedlessly into its most immediate thrown possibilities, but after having reached authentic resoluteness, Da-sein heedfully chooses and appropriates for its self its thrown possibilities. But because Da-sein never gets behind these thrown possibilities, it is always fatefully determined by them even while simultaneously choosing them for itself (BT 351). So what does this mean for Heidegger’s understanding of Da-sein’s finitude? This shows that Da-sein has some level of transcendence, insofar as it can appropriate possibilities for itself, but this power to choose, or what Heidegger calls finite freedom, is always-already circumscribed by one’s heritage, so that the choosing of possibilities from this heritage results in Da-sein’s inescapable fate, and this is the meaning of its finitude.

The central point that Page will attack is Heidegger’s connection between Da-sein’s thrownness and the entire set of possibilities being limited to this thrownness. First, Page agrees with Heidegger that Da-sein could never take over its context before being in this context: “any taking over is constrained to begin from where, and as, one finds oneself thrown” (PHFP 145) and “Dasein will never create itself whole, obviously” (PHFP 145). But this observation does not “self-evidently set any localizing limits to one’s final state... The difficulty concerns whether there are any a priori limits to the perfections Dasein may realize in response to its thrownness” (PHFP 145). Page thinks that Heidegger too glibly collapses Da-sein’s power of an *ex nihilo* self-creation (which it clearly does not have) with the power of self-development (which has yet to be shown to be circumscribed by thrownness). And not only does Heidegger not provide a persuasive argument for why these are identical, but there is actually good phenomenological reasons to separate the two.

Da-sein’s thrownness refers to the set of conditions not of Da-sein’s choosing in which it is born into the world, but once in the world, Da-sein not only finds itself amidst a wider set

of possibilities than those initial conditions not of its choosing (*PHFP* 145), but it can also create new possibilities. A person may be born into a nation, culture, and language not of its own choosing. This person's thought may be largely affected by the conceptual modes of thought imbedded in her mother tongue, the cultural practices of her native context, and the social, political, and philosophical ideas of her country of origin. But this same person could move to a foreign land, adopt new cultural practices, learn a new language, perhaps invent a new religion, or even discover a new way of thinking about life. As a matter of fact, people quite regularly transcend many of their thrown conditions including religious beliefs, political ideologies, biological sex, cultural practices and others.

But is one not *de facto* limited in one's possibilities depending upon what time in history one is born in? For example, prior to the Wright brothers, one could not, as a matter of fact, fly in an airplane. And is this not what Heidegger is getting at when he speaks about Da-sein's fate, that at any point in time, Da-sein's finds itself open to a *limited* set of factual possibilities that have been opened by its heritage (*BT* 351)? While Da-sein has the power, through its resoluteness, to appropriate a myriad of possibilities, these seem circumscribed by the point in time of Da-sein's heritage. In response, while it is true that as a matter of history, it contingently happened to be the case that the Wright brothers flew the first airplane in 1903, there is nothing in principle to have prevented a different set of brothers to invent the airplane earlier. History is full of precocious geniuses, like Newton and Einstein, who have accelerated the development of their fields by several decades, if not centuries. If this is the case, then we can see that matter-of-fact limits do not *essentially* determine Da-sein's possibilities to its thrown context because Da-sein is more than its factual circumstances. Da-sein has the power to change and even repudiate some of these circumstances, and this power is precisely what allows for the movement of history to occur. For if thrownness had the kind of determining *and* determinate state that Heidegger supposes, it is difficult to understand how new possibilities could arise from this circumscribed set of possibilities.

This brings us to Page' point that even the factual circumstances in which Da-sein finds itself are themselves more than the determined set of conditions that Heidegger takes them

to be. As Page argues, even the heritage that Heidegger takes as a fixed limiting condition for Da-sein's possibilities is itself opened to an infinite horizon:

One finds oneself in a particular situation, i.e., one finds oneself 'there' (da), but the horizons of any 'there' are not particular in this way. In a sense it is fate to be the child of one's parents, a member of one's race, the inheritor of one's culture, but no family, race, or culture is so fully determined in its own right that its horizons are all as contingent as its actual institutions and practices. (*PHFP* 148)

Though cultures, like Da-sein, have determinate characteristics at any point in time, they also have an open horizon for what they could become, and the horizon of their possibilities can never be closed off. For any factual actuality (any here), there will always be another factual possibility (a new there to the here) that lies within the culture's horizon. This dynamic manifests Hegel's point that finitude is inextricably and dialectically linked with infinitude. This dialectical relationship is evidenced anytime a finite limit is set. A limit encloses a space, but this very acting of drawing a boundary creates a new space outside the boundary (a new there, a new possibility to the factual here). Multiplying the act of setting boundaries by infinity will only result in an infinite set of new "theres" to the circumscribed "heres." The irony of this situation is that Heidegger is famous for speaking about possibility being higher than actuality, but in seeking to circumscribe Da-sein's existence by its heritage, he neglects his own insight. The fact that Da-sein depends upon its heritage for its *initial* possibilities does not entail the kind of determinate finitude that circumscribes *all* of Da-sein's possibilities to its thrown conditions.

The crucial mistake in Heidegger's analysis of human thrownness is that part of the condition not of our choosing with which we are thrown into the world is an orientation to truth that transcends our factual circumstances. In fact, it is in light of this orientation that we can recognize our factual conditions as such. Heidegger is superbly insightful in describing the existential structures of human existence—our thrownness, our being-in-the-world, our always-already being-with-others. But the meta-structure that he misses is

the rational existential¹⁵ which allows us to recognize these structures as the kind of phenomena that they are. For if Da-sein were fully immanent within these structures, it could never recognize them because recognition requires a certain degree of distance for objects to become thematized. Heidegger himself appeals to this insight at the beginning of *Being and Time* when he tells us that that which is closest to us is furthest from our sight (BT 13). As Hegel explained, recognition of a determinate object requires contrast, so if Da-sein were thoroughly immanent in its existential structures, it would never recognize them as such. We would be like fishes swimming in an ocean utterly unaware of the water we swim in. But the fact that we can recognize our existential structures shows us that human existence cannot be exhaustively reduced to pure contingency. As Page says, "Indeed, understanding could only illuminate or disclose those contingencies [of thrownness] in virtue of itself being beyond them, in virtue of being able to construe them against a background of possibility that includes the intelligibility of their not having been at all" (PHFP 145-46). Contingency can only be recognized as such amidst a background that transcends these contingent conditions.

Heidegger's understanding of human finitude is incomplete. The human being does have *determinate* characteristics at any point in time, but these characteristics are not *determinative* of the capacities of this kind of being. The human way of being is one whose determinate characteristics, insofar as these set recognized boundaries on our being, simultaneously open up a space of possibilities beyond these boundaries. By the same token, the human being can also neglect these possibilities by treating itself inauthentically as something that it is not. The human being can deny its transcendence and treat itself as a victim of its circumstances, as merely a product of historical necessities, as a being fated to a pre-determined destiny. But the irony is that the human being can only have this self-understanding in virtue of having the transcendence that it denies itself. Heidegger's failure to reduce Da-sein's conditions of validity to finite temporal structures shows that human beings are intrinsically and primitively oriented to the transcendence intrinsic in the normative demands of reason. Human finitude is thus inextricably tied to the infinite. Page

¹⁵ Just what this rational existential is will be more thoroughly developed in chapter 6 with Karl-Otto Apel's notion of the *logos-a priori*.

remarks that, “Human existence is an odd mixture of life, whose medium is singular, and thought, whose medium is universal,” (*PHFP* 130) and true to his theory of truth as a simultaneous concealing and unconcealing, Heidegger’s ontology reveals much of the singularity of Da-sein’s life while concealing the universality of Da-sein’s reason.

Conclusion

Heidegger’s thought has been massively influential, contributing to many philosophical and theological schools including Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, Derrida’s deconstruction, Foucault’s genealogical narratives, Bultmann’s demythologizing, French phenomenology, and many others. This influence is due not only to *Being and Time’s* ingenious and revolutionary account of Da-sein, but also to the comprehensive explanatory scope employed throughout this work. Taking a cue from Hegel, Heidegger puts the burden on himself not just to argue for his own position, but also to show why alternative positions, i.e., the tradition, have gone wrong. In his contribution to the question of historicism, Heidegger does not just attempt to show, like prior historicists, *that* context affects Da-sein’s truth claims, but that Da-sein is the context itself, i.e., being-in-the-world.

But despite Heidegger’s massive influence, *Being and Time* is riddled with a number of problems, many of which Heidegger himself came to recognize as evidenced by his abandoning the work’s projected sequels. In his later writings, Heidegger will argue that *Being and Time’s* method of beginning with Da-sein predisposed the inquiry into Being to a problematical ontic horizon. Furthermore, Heidegger will complain that the method of fundamental ontology also predisposes thought to a metaphysical horizon, thereby ignoring the historicity of Being. In his continued search for the meaning of Being, the later Heidegger will replace Da-sein with the history of Being and then the anonymity of language. With these innovations, Heidegger will initiate a linguistic turn in thought that will also prove to be massively influential. Hence, the narrative of historicism and the question of normativity continue with the deeper historicization and subsequent linguistification of normativity at the hands of the later Heidegger.

Chapter 4: The History of Being and The Linguistic Turn in the Later Heidegger

Introduction

After the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger abandoned the remainder of the project, deeming its starting point too problematic. In this project, Heidegger argued for the temporal and holistic nature of Being. The temporality of Being was meant to expose the errors of the metaphysical tradition's goal of grounding philosophy on fixed foundations while the holism of Being was a direct rebuke of the tradition's fixation with a worldless transcendental subject. The problem was that Heidegger's way of getting at the meaning of Being was through the foundation of the Da-sein analytic. Though the Da-sein analytic was merely a means toward an analysis of Being, the Da-sein-centric entry point threatened to undermine *Being and Time's* goal of temporalizing Being and decentering the Cartesian subject. With the benefit of hindsight, Heidegger saw that his project was in danger of reverting back to the same transcendental foundationalism grounded by the philosophy of the subject that he was trying to overturn.

Heidegger also noticed that *Being and Time's* use of phenomenology committed the analysis in an objectionably metaphysical direction, contradicting the work's aspiration to overthrow metaphysics. By using metaphysical language, the analysis of Da-sein remained mired within an ontic horizon, which impeded an authentic analysis of Being and its dynamic of self-concealment and unconcealment. For these reasons, *Being and Time* was deemed unsalvageable as it was committed to a whole mode of thinking that Heidegger would leave behind.

Heidegger's new orientation to philosophy was something he called thinking *simpliciter*. William Richardson and much of the secondary literature have distinguished the Heidegger of *Being and Time* from the thinker's later works, roughly after 1933. Much of this literature opts for describing the thinker's early period as the "early Heidegger" or "Heidegger I" in

distinction from “the later Heidegger” or “Heidegger II” used to designate the period post *Kehre* (turn).¹ In this chapter, I will use both appellations. So what is distinctive of Heidegger II’s new mode of reflection?

Heidegger II continues to ask for the meaning of Being, but instead of using Da-sein as the entry point to this question, the later Heidegger thinks of Being in terms of the history of Being. Heidegger takes the temporality of Being seriously, so he refashions the method of philosophy in a more historical direction from the ground up. The temporal nature of Being makes phenomenology an unsuitable method, so the later Heidegger thinks of Being through the various historical configurations that it has adopted in the history of philosophy in the West. Heidegger continues to think of Being as the source of intelligibility, but what is distinctive about his later work is that it shows how Being as the background of intelligibility changes in different historical eras. Being never remains static. It is intrinsic to the nature of Being that it conceals *and* reveals itself in different ways. The precise manner in which Being conceals itself, and what of itself it reveals, determines the configuration of intelligibility of the particular historical epoch in which it is being manifested.

Many of the later Heidegger’s innovations in thought are summed in his new understanding of Being. For one, the later Heidegger articulates a much deeper connection between history and Being. Being is not only manifested through its history; Being *is* its history. Being and the history of Being are interchangeable terms. By the phrase “history of Being,” Heidegger has in mind an ontological understanding of history distinct from ordinary historiography (a move already made in *Being and Time*). While the idea of an ontological understanding of history is not new, the later Heidegger greatly develops this idea in historically concrete ways. *Being and Time* showed how an ontological historicity underpins all subsequent historiographical reflection, but this analysis was abstract.

¹ In the preface to Richardson’s *magnus opus*, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Heidegger himself approves of Richardson’s distinction between Heidegger I and II with the following proviso: “The distinction you make between Heidegger I and II is justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what [Heidegger] I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by [Heidegger] II. But the thought of [Heidegger] I becomes possible only if it is contained in [Heidegger] II” (xxii).

Through his various analyses of different thinkers, the later Heidegger concretely shows how the history of Being is at work in distinct historical epochs.

Secondly, Being is now the primary theme of reflection. Heidegger I's de-centering of the subject in *Being and Time* becomes much more pronounced in Heidegger II as Being becomes the ultimate agent that moves history and constitutes any particular epoch's disclosedness. Human beings continue to be the site of openness for Being, but their role is greatly subordinated because it is Being itself that gifts human beings with the clearing in which to think. In Heidegger's later works, even Being itself gets superseded by an even more primordial phenomenon which he calls the event of Appropriation. Eventually, Appropriation takes on the role of dispensing and withdrawing the epochs of Being in which human beings think and live.

Finally, perhaps the most unique innovation in Heidegger's last years is the linguistic turn he undertakes in understanding Being. As his thought on Being becomes more concrete, the concreteness of history turns into the concreteness of language. The later Heidegger comes to think of the historical disclosedness of Being in terms of the intelligibility that language makes possible. This development can be understood as an outflow of Heidegger's lifelong goal of decentering the Cartesian subject, since language always precedes an individual's subjectivity. Also, this development is also a natural progression of Heidegger's increased emphasis on concreteness, since language is even more present as an aspect of the everyday world than an abstract concept of history. But just like his distinction between ontic history and ontological history, Heidegger will also distinguish between ontic language and ontological language with a focus on the latter. Ontological language is more than just an instrument for communication; it is the very ground of all intelligibility, so it is the way in which Being self-conceals and reveals.

So how do these three new insights affect the issue of historicism? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's big move was to fundamentally change the problematic of historicism from an understanding of truth as being historically situated, to equating truth with Da-sein as the historical situation itself. This radicalization of historicity is even furthered in Heidegger II,

but now the bearer of history is not Da-sein, but Being. The later Heidegger will conjoin Being and history in the primordial unity that he designates “The history of Being” where the “of” functions as both an objective and subjective genitive. Being is self-concealing (while also self-revealing) and these occlusions and revealings vary historically. Whereas *Being and Time* grounded history in Da-sein’s temporality, the history of Being historicizes Da-sein itself. I will argue that this is an intensification of the historicist bent already shown in *Being and Time*, and the problems of self-referential consistency that plagued *Being and Time* only get compounded in the later Heidegger because no matter how much Heidegger emphasizes the historicity of Being, he is still producing a global account of this history that he takes to be valid beyond his immediate historical context. Problematically, this global account is inconsistent with the historicizing dynamics that his thought maintains.

The second move, already present in *Being and Time*, is that since Da-sein is never self-constituted but rather a projection of its thrown-context, then there is a certain degree of fatalism over what truth it can obtain. This fatalism is further amplified in Heidegger II as the workings of Being take center stage and Da-sein is increasingly marginalized to the status of an epiphenomenon of Being. I will argue that if Heidegger’s thought on the history of Being is taken seriously, there is a further dwindling of responsibility for one’s thought as it is ultimately the arbitrary whims of Being that is in control of the norms and events in history, and as Heidegger’s own context with the supposed fate of Nazi Germany and the Jews shows, this can be fatal.

Finally, the third consequence that arises from Heidegger II’s thought is that the identification of Being with language opens a new domain of relativism. Whereas the relativism that Heidegger creates by identifying the truth of Being with the history of Being is a relativism of historical epochs that span the vertical axis of time, the identification of intelligibility with language opens up a linguistic relativism that spans the horizontal axis of culture. This is one of Heidegger’s most significant legacies as it has influenced many twentieth century thinkers. By extending relativism to linguistic frameworks, relativism becomes a ubiquitous phenomenon that occurs wherever different languages are spoken. Though Heidegger himself doesn’t develop these consequences, much of later twentieth

century thought does this for him, as the incommensurability of conceptual schemes has become a highly influential trope in the humanities. Through this turn to language, historicism comes to encompass a cultural relativism in addition to its historical relativism.

The plan for this chapter then is to discuss these issues in four sections, 1) History in *Being and Time*, 2) From *Being and Time* to the history of Being, 3) The narrative of Being, and 4) Heidegger's linguistic turn. These sections will provide a rough map of Heidegger's conceptual development while also showing how these different conceptual stages affect the issue of historicism.

I. History in Being and Time

The Common View of Time as Objective Presence

The later Heidegger's thought on history is a radicalization of the revolutionary insights of *Being and Time*. To properly understand Heidegger II's view of Being as history, one must begin with *Being and Time's* ontological view of history and trace how this concept evolves in Heidegger's later works. The analysis of history occurs in Division II Chapter 5. It presupposes Da-sein's existential analytic of Division I and Division II's sketch of Da-sein's temporality in Chapters 1-4.

The analysis of history proceeds by a distinction between ontic history, which is what most practicing historians and historiographers are acquainted with, and Heidegger's novel ontological analysis of history. Ontic history is a view of history that presupposes an understanding of time as objective presence. Objective presence is merely a derivative mode of being, dependent upon Da-sein's primordial existential structures. But common historians never examine the deeper existential structures of time. They are restricted to understanding time at the level of objective presence, from which they then derive their misguided view of history. Consequently, before Heidegger gives his analysis of history, he first delineates the common view's problematic understanding of time, from which common historiography derives its theoretical grounding.

The common view understands time through the framework of objective presence, as an independently subsisting reality through which human beings exist. Time is objectively there, and human beings exist in time. Since the past, present, and future do not all exist at once, the common view must understand time as a succession of objectively present-nows. Under this view, Da-sein hops from one objectively present now to another (BT 342) since “the past and future are no longer or not yet real” (BT 342), so only the present-immediate-now-moment has reality.

Though the common view believes in the objectively present reality of time, it tangles itself in the contradiction that its very understanding of time annihilates nearly the whole temporal framework except for an infinitesimally small and momentary stream of the present. This infinitesimal present is co-extensive with Da-sein’s existence, so though the common view wants to understand time as “objective,” it cannot but trace time back to Da-sein’s existence. Through this contradiction, Heidegger shows that even the common interpretation of time cannot completely obfuscate Da-sein’s primordial temporality: “At bottom, even the vulgar interpretation of the ‘connectedness of life’ does not think of a framework spanned ‘outside’ of Da-sein and embracing it, but correctly looks for it in Da-sein itself” (BT 343).

So if the objectively present view of time is self-defeating, how is Da-sein’s temporal stretching along between birth and death to be conceived? Heidegger thinks that Da-sein “stretches *itself* along in such a way that its own being is constituted beforehand as this stretching along. The ‘between’ of birth and death already lies *in the being* of Da-sein” (BT 343). But this view must not be understood in such a way that time becomes an objectively present series of moments “inside” Da-sein, or that Da-sein’s mode of being is a punctiliar existence whose trajectory unfolds as an objectively present series of moments that successively moves. Heidegger’s counter-intuitive thesis is that temporal succession is a derivative product of Da-sein’s existential structure.² Existentially, events like birth, death,

² In *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*, William Blattner does a thorough analysis of Heidegger’s argument for this claim and concludes that he fails to show how temporal succession is a derivative product from primordial temporality.

and what occurs in between are all subsumed within the unity of Da-sein's primordial temporality because Da-sein's mode of being is ontic-ontological. Da-sein does not simply be, it *exists*. As such, birth and death insofar as they are part of Da-sein's *existence* cannot be mere events, the former being what once was and the latter what is still to come. For "factual Da-sein exists as born, and, born, it is already dying in the sense of being-toward-death. Both 'ends' and their 'between' *are* as long as Da-sein factually exists, and they *are* in the sole way possible on the basis of the being of Da-sein as *care*" (BT 343).

Now, how does Da-sein's stretched existence relate to history? Heidegger explains that the movement of the stretched out stretching itself along is the "occurrence of Da-sein," (BT 344) and that "to expose the *structure of this occurrence* and the existential and temporal conditions of its possibility means to gain an *ontological understanding of historicity*" [Heidegger's italics] (BT 344). What is revealed at this point is that the Da-sein analytic was not just an ontological account of human existence but also a fundamental analysis of historicity. Heidegger believes that his reorientation of history to Da-sein's existentiality can answer the cluster of questions of the early twentieth century surrounding historical knowledge, like its possibility, its relation to norms, and the contestation of distinct historical norms. The problem has been that most thinkers never examined the fundamental assumptions of the common view of history.³ All prior thinkers arrive too late at the problem of history because they all presuppose an ontology of objective presence that gets applied to both the historical inquirer and the historical subject matter while leaving the fundamental phenomenon of history unexamined. In keeping with his method in Division I, Heidegger describes the common understanding of history and then shows how this understanding is derivative upon his own ontological-existential analysis of history. To show the force of Heidegger's argument, I will follow him in his order of exposition.

The Common Understanding of History

³ In *Being and Time* 344, Heidegger calls out by name the historical school led by Ranke, Simmel's epistemological reflections, and Rickert's work on concept formation in history. In BT 363, Heidegger explicitly says: "Our analysis of the problem of history grew out of an appropriation of Dilthey's work."

What makes a historical artifact in a museum historical? For common sense, history is associated with the past, understood as a time long ago that no longer is, but the historical artifact still confronts us in the present, so in what sense is this artifact historical (BT 348)? Perhaps it is that the artifact is no longer in use. But this cannot be right because insofar as the artifact is intact, it can be used, and it seems strange to say that the artifact would cease to be historical once used today (BT 348). So then, what are we referring to when we say that these artifacts come from “the past”? Heidegger replies, “Nothing other than the *world* within which they were encountered as things at hand belonging to a context of useful things and used by heedful Da-sein existing-in-the-world. That *world* is no longer” (BT 348). But if this is so, then a “past world” cannot refer to the objective presence of the material entities because those still exist as historical artifacts. “World,” as Heidegger argued in Division I, must refer to Da-sein’s mode of existence, “that is, *factically as being-in-the world* [Heidegger’s italics]” (BT 348). Hence, historical artifacts must refer to past Da-sein, i.e., the past set of relations of the compound being-in-the-world phenomenon comprised of human beings and their social world—that is what is no longer here today.

But this conclusion appears to conflict with Heidegger’s thesis that Da-sein, as existing, is the unity of the three temporal ecstasies of past, present, and future. To speak of a no-longer-existing past is to presuppose an ontology of objective presence, but “Da-sein can never be past, not because it is imperishable, but because it can essentially *never be objectively present*. Rather, if it is, it *exists* [Heidegger’s italics]” (BT 348). This point is counter-intuitive as figures like Caesar and Jesus cannot be encountered today as our coteremporaries can. However, Heidegger does not deny this evident quality of our experience. What he proposes is that this understanding of the past is parasitic on Da-sein’s temporalizing of its temporality. Da-sein’s existence in which past, present, and future form a whole is first in the order of reality, whereas the understanding of a discrete past as no-longer-now is posterior and derivative on the primary existential reality. To talk about “the past” from a more proper ontological perspective, Heidegger uses the term “*having-been-there*” to designate this status (BT 349). Unlike “the past” which is a way of describing time in the mode of objective presence, “having-been-there” designates the mode of being that is “constituent of the ecstatic unity of the temporality of Da-sein” (BT 349).

But even if we say that “the past” of objective presence derives from the past ecstasy of Da-sein’s existence, this still leaves unanswered why “the past,” if it really is existentially one with the present and future, gets singled out as the primary focus of history (*BT* 349). If the reality of time consists in being a compound phenomenon of past, present, and future ecstasies, why does the common view of history privilege the past for its self-understanding? The answer to this question will take us to the heart of Heidegger’s understanding of historicity, which must be explained gradually because this point ties together the essential insights of both Division I and II in *Being and Time*.

The Ontological-Existential Understanding of History

According to Heidegger, Da-sein is defined by historicity because historicity is just the concrete development of Da-sein’s temporality. As was argued before, Da-sein’s temporality can be manifested in either an authentic or inauthentic manner. In its inauthentic mode, Da-sein levels down its possibilities and unreflectively imitates the behavior of the-they. Da-sein can also comport itself authentically where it accepts its death in anticipatory resoluteness, realizes that its entire life is a nullity with no essential character other than the possibilities of the tradition in which it has been thrown, and chooses to take up one of these possibilities in resolution. As Heidegger explains, “The more authentically Da-sein resolves itself, that is, understands itself unambiguously in terms of its ownmost eminent possibility in anticipating death, the more unequivocal and inevitable is the choice in finding the possibility of its existence” (*BT* 351). Da-sein inherits this possibility from its historical tradition, but also chooses it (*BT* 351).

Now, Heidegger has made these points before in Division II Chapters 1-3, but he repeats them because they form a crucial background to the concepts of retrieve and the Moment that will be developed as crucial notions through which Da-sein can get beyond ontic history. To transcend ontic history, Da-sein must see how this concept is grounded in inauthentic temporality. Instead, Da-sein must engage its ownmost historicity that is based on authentic temporality through retrieve. Retrieve is a crucial notion because it forms the bridge between the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the later Heidegger of the history of Being. The insight of retrieve is the theoretical insight that Heidegger II will put into

practice through his many analyses of the history of philosophy later in his career. It is the need for retrieve, for which common history discerns the need but ultimately fails to respond to adequately, that answers the question of why common history privileges the past as the object of study. So what is this notion of retrieve, and how does it advance the issue of historicism?

Heidegger defines retrieve as the “explicit handing down, that is, going back to the possibilities of the Da-sein that has been there” (BT 352). But this retrieve of possibilities “neither brings back ‘what is past,’ nor does it bind the ‘present’ back to what is ‘outdated’” (BT 352). In other words, retrieve is not a detached historiographical observation of a “prior” possibility that is in a no-longer-existing past, for this kind of act is thoroughly grounded in the mode of objective presence. Rather, retrieve:

responds to the possibility of existence that has-been-there. But responding to the possibility in a resolution is at the same time, as in the Moment, the disavowal of what is working itself out today as the ‘past’ [the past of objective presence]. Retrieve neither abandons itself to the past, nor does it aim at progress. In the Moment, authentic existence is indifferent to both of these alternatives. (BT 352-353)

Retrieve does not bring back the past; rather, it brings back Da-sein’s attention to an-already-existing having-been-there possibility. What differentiates retrieve from ordinary historiography is that retrieve is existentially grounded in anticipatory resoluteness. Retrieve is what happens when Da-sein appropriates its death, understands its whole life as nullity, and then chooses a possibility of existence from its historical tradition. Retrieve operates under the horizon of authentic temporality such that Da-sein no longer sees “the past” as a distant no-longer-now phenomenon, but realizes the primordial temporal unity of its present with its past, and particularly with its future.

Though the three temporal ecstasies are equiprimordial, the future is privileged. This is so because death is the key that unlocks the mystery of Da-sein’s existence. Death reveals Da-

sein's existence as finite. In authentically accepting death, Da-sein realizes that its finitude does not consist of an event not-yet-here, but a condition that permeates the entirety of its being. This condition shows Da-sein's life to be a nullity. But concretely, death forces Da-sein to look upon the *concrete* nullity that it is. The insight of death has a ricochet effect in that it forces Da-sein to review all of its possible concrete historical choices, the historical tradition which provided these choices, and the further possibilities of existence within this historical tradition in a new light, in the light of the nullity of death. The horizon of the finitude of death teaches Da-sein that none of its norms, values, or cosmologies is simply there objectively present for it. All these phenomena are simply a product of a contingent historical tradition to which it itself is fated to follow. But now that it is aware of the truth of this matter, Da-sein can reflect on its history and *choose* to follow its fate. Da-sein "lies in authentic resoluteness in which it *hands itself down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility that it inherited and yet has chosen" (BT 351). Thus, the real engine of historical reflection is the ricochet effect created by death thus showing the future as the real ground of history:

history has its roots so essentially in the future that death, as the possibility of Da-sein we characterized, throws anticipatory existence back upon its *factual* thrownness and thus first gives to the *having-been* its unique priority in what is historical. *Authentic being-toward-death, that is, the finitude of temporality, is the concealed ground of the historicity of Da-sein.* [Heidegger's italics] (BT 353)

Though the past is what history thematizes, the event of death in the future is what triggers our concern with the past.

This exposition of Da-sein's historicity in terms of death, its ricochet effect on Da-sein's concern with the past, and Da-sein's newfound appropriation of its history now gets us to the point where Heidegger can finally answer why the having-been is the privileged horizon of history despite time being a unity of temporal ecstasies. Although the future of death is the true ground of history or what gets the historical project going in the first place, "the factually disclosed possibilities of existence are not to be taken from death" (BT

350). Death is the condition that inheres in every human possibility, but death itself is not the set of factual possibilities of Da-sein's there. What Da-sein's concrete possibilities are will depend upon the specific and concrete historical fate specific to each Da-sein. But this project of discovering concrete historical possibilities is a project that must look toward Da-sein's concrete historical past.

It is important to note that this looking toward the having-been is a project within the horizon of authentic temporality. Heidegger is explaining why the privileged thematization of the having-been is legitimate for a historical project grounded upon a Heideggerian understanding of historicity, even while acknowledging that the future is what ontologically grounds Da-sein's historicity. Historians oblivious to the existential insights of *Being and Time* also will privilege the past, but they do so for different reasons and with a different understanding of the past and a different understanding of historical inquiry.

The reason why common historiography focuses on the past is that Da-sein in its inauthentic existence immerses itself in the-they, in objective presence, and in the leveling of all possibilities because it is avoiding the realization of its own death. For the most part, Da-sein understands itself in terms of its immediate projects (*BT* 354). In its everyday mode of being, Da-sein goes from one project to another, from one conversation to another in the restless manner described as curiosity and idle talk (*BT* 157-162). In Division II Heidegger shows how Da-sein engages in these fallen modes of being to distract itself from the realization of its death.⁴ Thus, it comes as no surprise that when inauthentically-oriented Da-sein approaches history, it thinks of it as a series of discrete "facts" that come along and then disappear. The past is a collection of these facts that have no fundamental connection to the present. Through this approach to history, Da-sein never has to think about its own death because its common historiography mandates that it never think of itself while doing history. This attitude is manifest in the German historical school of the nineteenth century led by Ranke and Droysen where the ideal historian is one who can extinguish oneself so as to let the past speak apart from any prejudice from the present.

⁴ See for example *BT* II.1, paragraph 51.

Thus, “the past,” which common historiography thematizes, is very different from “the-having-been” of a Heideggerian historian since the-having-been is inextricably united with both the future and the present.

Heidegger thinks that the faulty ontology formed from inauthentic temporality is responsible for the problem of historicism. Objective presence fractures the past from the present, the result of which is that “Inauthentic historical existence... is burdened with the legacy of a ‘past’ that has become unrecognizable to it” (BT 358). One way in which many of Heidegger’s contemporaries posed the problem of historicism was to ask how can history be a science if historical events are characterized by incommensurable particularity. This was Rickert’s formulation of the problem, as was Troeltsch’s, insofar as both saw the challenge of history in terms of finding an absolute value in light history’s particularity. To these attempts at solving the problem, Heidegger says “The question of whether historiography only has as its object a series of unique, ‘individual’ events, or whether it also has ‘laws,’ is radically mistaken. Neither what only occurs uniquely nor something universal above these is its theme, but rather the possibility that has been factually existent” (BT 360).

According to Heidegger, the real problem of historicism is the horizon from which the problem is formulated. This horizon is that of objective presence, as the demand for universal criteria is just the product of the-they: “In no science are the ‘universal validity’ of standards and the claims to ‘universality’ that are demanded by the they and its common sense *less* possible criteria of ‘truth’ than in authentic historiography” (BT 361). Thus, any supposed “solution” to historicism is misguided because the problem has been mischaracterized. The real theme of history is Da-sein’s historicity, which already is a stretched along constancy of possibility accessible through the understanding of the having-been as the *possibility* of Da-sein:

This possibility is not retrieved as such, that is, authentically understood historiographically, if it is distorted into the pallor of a supratemporal pattern. Only factually authentic historicity, as resolute fate, can disclose the

history that has-been-there in such a way that in retrieve the 'power' of the possible breaks into factual existence, that is, comes toward it in its futurity. (BT 360)

Rightly understood, history does not concern itself with universal law or particular events. Rather, history is the power of the possible for factually existing Da-sein.

For Heidegger, the "answer" to historicism or the disconnectedness of historical Da-sein lies in Da-sein's intrinsic existential constancy of possibility which the Moment just lets manifest. He says:

The resoluteness of the self against the inconstancy of dispersion is in itself a *steadiness that has been stretched along*—the steadiness in which Da-sein as fate 'incorporates' into its existence birth and death and their 'between' in such a way that in such constancy it is in the Moment for what is world-historical in its actual situation. In the fateful retrieve of possibilities that have-been, Da-sein brings itself back 'immediately,' that is, temporally and ecstatically, to what has already been before it. (BT 357)

The Moment itself is not to be interpreted as an objectively present moment that comes and then goes, but rather as Da-sein's return to its original constancy: "Resoluteness would be misunderstood ontologically if one thought that it *is* real as 'experience' only as long as the 'act' of resolution 'lasts.' In resoluteness lies the existentiell constancy which, in keeping with its essence, has already anticipated every possible Moment arising from it" (BT 357). Resoluteness is not a momentary experience, as it "constitutes the *loyalty* of existence to its own self" (BT 357).

By reorienting us to a new ontology of the past, Heidegger solves the problem of historicism by tracing its rise to a faulty ontology that when corrected dissolves the problem of historicism. The issue that historicism raised was the question of values and the question of a universally binding truth. How can we have access to these universal ideals if

history fractures these into historically conditioned values and historically relative truths? Heidegger's response is to show us that the problem lies in thinking of history as a set of events that have come and gone and that are dispersed and disconnected from us and from one another. This conceptualization of history stems from thinking of reality as ontic, in the mode of objective presence. But this ontic concept of reality is a derivative product of Da-sein's ontological-existential historicity. Da-sein's historicity extends, is stretched along such that Da-sein's past, present, and future all form an indivisible whole of *possibility* at the ontological level, which is the primary level of reality. The past is not a *factum* in the sense of an achievement that has been completed. The past is a possibility, and if we recall the ontology of Da-sein, possibility is not something Da-sein *has*, possibility is what Da-sein *is*. Da-sein is the peculiar being that takes a stand on its being, so it is defined by possibility. What this means then is that there is no distance to be bridged between the past and Da-sein. Properly conceived, the past as possibility is an ontological constituent of Da-sein's existence. Da-sein retrieves the past, but in this act of retrieval, Da-sein does not reach beyond anything that is outside its horizon of existence. Hence, there is no historical chasm to be crossed, no discrete historical values that are incommensurable to one another as all history is possibility, and since possibility characterizes Da-sein's existential mode of being, the two, history and Da-sein, constitute a primordial union.

Heidegger anticipates the objection of common historians that history only deals with facts. In response, Heidegger says, "If Da-sein is 'really' actual only in existence, its 'factuality' is... constituted by its resolute self-projection upon a chosen potentiality—of—being" (*BT* 360). In other words, historians cannot just foot-stomp their faulty ontology of objective presence into being true. If Heidegger's analysis about historicity is true, what "facts" are must be reconceived. Furthermore, a new historiography must be produced, one which will disclose the "power of the possible with greater penetration the more it understands having-been-in-the-world in terms of its possibility, and 'just' presents it" (*BT* 360). To a large extent, this suggested historiography is the one that Heidegger carries out in his mature writings on the history of Being.

Critique of Heidegger's Category of Possibility as an Answer to Historicism

Is Heidegger's proposal then a viable answer to the problem of historicism? Heidegger's highly ingenious and creative reconceptualization of the problem forces one to reconsider the categories used to formulate the problem. His proposal of a third category of possibility over and against the binary of the universal and particular is a thought-provoking move. But despite its ingenuity, Heidegger's ontology cannot resolve or dissolve historicism. In short, the reason is that one can still distinguish between contingent and particular possibilities and normative possibilities that make claims of universal validity. For example, the new possibility that Heidegger presents for doing historiography in accordance with Da-sein's authentic temporality is a normative one that presupposes the universal validity of truth. Consequently, Heidegger's ontology cannot get away from the categories that force the issue of historicism as a problem.

Recall that Heidegger tells us that the past is to be conceived not as a fact that came and went but as a live possibility within the existential horizon of Da-sein. Recall further that Da-sein, as the being that takes a stand on its being, is itself an existential possibility. By conceptualizing the past as a possibility, Heidegger seeks to connect the past into Da-sein's existence so as to eliminate the chasm between past and present. By using the category of possibility, Heidegger intends to undermine concepts like universal validity and historical particularity as both these concepts depend on an ontology of objective presence. In the case of historical particulars, these events are things that come into existence, have some level of determinate content while they exist, and then go out of existence. In the case of universal validity, this concept is applicable to that which maintains its demand for constant recognition through all historical eras. But Heidegger's existential ontology seeks to undermine the objective presence that both these categories presuppose, thus showing these concepts to be problematic. This is what is behind his statement that the proper object of historiography is "Neither what only occurs uniquely nor something universal above these is its theme, but rather the possibility that has been factually existent" (*BT* 360). By showing the problematic status of historicism's categories, Heidegger thinks he has solved the problem by dissolving it. If there is no such thing as either a historical

particular or a universally valid law, then there is no sense in asking which particular historical value has universal validity.

The problem I see with Heidegger's argument is that he covertly uses universal validity in his argument while presuming that his ontology does away with this concept. The categories of universality and particularity apply to possibilities just as much as actualities. To show why this is so, it may be helpful to think of different kinds of possibilities. On the one hand, there are possibilities free of normative implications, like wearing a blue jacket instead of a green jacket. On the other hand, there are possibilities with normative implications, like choosing to do authentic existential historiography over against the inauthentic historiography practiced by "vulgar" or common historians. When Heidegger presents the two forms of historiography, he presents two possibilities for how *Da-sein* could attend to history. Common historians approach history as a set of facts that have come and gone, but the knowledge of these can be recovered to some extent through historical research. Heidegger rejects attending to history this way because it covers over *Da-sein's* existential structure. Instead, Heidegger offers not just a different possibility of attending to history, but a better one, one that attends to the *reality* of *Da-sein* and the *reality* of history. One can clearly see that when Heidegger juxtaposes his approach to history to that of common historians, this juxtaposition of possibilities is not a neutral choice, like choosing a blue jacket over a black one. Heidegger thinks that historians are *wrong* to think of history as objectively present, apart from *Da-sein*. He says as much by showing how self-contradictory the objectively present view of time is (*BT* 343). Hence, Heidegger's existential approach to history is not just another possibility, but a better possibility, a more accurate possibility, a possibility that is faithful to the truth of human existence. This possibility of understanding history existentially comports better with the truth of *Da-sein*, and insofar as this existential history bears witness to the truth, it places demands on all others, including common historians, for its recognition.

Insofar as Heidegger argues for the truth of existential history, he presupposes the universal validity that he scorns as a problematic category of a faulty ontology of objective presence. The performative contradiction inherent in trying to dissolve the validity that is

simultaneously presupposed will continue to appear in Heidegger's later thought, particularly in his recounting of the history of Being in *Time and Being*. So long as Heidegger engages in argumentation, truth will always be presupposed as the goal of his argument. And implicit in truth is the idea of universal validity as that feature of truth that demands universal recognition. So long as these ideas endure, the question of historicism, the question of how historically conditioned values and historically produced truth claims can meet the universal demands of reason will remain an outstanding question.

II. From Being and Time to The History of Being

Whereas in *Being and Time* Heidegger developed a doctrine of historicity based on Dasein's temporality, the later Heidegger reverses this relation. In his post-*Kehre* phase, Heidegger thinks of Dasein in light of a new doctrine of historicity. *Being and Time* sought the question of Being from an analysis of Dasein's temporality, but the later Heidegger rejects the directionality of this approach because it distorts the meaning of Being. By beginning with Dasein as an ontic-ontological event, Being is explicated within an ontic horizon. Additionally, *Being and Time* used a Neo-Kantian method of transcendental framing which also presupposes an ontic horizon. But the presupposition of an ontic horizon distorts Being because Being eludes any foundation. In this section, I will unpack these points with the aim of explaining why Heidegger moves away from *Being and Time* to a new approach to history which he calls the history of Being.

In a lecture entitled *Time and Being*, Heidegger states: "to think Being explicitly requires us to relinquish Being as the ground of beings."⁵ After Heidegger gave this public lecture, he convened with some students in the black forest (Todtnauberg) for a six-session seminar intended to further clarify his thought. One of the attendees was Dr. Alfred Guzzoni who provided a summary of Heidegger's thought and as Dr. Guzzoni recounts, Heidegger gave one of his sharpest corrections of *Being and Time*. Looking back on his earlier work, Heidegger told his seminar attendees (as paraphrased by Dr. Guzzoni) that: "*Being and*

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 6. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *TB*.

Time is on the way toward finding a concept of time, toward that which belongs most of all to time, in terms of which 'Being' gives itself as presencing. This is accomplished on the path of the temporality of *Dasein* in the interpretation of Being as temporality" (TB 32). Following this summary, Heidegger then explained the problem with *Being and Time's* phenomenologically foundationalist method: "But this means that what is fundamental in fundamental ontology is incompatible with any building on it. Instead, after the meaning of Being had been clarified, the whole analytic of *Dasein* was to be more originally repeated in a completely different way" (TB 32).

Recall that *Being and Time's* goal was to find that in virtue of which beings are beings. Also recall that Heidegger's method for this inquiry was the Kantian transcendental approach of finding conditions of possibility where Being is the ultimate transcendental condition for any intelligibility. The problem is that if Being is interpreted as time,⁶ and if time is not to be understood ontically as a thing, but as a presencing event that constantly passes away as Heidegger II will understand time,⁷ then Being as time cannot function as a stable or permanent foundation for entities. Heidegger explained this to his seminar attendees:

Thus, since the foundation of fundamental ontology is no foundation upon which something could be built, no *fundamentum inconcussum*, but rather a *fundamentum concussum*, and since the repetition of the analytic of *Dasein* already belongs to the point of departure of *Being and Time* whereas the word 'foundation' contradicts the preliminary character of the analytic, the term 'fundamental ontology' was dropped. (TB 32)

In other words, the *Da-sein* analytic itself yielded the result that *Da-sein* as temporality is a dynamic set of historical possibilities, and if this is so, then the analytic itself is subject to

⁶ This conclusion seems to be reached more so in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* than in *Being and Time*. *Being and Time* leaves the reader as a kind of cliff hanger saying that it has only clarified the question, but *Problems* seems to give a more definite answer that Being is to be understood not as *Da-sein's* temporal ecstasies but rather as the horizontal temporality (Temporalität) from which and whereto *Da-sein's* temporal ecstasies move.

⁷ In *Time and Being*, Heidegger states, "Time is not a thing, thus nothing which is, and yet it remains constant in its passing away without being something temporal like the beings in time" (TB 3).

different configurations, which is why “the repetition of the analytic of Dasein already belongs to the point of departure of *Being and Time*.” *Being and Time*’s implicit conclusion is that its analysis of Da-sein will change, but if this is the case, then Being cannot be interpreted through the lens of the Da-sein analytic as this is just one configuration of Da-sein. To understand Being through the Da-sein analytic would be to distort Being’s meaning under the parochial and static view of the one configuration of Da-sein that *Being and Time* presents.

Besides failing to consider Da-sein’s historicity as a problem for fundamental ontology’s approach to the question of Being, the very act of beginning the *Seinsfrage* with Da-sein is problematic. *Being and Time* made the decision to inquire into Being through a being, and the being of choice was Da-sein. The goal was to understand Being (the ultimate ground of intelligibility) through a grounded being (Da-sein). The problem is that by starting with the being of Da-sein, the horizon of questioning never escapes its ontic starting point. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger decries the inability of Western thought (including his early work) to think of Being apart from beings, and hence apart from its metaphysical role of ground:

the still unbroken predominance of ‘metaphysics’ has reached the point that being⁸ represents itself to us only as a side effect of the representation of beings as beings... We grasp the ‘ontological,’ even when grasped as a condition of the ‘ontic,’ indeed only as something supplementary to the ontic, and we repeat the ‘ontological’ (the projection of beings onto beingness) once again as a self-application to itself: the projection of beingness (as a projection of being) onto its truth. There is at first no other way that could come out of the horizon of metaphysics and make the question of being graspable at all as a task.⁹

⁸ Heidegger’s designative terms for Being will change several times during his post-kehre period to distance readers from “Being’s” ontic connotation.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 355. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *BZP*.

In this passage, Heidegger explains how representational thinking, including the transcendental method of *Being and Time*, necessarily grasps Being in terms of beings, i.e., the ontological as a supplement to the ontic. Transcendental inquiry looks for conditions of possibility, but in doing so, it understands phenomena in terms of causal connections: condition A as the possibility for effect B. If one starts with ontic phenomena, and then asks for its conditions, one predetermines the nature of these conditions in an ontic way, i.e., as a “supplement to the ontic,” presumably because causal connections establish a verisimilitude between cause and effect. Hence, the errant chain of reasoning that *Being and Time* undertakes is to begin with the ontic phenomenon of Da-sein, interpret its “ontological” temporality in an ontic-like way, i.e., “the projection of beings onto beingness,” and finally interpret Being in light of Da-sein’s “ontological” structure (which really still remains at the ontic level), i.e., “the projection of beingness onto its truth [the truth of Being].” The project of searching for the meaning of Being by reverse engineering Da-sein goes awry because as soon as one thematizes Dasein as an ontic entity in need of conditions of possibility, one is led to reverse engineer this ontic entity into its ontic constituent parts.

A further problem with the transcendental method that Daniela Vallega-Neu observes is that it leads one to think of two entities or two levels of reality—the ontic and ontological—but this mischaracterizes Being. In her commentary on Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*, she says:

In reading *Being and Time* one is easily led to represent to oneself an ontological structure that occurs at another level than the ontic-existential occurrence of Dasein. It is certainly possible, but far more difficult, to engage again and again in an understanding of the ontological dimension out of and within Dasein’s ‘ontic’ existence, out of an authentic, factual grasping of one’s

own being-towards-death in which being as such is disclosed out of a temporal occurrence.¹⁰

This bifurcated two-level picture is a product of transcendental inquiry's bifurcation of reality into conditions of possibility and the effects of these conditions. In his later work, Heidegger is quite adamant that no such two-level reality exists. The truth of Being is its meaning as time, but as time, Being is not a static or fixed entity. As time, Being is an event of presencing, a verb that occurs: Be-ing. When Being is understood statically, this dynamic reality is frozen into a permanent presence. This is the self-understanding that Da-sein has when it operates under the mode of inauthentic temporality: its character is fixed, its values are fixed, reality is fixed and its judgments, when they capture reality in a truthful manner, are also fixed. This is why, as Vallega-Neu says, death is the key to unlock Da-sein's real existence, because the not-ness of death shatters the errant view of permanence that Da-sein gives to itself. Death opens a window into Being as presencing, i.e., a dynamic event that comes and goes, and negates the view of Being as presence, i.e., a static reality.

Properly understood, the ontic-ontological distinction is not a real distinction but a conceptual one. This is why Vallega-Neu says that if we grasped our authentic possibilities of Being:

we would not consider the 'ontological difference' as posing two 'entities' but would rather understand this difference as a temporal occurrence, as a differencing that occurs in the motion of thinking, a differencing which also marks the slippage from openness of being to a representational encounter with beings, words, concepts.¹¹

An authentic understanding of Being would neither posit two levels of reality nor think about Being in ontic terms.

¹⁰ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Thus, Heidegger concludes that the aim of *Being and Time* of getting at the meaning of Being through a reverse engineering of the conditions of possibility of Da-sein is problematic because of Da-sein's inability to act as a *fundamentum inconcussum*, the ontic starting point of the project, and the metaphysical horizon intrinsic in the positing of a ground and a superstructure of grounded things that the project's fundamental ontology presupposes. All these problems call for a new starting point in the search for the meaning of Being. In *Contributions*, Heidegger remarks:

Through this procedure [fundamental ontology], beyng itself is apparently still made into an object, and what is reached is the most decisive opposite of what the first approach [*Being and Time*] to the question of beyng had already opened up for itself. Yet the point of *Being and Time* was indeed to expose 'time' as the domain of projection for beyng. (BZP 355)

Being and Time gets the key insight of time as the domain for the projection of Being, but precisely for this reason, it is inconsistent with its own metaphysical procedure of fundamental ontology that makes Being into an object since time is not an object.

The understanding of Being as time should awaken us to the root historicity of Being and hence its ungraspableness as an object. The insight that the meaning of Being is time should not lead to an understanding of Being as permanent presence, a fixed answer to the question of Being; rather, this insight should open a new horizon of questioning since time is not a static presence but a dynamic reality. Heidegger says, "Of course; but if the matter had rested there [finding time as the meaning of being], then the question of being would never have developed as a *question* and thus as an inventive thinking of what is most question-worthy" (BZP 355). What is needed is a further pursuit of the question of Being, but this time without the detrimental ontic baggage of beginning the inquiry with Da-sein or fundamental ontology. What then would an authentic approach to the question look like?

If the inquiry of Being is to be authentic to its “subject-matter,” one must start with the truth of Being itself. Heidegger says, “The projection of being can be thrown only by beyng itself, and for this to occur a moment of that which is ap-propriated by beyng as appropriating event, i.e., a moment of Da-sein, must be successful” (*BZP* 352). If we are to get at the truth of Being, rather than starting from Da-sein, thought must begin with Being itself. The later Heidegger shifts agency from Da-sein as the inquiring subject to Being as the self-revealing and self-concealing reality to which Da-sein is to be appropriated. But how then is thought able to understand and convey the workings of Being, if agency is relocated away from Da-sein and to Being? Heidegger answers, “The crisis [of the question of Being] could not be mastered merely by thinking further in the already established direction of questioning. Instead, a manifold leap into the essence of beyng itself had to be ventured” (*BZP* 355). What is needed is a leap, which is Heidegger’s way of expressing the discontinuous transition between metaphysical thought and the new thought beholden to the agency of Being.

Heidegger goes on to describe this new way of thinking:

That, in turn [the leap], required a more original insertion into history: the relation to the beginning, the attempt to clarify ἀλήθεια as an essential character of beingness itself, the grounding of the difference between being and beings. The thinking became ever more historical; i.e., the distinction between a historiological and a systematic consideration became ever more untenable and inappropriate. (*BZP* 355)

The new type of thinking called for by Being is a “more original insertion into history.” Though it is not fully clear what this means, it at least means letting go of representational thought:

the more steadfast in beyng this thinking becomes, the more relentlessly must it abandon every representational approximation and come to know that the task is to prepare a historical de-cision that can be endured only in a

historical way, which means that the attempt at inventive thinking must not overstep its proper historical measure, lest it relapse into a previous stage.
(BZP 355-56)

The new manner of thinking, called inventive thinking in this passage (referred to as simply “thinking” later on) is effected by taking “the leap” into Being’s ἀλήθεια (unconcealment) and tracing its specific moves throughout its history. This explains why Heidegger’s mature writings include so many commentaries on the history of philosophy, but what is still in need of clarification is Heidegger’s cryptic remark about preparing “a historical de-cision.” What exactly is this decision, and how does inventive thought’s proper “historical measure” help us arrive at this? In order to explain what this historical de-cision is, we must first examine the broader historical narrative of Being that Heidegger constructs post-*kehre* to understand what he means by this historical de-cision.

III. Being’s Narrative

From the Pre-Socratics to the Present Age of Decision

Heidegger recounts a philosophical garden of Eden story about Being where once upon a time, thinking was authentically attuned with Being, but in the course of time, a rupture fractured this primordial union. Thought ceased to recognize authentic Being and instead “idolized” an objectification of Being, the idea. It is from this fall that metaphysics is born. This “fall” into metaphysics has continued throughout the history of Western philosophy up to our current epoch, which Heidegger characterizes as an age of nihilism. Our age has so fallen into metaphysics that we are now on the verge of annihilating the planet and the human race. So who are the specific characters in this story, what is Being’s role, and how do we figure in the story?

The story begins at the inception of the Western philosophical tradition with the pre-Socratic Greeks. In this era, Being manifested itself to the Greeks as a dynamic emerging *event* of showing-forth. The name that the Greeks gave to this event was *phusis*, usually

translated as nature. Our understanding of the term “nature,” derived from the Latin *natura*, has already undergone a metaphysical modulation of meaning, which impedes us from getting at the distinct early Greek understanding of this term. For the Greeks, *phusis* meant “what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance—in short, the emerging-abiding sway.”¹² For the early Greeks, Being is an appearing, and “appearing does not mean something derivative, which from time to time meets up with Being. Being essentially unfolds as appearing” (*IM* 107). For the Greeks, Being precedes the distinction between object and subject. It is simply a making manifest or a “letting step forth from concealment” (*IM* 107).

Because Being is a movement from concealment, it can also be characterized as *aletheia* or unconcealment. In this word, the alpha privative negates the root word, *lethe*, which means oblivion, forgetting, or concealing, so the word describes an active *happening* from concealment to unconcealment. For the Greeks, “what shows itself in its sway stands in the unconcealed. The unconcealed as such comes to a stand in showing itself” (*IM* 107). Being, understood as *phusis*, is continually moving. It comes to a stand to show itself, but because of its intrinsic dynamism, it also immediately withdraws as a new movement of showing-forth is taken up. Being as *phusis* is a becoming:

becoming as ‘arising’ nevertheless belongs to *phusis*. If we understand both in a Greek manner, becoming as coming-into-presence and going-away out of presence, Being as emergence and appearing coming to presence, not-Being as absence, then the reciprocal relation between emerging and decaying is appearance, Being itself. (*IM* 121)

Heidegger links the notion of Being as appearance with Being as becoming. This notion of Being as becoming is further explained as follows:

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 15. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *IM*.

What maintains itself in becoming is, on the one hand, no longer Nothing, but on the other hand it is not yet what it is destined to be. In accordance with this 'no longer and not yet,' becoming remains shot through with not-Being. However, it is not a pure Nothing, but no longer this and not yet that, and as such, it is constantly something else. So now it looks like this, now it looks like that. It offers an intrinsically inconstant view. (*IM* 121)

Becoming is intrinsically dynamic and indeterminate.

This link between Being and becoming has important and highly relevant consequences for the later doctrine of the epochs of Being as it explains why Being is undergoing many distinct permutations throughout history. The instability of Being as becoming will also explain why Being's fall into metaphysical objectification is a necessary consequence. But before addressing these points, it is necessary to discuss one last link, that between Being and seeming, to understand how Being is both inauthentically understood in the objectification of metaphysics and yet how this very erroneous standing-forth is also part of Being's self-concealing.

So how is Being related to seeming? Heidegger explains the distinction between Being and seeming by appealing to our common use of these terms to differentiate the reality of a state of affairs and its seeming appearance. In this distinction, "seeming" refers to our initial belief of truthfulness about something that turns out to be incorrect. Colloquially, we use this distinction to distinguish the truth of some state of affairs from what appeared to be true but later turned out to be false. But Heidegger rejects the unreality that we ascribe to seeming. He argues that Being as appearing lends itself to many different vistas, just as a grand city offers many distinct vistas from different points of view, different times, and different spaces (*IM* 109). Any seeming or semblance of the city is only made possible because of the appearing of the city. The seeming is so intimately connected with the appearing that it makes no sense to relegate the seeming to non-Being. As an example, we experience the rising and setting of the sun, which in the light of modern physics is a

“seeming,” but this hardly warrants classifying this experience as nothing or untrue. Heidegger says, “This seeming is not nothing. Neither is it untrue. Neither is it a mere appearance of relations that in nature are really otherwise. This seeming is historical and it is history, uncovered and grounded in poetry and saga, and thus an essential domain of our world” (*IM* 110). If these experiences are not nothing, then they are something, and if they are something, they are within Being.

Not only is seeming not nothing, seeming is essential to Being’s self-manifestation. If Being as appearance is constituted by becoming, then there is no time in which Being is static. As Heidegger says, “It offers an intrinsically inconstant view” (*IM* 121). But the thinking of Being and the speech about Being requires some conceptualization that inevitably will “distort” the constantly moving phenomenon of Being. These “distortions” or seemings are central to our understanding of Being, as we cannot think without concepts, so seeming cannot be purely opposed to Being. Heidegger says, “Being and seeming belong together, and as belonging-together are constantly by one another, and in this by-one-another they also always proffer change from one to the other, and hence constant confusion, and hence, the possibility of aberration and mistakes” (*IM* 115). The dynamic between Being as an ever-moving flow and its conceptualization in a static seeming which contradicts this dynamic moving flow creates a situation of “constant confusion” or perpetual aberration. Yet, the belongingness of seeming to Being also shows us that this situation is also one of Being’s self-manifestation.

This explains why, though the history of Being has many different metaphysical depictions that are “erroneous,” these very concealments are also part of Being’s self-concealment. Heidegger thinks that the pre-Socratics understood this connection between seeming and Being as is evidenced by Heraclitus’ saying that “Being [emerging appearance] intrinsically inclines toward self-concealment” (*IM* 121).¹³ So if the pre-Socratics understood these connections between Being, becoming, and seeming in their concept of *phusis*, how did philosophy fall into metaphysics?

¹³ More common translation is “Nature loves to hide.”

The fall from an authentic understanding of Being took place with Plato's conceptualization of Being as *idea*. The word "*idea*" means a look or a view, but Plato focuses on two constancies in this look. First, there is the constancy of that which comes to presence in the view of what appears, "the constancy of what has come forth of itself, the constancy of *phusis*" (IM 192-93). This type of constancy, the constancy of the thatness of a being, will be the basis for the concept of existence in the philosophical tradition's contrast between existence and essence. On the other hand, Plato's *idea* also focuses on the constancy of "what comes to presence of itself, the apprehensible. In the look, that which comes to presence, that which is, stands there in its whatness and its howness" (IM 193). In other words, whereas the first constancy focused on the steady presence *that* a being exists, this second constancy focuses on the steady presence of *what* a being is, i.e., its intelligible content. This distinction, derived from Plato's *idea*, is central because from it comes the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics.

The onto-theological nature of metaphysics is the project of grounding beings in terms of an ultimate ontic ground, an ultimate Being. Not coincidentally, metaphysics thinks of this grounding project in a double sense: the ultimate Being grounds the thatness or existence of beings (the theological aspect), and also their whatness or the essence of what beings are (the ontological aspect). Heidegger says, "Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere [the whatness or ontology of beings], and also in the unity of all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest [the thatness given to beings by a theological reality]."¹⁴ This distinction, set off by Plato's *idea* and the double constancies in this concept, is what propels two millennia of objectionable metaphysics. But why is the understanding of Being as *idea* or for that matter, the ensuing onto-theological constitution of metaphysics objectionable?

Plato's *idea* is a fall from Being because this concept raises a derivative product over and above the originary phenomenon, and in so doing distorts the authentic reality of Being by

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 58.

replacing it with “an idol” in its place. Heidegger concedes that Plato’s search for constancy is a natural and unobjectionable consequence that arises from the dynamic showing-forth nature of Being: “it cannot be denied that the interpretation of Being as *idea* results from the fundamental experience of Being as *phusis*. It is, as we say, a necessary consequence of the essence of Being as *emergent shining*” (IM 194). Understanding Being as *Idea* is a necessary consequence because one can only apprehend Being in its flux nature by conceptualizing one moment in the flux, when Being comes to a momentary stand. The problem is that Plato goes farther than this natural consequence. Heidegger says,

But if that which is an essential *consequence* is raised to the level of essence itself, and thus takes the place of the essence, then how do things stand? Then there is a fall, and it must for its part generate its own distinctive consequences... What remains decisive is not the fact in itself that *phusis* was characterized as *idea*, but that the *idea* rises up as the sole and definitive interpretation of Being. (IM 194)

The original sin here is that the derivative reality (Plato’s *idea*) “rises up” to replace the underived reality (Being). Though Plato’s *idea* is an inevitable consequence, its displacement of Being as *phusis* goes beyond this natural consequence and plunges humankind from an authentic comportment with Being to an alienated existence.

Throughout Being’s history, this alienation will only increase as Being undergoes different conceptualizations in which it will be understood as a static metaphysical presence. The history of Being is arranged into epochs, which designate different conceptualizations of Being. As Heidegger explains, “Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of Being with regard to the grounding of beings” (TB 9). The word “epoch” comes from a Greek verb, *epechein*, which means to pause or hold back. What is being held back is Being in its authentic showing-forth, or “the flood-waters of

ontological historicity for a time.”¹⁵ What is presented is a metaphysical conceptualization of Being, the freezing of the ontological flood-waters in a metaphysical snapshot. In turn, this metaphysical snapshot is understood onto-theologically as the ground for beings. These epochs overlap with one another such that “Being as presence is more and more obscured in different ways” (*TB* 9). Some of the epochal sendings that conceptualize Being as a metaphysical ground include:

the *hen*, the unifying unique One, as the *logos*, the gathering that preserves the All, as *idea, ousia, energeia, substantia, actualitas, perception, monad*, as objectivity, as the being posited of self-positing in the sense of the will of reason, of love, of the spirit, of power, as the will to will in the eternal recurrence of the same (*TB* 7).

The history of Being is a history of the increasing obfuscation of Being, a history of the increased alienation of humanity from authentic reality.

The last epoch of Being in Heidegger’s list is Nietzsche’s doctrine of Being as the will to will (also called the will to power), which is a decisive period. In Nietzsche, the history of Being comes to an important crossroads. Nietzsche is the first in the history of metaphysics to question the need for a transcendent metaphysical grounding for beings. As Iain Thomson explains, “For Nietzsche, beings are only concatenations of forces in the service of human will, a will which aims ultimately only at its own unlimited self-aggrandizing increase and thus becomes nothing but ‘the will to insure the overpowering of everything’, that is, sheer ‘will to will’ (EP 64/NII 468; I & D 66/134).”¹⁶ However, Heidegger insists that Nietzsche’s thought is still tied to metaphysics. Though Nietzsche putatively renounces a transcendent grounding for beings, he really just relocates this ground to human willing. In doing so, human beings become the final arbiters of reality, but through this same movement, human beings also become the objects of the arbitrary whims of this same will. As mere

¹⁵ Iain Thomson, “Ontotheology? “Understanding Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of Metaphysics,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 3 (2000): 305.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

concatenations of forces, human beings “are thereby conceived of ultimately only as ‘raw materials’ (Bestand), resources merely to be optimally ordered and efficiently disposed of in a dangerous spiral of ‘constant overcoming.’”¹⁷ Nietzsche brings the objectification and alienation of the metaphysical tradition to its consummate fulfillment in our present age.

This age is what Heidegger characterizes as the age of technology, an age where Being is understood through the concept of enframing (*Gestell*). Enframing denotes the understanding of Being in terms of a rampant objectification, a boxing of reality into readily accessible objects for human consumption.¹⁸ Instead of the beauty, majesty, and mystery of a rainforest, enframing presents this natural wonder as a standing reserve of lumber, ready to be used for human construction projects. In this respect, Nietzsche’s metaphysics brings to fulfillment Plato’s objectification of Being as *idea*. At the same time, in questioning the transcendent grounding project of metaphysics, and by displaying the failure of all prior epochs to provide a steady onto-theological ground, Nietzsche also provides the possibility of overcoming metaphysics. By rejecting the need for a ground, Nietzsche opens up the possibility of experiencing Being apart from its function as a ground, and hence apart from its metaphysical relation to entities, an experience that even *Being and Time* failed to bring forth. Because of this possibility, Heidegger is fond of quoting Hölderlin’s saying that “But where danger is, grows the saving power also” (*QCT* 340). Nietzsche’s metaphysics opens up the possibility for experiencing Being on its own terms, but this is just a possibility that has not yet been realized.

This then is the “historical de-cision” that Heidegger speaks about in *Contributions*. Heidegger believes that, through his de-structuring of the history of philosophy, he has exposed the metaphysical character of the philosophical tradition *as* metaphysical, and hence as merely one way of conceptualizing Being. If metaphysics was only one way in which the history of Being developed, this means that there are other, more authentic ways in which Being can be thought. What is in the balance in this decision of how to think of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. William Lovitt, ed. David F. Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 325-26. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *QCT*.

Being is none other than the destiny of the West: will we in the West become a culture increasingly ruled by objectification, technological control, and nihilism? Or will we open ourselves to the mystery, wonder, and rule of Being? Late in his life, Heidegger grew increasingly pessimistic about the West's chance for salvation.¹⁹

What complicates things is that though this call for a decision seems to attribute some kind of responsible agency to human beings for their destiny, the later Heidegger also argues for a kind of Being-fatalism that is in conflict with this call for decision. While calling for a historical decision between the first beginning (metaphysics) and the other beginning (the rule of authentic Being) in *Contributions*, Heidegger also says in his Nietzsche lectures: "The decision is never first made and executed by a human being. Rather, its direction and perdurance decide about man and, in a different way, about the god."²⁰ The course of history, including the fate of human beings, is decided before any actual human decisions are made. Human destiny is so firmly decided by Being that even the fall of human beings from authentic Being is Being's own doing, its self-concealment, and human thought is bound to Being's decree. Heidegger says:

When Plato represents Being as *idea* and as the *koinonia* of the Ideas, when Aristotle represents it as *energeia*, Kant as position, Hegel as the absolute concept, Nietzsche as the will to power, these are not doctrines advanced by chance, but rather words of Being as answers to a claim which speaks in the sending concealing itself... Always retained in the withdrawing sending, Being is unconcealed for thinking with its epochal abundance of transmutations. Thinking remains bound to the tradition of the epochs of the destiny of Being, even when and especially when it recalls in what way and from what source Being itself receives its appropriate determination, from the "there is, it gives Being." (*TB* 9)

¹⁹ In a 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger said "Only a God can save us."

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David F. Krell, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 5.

Behind the epochal sendings of Being, Heidegger points to an even more primordial phenomenon “behind” Being, what he calls Appropriation (*TB* 22), which is the “there is, it gives being.” It is this event that sends the specific permutation of Being to an era, and as Heidegger says, thinking is bound to this configuration of Being. This doctrine is consistent with *Being and Time*’s emphasis on thrownness and Da-sein’s inability to escape its historical fate. But if Da-sein is bound to think within the thrown background of an epoch of Being, in what sense can we decide our fate with respect to the current epoch of nihilism and the other beginning?

In *Contributions*, Heidegger appeals to an act he calls “the leap” where Dasein is able to exercise a sort of disintegration of the self and realize its always already integration into the event of Appropriation. He says:

The leap is the leaping into a preparedness for the belonging to the event. The event, viz., the intrusion and remaining absent, advent and absconding of the gods, cannot be compelled by thinking... Only in appearance is the event something carried out by humans; actually, being human occurs as historical through the appropriation that summons Da-sein in one way or another. (*BZP* 186)

There is some level of human agency insofar as Da-sein prepares itself for the event of Appropriation, but this role is strictly confined to preparing itself to follow Being’s dictates, to prepare “the open realm which as time-space (site of the moment) makes the fissure of being accessible and endurable in Da-sein” (*BZP* 186). Even when Da-sein attempts to contradict Being, it is still working on behalf of Being’s unconcealment:

The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into the modes of revealing allotted to him. When man, in his way, from within unconcealment reveals that which presences, he merely responds to the call of unconcealment even when he contradicts it. (*QCT* 324)

If human agency is restricted to preparing itself for Being's dictates, the question remains of how Da-sein can make a genuine decision.

The key to this paradox is in understanding Heidegger's view of Da-sein's freedom. Heidegger thinks that Da-sein is constituted by freedom in its essence, but this freedom consists in following Being's dictates because to be free means to be a human *Being*. The history of philosophy has often understood freedom as a self-willed action, an action that stems from one's own agency or character. Heidegger adopts this formal definition of freedom, but reinterprets "the self" that has long been understood in the philosophical tradition as a subject, to a self that is the-there, the site of Being. As Michael Gillespie says, "When we understand this history of Being as *our* tradition, as the claim made upon us by Being, as the question that presents us with a new future and a new past, we are freed to be what we already are, freed as the place (*Da*) of the occurrence of Being (*Sein*) to be human Being (*Dasein*)."²¹ By understanding the self in this Heideggerian sense, we can see how the historical decision that Heidegger speaks about is a decision to surrender to Being, and precisely through this choice, a decision *for* freedom, for allowing Da-sein to *be* what it already *is*. It is Heidegger's understanding of freedom that allows him to reconcile his call for Da-sein's historical decision with the primacy of Being's determination of historical epochs and consequently, the determination of human beings within these historical epochs.

Critique of Heidegger

One may be left wondering whether this solution replaces genuine freedom with Being's determinism by defining away true freedom, and with it true responsibility. If this were the case, then moral responsibility would be placed in the hands of an utterly mysterious power without any recourse to rationally adjudicate its dictates. Given Heidegger's infamous political involvements, one cannot help but wonder whether it was this vision of Being's power to suspend conventional norms of ethics and reasoning and to inaugurate revolutionary epochs of history that led Heidegger to Nazi ideology.

²¹ Michael Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 162. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *HHGH*.

The danger of cases like Heidegger's involvement with Nazism is not an isolated event, but rather a direct consequence from his vision of history and Being's control of it. As Michael Gillespie explains:

History, as Heidegger understands it, does not move forward gradually and regularly but spasmodically and unpredictably. Mankind is thus not gently turned toward a new future that is among the possibilities already present in its tradition but is wrenched out of its historical world by the nothingness of Being and cast toward a new goal that is utterly alien to this tradition, a goal so alien that it requires the construction of a new tradition to make it comprehensible. It is a submission to this truly revolutionary reconstitution of the world in accord with the revelation of Being that Heidegger sees as necessary to the salvation of the earth and man's humanity. (*HHGH* 173)

As Gillespie points out, though there is submission to Being, Heidegger's vision does not entail a passive quietism. The submission Heidegger has in mind, which follows from his view of freedom, entails a "resolute action in the service of the goal that Being establishes, a service that stretches itself forward through concrete political and technological action and that stretches itself backward through a hermeneutical reconstitution of the tradition" (*HHGH* 173).

Heidegger's Being-determinism demands surrender in the form of active service toward the goal of Being, and it does so through the guise of a redefined understanding of freedom. The goal that Being establishes is radically inscrutable because Being also establishes the very norms by which any of its goals could be evaluated. Being also establishes the background of intelligibility by which human beings understand themselves, making all self-determination a Being-determination. Throughout the course of their lives, human beings' horizon of intelligibility will be fixed and limited to that which is disclosed for their historical epoch.

These dynamics negate freedom in any meaningful sense. The problem lies with Heidegger's conception of the background of intelligibility that Being provides as fixed for a historical epoch. Genuine freedom allows for the fact that one's immediate historical situation may dictate one's initial ends, but genuine freedom also entails that one can open new horizons, beyond those initially fixed by the immediate environment. If Being fully dictates one's ends, human existence is reduced to being the benign facilitator of an arbitrary power. Heidegger's notion of freedom is really a surrender of genuine freedom and responsibility. It replaces these with the call to submit to the arbitrary and contingent factual circumstances of one's historical situation, and this is what makes Heidegger's historicism so dangerous.

Without rational norms apart from those given by the arbitrary whims of Being, one is left open to the irrationalities of history and the radical evil of historical moments without the capability to judge these as such. Heidegger's call for a decision between metaphysics and the rule of Being entails that all prior standards of evaluation, in both the ethical and epistemic domains, are to be discarded in favor of the new leading of Being. But the practical result of this is that mystical intuition takes the place of rational and ethical standards, leaving the fate of history to the prophetic clairvoyance of certain chosen ones, those able to discern the leading of Being. Gillespie again captures this situation quite powerfully:

We must, in other words, first prepare ourselves for the experience of Being by purging ourselves of all past metaphysical standards and valuations, of all categories of logic, of all distinctions of natural kinds, of all our conceptions of justice and right, of freedom and necessity, of causality, indeed of every idea, structure, and institution with which we are familiar. We must come to regard these as the nihilistic manifestation of the withdrawal of Being. Second, we must then like Socrates and the medieval mystics follow Being in its withdrawal, plunge as it were into the absence of Being, into the abyss and wait there neither hoping nor despairing for the speaking of the silent sound of the revelation of Being itself. Finally, we must, then, resolutely and

appropriately respond to this revelation by submitting ourselves to the imperative that it establishes and resolutely following wherever it may lead. (HHGH 174)

And:

the experience of the abyss of Being that Heidegger believes is necessary to such a revelation destroys all metaphysics and thus all standards of judgment while at the same time fostering a state of mind that is, to say the least, 'anxious' for a new revelation and new order for human life. Having abandoned the categorical reason of metaphysics for something approaching a pure intuitionism and the orderly world of everyday experience for the terrors of the abyss, man thus is liable to fall prey to the most subterranean forces in his soul or at least is in danger of mistaking the subrational for the superrational. Here perhaps lies a clue to Heidegger's initial attraction to "the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism." (HHGH 174)

Recall that Heidegger's only path toward making the jump from beings (metaphysics) to Being is "the leap" which is not effected by a rational judgment since "the leap" is a leap away from metaphysics and its standards of reasoning. Without any rational means of checking whether one's intuitive insight is correct, one must take one's judgment that one is being led by Being as infallible since the only means of verification is one's own intuition.

The irony is that Heidegger, who thinks of himself as the thinker of human finitude, develops a vision of truth that argues against human fallibility. By discarding all evaluative standards and reducing these to one's experience of Being, human intuition becomes the ultimate norm of truth. Subjective intuitions, however, are not publicly verifiable, so in appealing to one's intuition as the ultimate norm of truth and goodness, one is *de facto* making oneself infallible. Heidegger will insist that it is not human beings, that it is the unconcealing activity of Being that discloses truth, but as Gillespie points out, there is simply no way to know this apart from a deep and resolute confidence that remains

unverifiable (*HHGH* 170). Heidegger's epistemology reduces to a foot-stomping dogmatism that takes its experience of Being as inscrutable, thus elevating human intuition beyond the rational and ethical norms that could actually check the self-conceit and grandiosity of our intuition.

Another difficulty in Heidegger's narrative of Being is that it presumes to know more than Heideggerian ontology allows. Heidegger frequently speaks about the decision between the first beginning (metaphysics) and the other beginning (the rule of Being), and how following the rule of Being leads to salvation.²² But given his characterization of Being's epochal transformations and its propensity to self-conceal as much as to unconceal, his promise of salvation is groundless. There is simply no way of knowing that Being's next transformation (after the age of nihilism) is a salutary one for human beings. Why think that following the rule of Being will lead to a salvific epoch as opposed to an epoch of deeper nihilism or perhaps even absolute destruction? There is no basis, given the protean character of Being that following its rule leads to salvation. To think this is to presume to know the next epoch of Being, but this is inconsistent with the radical historicity of Being.

Why then does Heidegger presume that following Being's rule leads one to a return to a more authentic and non-objectified relation? The insistence that the return to Being is salutary could merely be Heidegger's projected desire. Without rational standards to verify otherwise, there is nothing to preclude Heidegger's ontology from merely being the projected wishes of a countryside villager, longing for simpler times. Heidegger's vision may be nothing more than the parochial and atavistic yearning for the past of a man enamored with the ancients, with nature, with the simple rural life, and wary of the technological changes that disturbed his countryside sensibilities. The control over nature and the world that Heidegger continuously decries could merely be the complaint of a man privileged with sufficient technological control in his life to give him the leisure time to

²² See for example Heidegger's commentary on Hölderlin's statement in *The Question Concerning Technology* that "But where danger is, grows the saving power also." Heidegger says "'To save' is to fetch something home into its essence, in order to bring the essence for the first time into its proper appearing" (*QCT* 333). For this reason, coming to an authentic attunement with Being leads to salvation, i.e., bringing one's essence "for the first time into its proper appearing."

reflect and not be overly burdened with meeting life's basic necessities. Yet, this same technological control that Heidegger derides is a dream for billions who do not have this control, who cannot meet basic life necessities like having proper nutrition, shelter, safety, or having full use of their bodily functions, who would in an instant better their life with the technological control that Heidegger derides.

In addition to the fatalistic consequences of the history of Being, the doctrine's lack of justification, and its susceptibility to parochial projections, there is an even deeper problem concerning how Being's narrative is cast as a *falling* from authenticity. The problem is that Heidegger's ontology eliminates the possibility of making normative judgments like *falling*, but Heidegger still uses this normative notion and many others. For Heidegger, truth is fundamentally about unconcealment and only derivatively (and inauthentically) about correctness. Nevertheless, Heidegger thinks of metaphysics—its historical inception in Plato and its culmination in Nietzsche's nihilism—in normative terms as dangerous, an illusion, false, nihilistic, and obfuscating of the most primordial reality of Being. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he says: "But in the interpretation of Being as *idea*, not only is an essential consequence *falsified* into the essence itself, but this *falsification* is misinterpreted yet again—and this, too, happens in the course of Greek experience and interpretation [italics are mine]" (*IM* 195-96). In *Question Concerning Technology*, when Heidegger speaks of enframing, the mode of being ushered in by the technological age, he uses the normatively laden language of supreme danger:

Yet when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the *supreme danger*. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. [italics are mine] (*QCT* 332)

Heidegger also describes enframing as having lower degrees of truth, and he even

characterizes it as a delusion and illusion: “The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a *more original* revealing and hence to experience the call of a *more primal* truth” [italics are mine] (QCT 333). And:

Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This *illusion* gives rise in turn to *one final delusion*: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. [italics are mine] (QCT 332)

As these quotes show, Heidegger freely uses the language of falsity, illusion, and danger in his value judgments against the metaphysical tradition.

The problem is that Heidegger also claims that the “false” appearances of Being, manifested in Being’s metaphysical epochs, are not only the doing of Being itself,²³ but also express Being itself: “Being is unconcealed for thinking with its epochal abundance of transmutations”(TB 9). Heidegger claims not only that these “false” seemings of Being are produced by Being, these “false” seemings *are* actual manifestations of Being. Recall that in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger explained that seeming is also Being: “This seeming is not nothing. Neither is it untrue. Neither is it a mere appearance of relations that in nature are really otherwise” (IM 110). Because Being as *phusis* is emerging appearance, it makes no sense to say that seeming is an untrue appearance because mirages and illusions come to appear just as much as “veridical” perceptions. Seeming is “not nothing” and not “untrue” and Heidegger warns that “we must guard ourselves against cavalierly taking seeming as something just ‘imaginary,’ ‘subjective,’ and thereby falsifying it” (IM 110). Seeming belongs intrinsically to Being such that “Being and seeming belong together, and as belonging-together are constantly by one another” (IM 115). In *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger argues that Being’s concealment, i.e, its seemings or what common sense would call “false appearances,” actually preserves truth. He says:

²³ Some of Heidegger’s later writings will lay claim to “Appropriation” as an even more primordial source behind the sending of Being.

Concealment deprives *alētheia* of disclosure yet does not render it *sterēsis* (privation); rather, concealment preserves what is most proper to *alētheia* as its own. Considered with respect to truth as disclosedness, concealment is then undisclosedness and accordingly the untruth that is most proper to the essence of truth."²⁴

Concealment or seeming is a mode in which Being reveals itself as it is what is "most proper" to truth. Heidegger also says, "the 'non-' of the primordial nonessence of truth, as untruth, points to the still un-experienced domain of the truth of Being (not merely of beings)" (*WW* 131).

What we have then is a profound contradiction at the heart of Heidegger's ontology of truth. On the one hand, he wants to indict the metaphysical age with conventionally normative language, describing this era as "false," "inauthentic," "less original," a "delusion." On the other hand, he wants to say that Being's concealments (its untruth) are "most proper to the essence of truth." If this is the case, and if enframement constitutes a concealing of Being as Heidegger claims, then enframement should also be that which is "most proper to the essence of truth." Heidegger's own ontology of truth pulls the rug out from under him and leaves him with no basis to critique enframement or any other metaphysical age as having any less truth than any other epoch. Nevertheless, Heidegger still critiques this orientation as "false" "inauthentic" "less true" "less original" and less "primal." But the identification of falsity requires a normative standard by which instances that do not meet this standard can be identified as such. Heidegger's problem is that he includes *both* the unconcealment *and* concealment of Being into this standard, making the differentiation between truth and falsity meaningless. If all metaphysical epochs constitute what is most proper to truth, then there is no sense in which they can also be further away from the truth, be less primal, or less authentic, given that truth is understood as the

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Basic Writings*, trans. John Sallis, ed. David F. Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 130. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *WW*.

emerging appearance of Being's unconcealment *and* concealment.

Though Heidegger critiques the understanding of truth as correctness, he himself vacillates between using the concept of truth as unconcealment and using the concept of truth as correctness, particularly when critiquing metaphysics. The use of truth as correctness allows one to talk about things missing the mark, or being false, inauthentic, or less revealing of primal truth. But Heidegger's ontology does not think of primordial truth as correctness but as unconcealment. Heidegger argues that the concept of truth as correctness is a product of Plato's "false" metaphysical inversion where the genuine reality of Being as *phusis* is relegated to the realm of fleeting appearances and conversely, Being's visage is elevated to primal reality. After this inversion, appearances came to be understood as likenesses that never reach their ideal prototypes. Metaphysics came to judge appearances as real only insofar as they approximate their prototypes: "The truth of *phusis*—*aletheia* as the unconcealment that essentially unfolds in the emerging sway—now becomes *homoiosis* and *mimesis*: resemblance, directedness, the correctness of seeing, the correctness of apprehending as representing" (*IM* 197). For Heidegger, this transformation of truth from unconcealment to correctness is a "falsity." The problem is that in understanding the fall from Being to *idea*, Heidegger cannot but help himself to this "faulty" understanding of truth as correctness with his use of concepts like falsity, inauthentic, and less revealing.

Thus, there is a contradiction between what Heidegger says is ultimately true (unconcealment) and the notion of truth that he actually uses (correctness) in explicating his theory. If Heidegger wants to dissolve the idea of truth as correctness, he has to pay the ontological consequences of not being able to use the concept of falsity, but he is inconsistent on this point. As much as he may rail against truth as correctness, he implicitly endorses this concept of truth by using it. What we thus see in Heidegger's inconsistent use of truth is that Tugendhat's critique of truth as disclosedness continues to haunt Heidegger, but now on the cosmic level of the history of Being. Given Heidegger's doctrine of seeming as Being, his doctrine of truth as unconcealment and not correctness, and his doctrine of Being's revealing itself through its dual activity of both unconcealing and self-concealing,

there simply is no basis for Heidegger to meaningfully distinguish between authentic and inauthentic or truth and falsity. Heideggerian ontology dictates that Being just appears, and to categorize some of these appearances as more revealing than others is just a product of metaphysical thought.

The final objection will bring together the prior two critiques made into what I hope to be a holistic objection that addresses the heart of Heidegger's project. Heidegger's ultimate goal is to think of Being in an authentic fashion. Whereas metaphysics had thought of Being in terms of objective presence, a steady foundation, and a reliable object of knowledge, Heidegger's ontology introduces a new attempt to think Being not in terms of presence but in terms of time. Specifically, the later Heidegger thinks of Being as concrete time, which is history, so that Being becomes synonymous with the history of Being. Being is not a *fundamentum inconcussum*; it is a dynamic emerging presence that unconceals and self-conceals into a variety of different historical epochs where each historical epoch has a dominant manner of thinking of Being, whether it is *idea, ousia, energeia, perceptio, monad* etc., and as Heidegger says in *Time and Being*, human thought is bound to these epochs (TB 9).

But given the historically contextual strictures of thought, Heidegger's project is self-defeating because it claims to give an account of Being that transcends these epochs. Heidegger's history of Being is an inter-epochal universal account of Being in the Western tradition, and not a historically restricted epochal understanding of Being that is no more valid than any other epochal understandings of Being. Heidegger's project brings together all historical epochs into a cohesive metanarrative of a pristine origin, fall, decline, height of decline, and the possibility of salvation/ultimate destruction. Heidegger's project does not confine itself to the limits of understanding of our present horizon, but rather tells us the meaning of every other historical horizon, the meaning of the narrative's pre-history (Being's status prior to the fall), and a vision of the authentic future that lies before us. Heidegger's project is ensnared in a contradiction between 1) the limitations of the historicity of knowledge that he posits and 2) the universal scope and inter-epochal validity that Heidegger presumes for his account of the history of Being.

Heidegger is also vulnerable to being accused of hubris. Like Hegel, Heidegger could defend himself by saying that his philosophy is not the result of his individual genius but that the time itself is ripe for his discovery. In many of his writings, Heidegger makes exactly this point—that our age’s Nietzschean refusal to anchor beings to a deeper ground leads both to a heightened objectification of all that is but also to the possibility of salvation in once again conceiving of Being apart from an onto-theological frame of reference. So our time itself is ripe to think Being authentically, and Heidegger and Hölderlin are Being’s prophets from the future that *Contributions* calls “the future ones.”

But what is missing in this self-designation is a historically grounded self-criticism that Heidegger freely deploys in assessing other historical epochs apart from his own. For a thinker who is highly sensitive to the historically situated nature of thought, Heidegger does not reflect on the historically situated nature of his own thought and how this may affect the veracity of the metanarrative of Being that he provides. We have already discussed the biographical factors in Heidegger’s life that show how his deepest intellectual concerns are connected with his parochial biography of a German intellectual who nevertheless grew up and identified with the simple life of a black forest villager.

But putting aside this psychologistic critique (which Heidegger is not immune to because he dissolves rational criteria for judging truth), it is very difficult to see why Heidegger’s metanarrative is not just another historical epoch in the history of Being which will pass away in due time, and which future thinkers can look back as just another way that Being decided to conceal itself in the early to mid twentieth century. To be sure, Heidegger vehemently denies that his own project is just another fleeting historical epoch. In *Time and Being* Heidegger argues that to think of his most primordial concept of Appropriation [the “it gives” which gives Being] as another epochal concept would be to place it back into metaphysics. Heidegger insists that Appropriation as the ultimate source transcends metaphysics, so it is beyond the ordinary epochal permutations of Being (*TB* 21). Heidegger defends his project as true, beyond the ephemeral changes of the history of

Being because his project reaches beyond the protean level of Being and into the heart of the matter of reality.

But as much as Heidegger insists on this, he has no grounds to assert this, given his emphasis on human finitude and the finitude of thought, his denial of truth as correctness, his denial of eternal truth, and his obfuscation of the line between appearance and reality. If universal validity is incompatible with the radical historicity of Being, then Heidegger has no right to affirm the universal validity of his notion of Appropriation as holding true beyond the historical epoch in which he is situated. Heidegger offers a relativistic ontology, but then transgresses the limits of this ontology by helping himself to traditional notions of truth as eternal, universally binding, and distinct from error whenever he appeals to the truth of Being as a dynamic emerging event that is mischaracterized by metaphysics. And then, when he helps himself to the eternality of truth in contradiction to the limits dictated by his ontology, he has nothing to ground his conventional use of truth other than his intuitionism. Heidegger can assure us that he has made the leap, but that is about it. Those wishing for evidence beyond Heidegger's personal judgment, which does not have the most pristine record, will be disappointed.

The later Heidegger's increased emphasis on the historicity of Being fares no better for solving the problem of historicism than *Being and Time's* solution. By dissolving away normativity into historical facticity, Heidegger inevitably ensnares himself in performative contradictions whenever he attempts to speak of falsity, thus rendering his own ontology incoherent and leaving the issue of historicism and normativity as an outstanding question.

IV. Heidegger's Linguistic Turn

A Development in Concreteness

Having examined Heidegger's direct confrontation with the question of history, and having looked at his account of Being as history, it may seem abrupt now to examine Heidegger's account of Being as language. At least, this may be so if one is mostly familiar with the

philosophy of language in the analytic tradition, which does not have a reputation for historical sensibilities. For that matter, Heidegger's own account of Being as the history of Being is not always well integrated with his account of Being as language. But I wish to argue that the two accounts, Being as history and Being as language, are intimately connected because Being as language is a further concretization of Being as history.

Previously, we saw how Heidegger moved along this same direction of further concreteness in his transition from *Being and Time* to his writings on the history of Being. Recall that *Being and Time* mostly focused on explicating Dasein's temporal structures while also leaving us with a promissory note of how the historicity of Da-sein is "just a more concrete development of temporality" (BT 350). This kernel in *Being and Time* becomes Heidegger's central organizing thought in his later writings as he shows how temporality concretely manifests itself in all the distinct epochs of Being's history. In like manner, I want to suggest that Heidegger's turn to language is a further development in this trajectory of increasing concreteness. While Being's epochal manifestations are how history unfolds, language is the concrete means by which Being makes an epoch intelligible. As such, language has a disclosive role, a world-constituting function. But insofar as it has this role, language, like Being, cannot be understood ontically, as a tool or instrument by which something is accomplished. Language, like Being, is that in virtue of which things become intelligible, it is the condition for the possibility of the disclosure of a thing *as a thing*. In fact, it is very difficult to show a precise differentiation between Being and language as I will soon show.

Before doing this, I need to explain why it is important to look at Heidegger's treatment of language in a project about historicism. Examining the identification of Being as the history of Being and Being as language is important because it is a broadening of the scope of the issue of historicism. Prior to the linguistic turn, the relativism of historicism was confined to distinct historical eras. The source of relativism in historicism is the advance of time, and subsequently the change of conceptual paradigms that is introduced with the advent of new historical vistas through which phenomena are examined. Now, with the linguistic turn that occurs with the connection of Being, history, and language, the prior source of

relativism is expanded to include not just time, but also linguistic culture, and specifically, distinct linguistic communities.

If language discloses a world, then different linguistic communities will disclose distinct worlds, and if the rootedness of the disclosure that language effects is fundamental to a community's very standards for intelligibility, then different linguistic communities will have incommensurably distinct intelligible standards. As we saw with the performative contradictions that Heidegger ensnares himself in his history of Being ontology, whether something is judged as true depends upon a standard by which this truth is judged, but if there are multiple and distinct standards for what is true, there will also be multiple truths or realities. Thus, the turn to language is an important step in the development of historicism because it broadens the scope of the problem to the contemporary axis of culture. Hence, my goal in this chapter is to show how the linguistic turn is an organic and natural development from Heidegger's history of Being. To begin showing this development, I will try to show how Heidegger characterizes Being in his mature work *Time and Being* and how he is led to the more foundational concept of Appropriation as a more primordial reality behind Being. Once I show this development to Appropriation, I next will show how this concept connects with Heidegger's description of language in his essays *On the Way to Language* and *The Nature of Language*.

The Development from Being to Appropriation

Time and Being is a particularly useful work because in it, Heidegger details a succinct summary of the development of his thought on Being, from *Being and Time* to his latest views about Being as Appropriation. In this work, Heidegger explains how Being has traditionally been understood as presencing while "presencing speaks of the present" (*TB* 2). The present, along with the future and the past, speaks of time, so that "Being is determined as presence by time" (*TB* 2). But the kind of presence of Being is unlike the presence of everyday objects. While a lecture hall *is*, i.e., while the "lecture hall" has a material correspondence to an actual lecture hall, the "*is*" has no equivalently corresponding material object with which it is paired (*TB* 3). Heidegger says, "But where in

the whole lecture hall do we find the 'is'? Nowhere among things do we find Being. Every thing has its time. But Being is not a thing, is not in time" (*TB 3*).

This leads us to examine the presence, or the temporal determination of Being and of everyday objects, i.e., beings. Temporal objects are perishable. They come into presence and go out of presence (*TB 3*). But even more so than objects, time itself also passes away. In fact, time passes away continually as that is its nature, so that "by passing away constantly, time remains as time. To remain means: not to disappear, thus, to presence" (*TB 3*). Time's unique way of presencing is to pass away. The insight accomplished here is that while Being is determined by time as a kind of presence, time, in virtue of continually passing away, is determined as persisting Being. But like Being, time's way of presencing is not found to be something like a thing (*TB 3*). There is both a reciprocal determination between Being and time, and a similar way of presencing insofar as Being and time's kind of presencing is unlike a thing's presencing. Yet Being is not a temporal object (since it is not a thing) and time is not a being (since it is not an ontic thing). Things are, but Being and time are not (at least not in the same way of presencing as ontic things). Heidegger says "Being and time determine each other reciprocally, but in such a manner that neither can the former—Being—be addressed as something temporal nor can the latter—time—be addressed as a being" (*TB 3*).

What then is the connection between Being and time? Heidegger says, "Being and Time name a matter at stake from which both Being and time first result" (*TB 4*). But surely the matter at stake cannot be a being, since we just established that Being and Time *are not*, that is to say, they are not ontic objects: "We do not say: Being is, time is, but rather: there is [*es gibt*] Being and there is time" (*TB 4-5*). From the grammatical construction *es gibt* Heidegger takes this as a clue that there must exist an even more primordial phenomenon behind Being and time, the *es* of the *es gibt* [it gives], which gives both Being and time. But again, this "it" should be not understood as an ontic object, but rather as the giving of presence itself, the giving that is a gifting that brings to openness, to unconcealment (*TB 5*).

From this point, Heidegger goes on to speak about how this presencing of the *es gibt* includes a presencing of absence. This presencing shows itself as an abundance of distinct configurations in the history of Being (*TB 7*), i.e., the so-called epochs of Being, but throughout all these different transformations of presencing, no one including the pre-Socratics, thematized the *es gibt* that gives the presencing. The *es gibt* has concealed itself behind the particular manner of presencing that it makes available to thinkers throughout the history of philosophy: “In the beginning of Western thinking, Being is thought, but not the ‘it gives’ as such. The latter withdraws in favor of the gift which It gives. That gift is thought and conceptualized from then on exclusively as Being with regard to beings” (*TB 8*). Heidegger makes much about this withdrawal of Being as it appears that a certain concealment of Being is a necessary product of its unconcealment. The very word that he uses to characterize the eras of Being *epoche* means to hold back, so it seems like Being is intrinsically two-faced, a concealed unconcealing which unconceals a particular configuration of Being while simultaneously concealing the *es gibt* from which this unconcealed presence arises. But Heidegger claims that he is the first to think through the character of the *es gibt*, which has heretofore been concealed from all Western thinkers. So what characterizes this mysterious *es gibt*?

In asking this question, we must resist the temptation to look for a thing with respect to the *es gibt*. Instead, the giving of the *es gibt* is the giving of Being in the series of epochal transmutations (*TB 17*). This sending of Being proceeds through an interplay of concealing and unconcealing and together, these modes extend an “opening up which gives all presencing into the open” (*TB 17*). The giving of the *es gibt* is that which determines the specific configuration of Being in an epochal transmutation, and insofar as Being and time are co-determining of each other, the giving of the *es gibt* also determines the specific configuration of time. Having clarified the giving of the *es gibt*, Heidegger is now ready to give it a name. He says, “What determines both, time and Being, in their own, that is, in their belonging together, we shall call: *Ereignis*, the event of Appropriation. *Ereignis* will be translated as Appropriation or event of Appropriation” (*TB 19*). The unique event character of Appropriation should be understood as that which makes any event possible (*TB 19*). Appropriation then is the source from which the sending of Being happens, and this

sending is characterized through both a presencing of an openness but also through a concealing of the source of sending (*TB 22*). Heidegger says:

to giving as sending there belongs keeping back—such that the denial of the present and the withholding of the present, play within the giving of what has been and what will be. What we have mentioned just now—keeping back, denial, withholding—shows something like a self-withdrawing, something we might call for short: withdrawal. But inasmuch as the modes of giving that are determined by withdrawal—sending and extending—lie in Appropriation, withdrawal must belong to what is peculiar to the Appropriation. (*TB 22*)

These claims about a dual concealing/revealing dynamic in the source of Being may sound cryptic and paradoxical, so it is important to clarify them as this dynamic is fundamental to the whole of Heidegger's later thought and it will also be important for understanding his remarks on language. As such, it is worth spending a bit of time clarifying this.

Mark Wrathall has sketched a taxonomy of the various levels of concealing and unconcealing in Heidegger's work and explains how these two modes of Being are related to one another. Though Wrathall's work focuses on truth (*aletheia*), my main interest in his analysis is to understand the event of Appropriation and how the concealing/revealing dynamic is central to it. Wrathall proposes that there are four levels or "planks" of unconcealment and subsequently concealment, given that unconcealment is a privative form of concealment. The first and least revealing level of unconcealment is propositional truth. Propositional truth comes about when a speaker's assertion orients itself successfully to that of which it speaks.²⁵ The successful propositional articulation of a state of affairs is a bringing out into the open a pre-predicative comportment wherein "the world is experienced in a way that lacks determinacy, i.e., propositional articulation" (*U 344*). But

²⁵ Mark Wrathall, "Unconcealment," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 338. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *U*.

this kind of propositional unconcealing is only made possible by our pre-predicative orientation to the world wherein entities are discovered in such a way that they can subsequently be spoken of in propositional terms. When one engages in propositional unconcealing, one shifts focus from the pre-propositional mode of discovery to the propositional form of understanding. Propositional speech makes one foreground the propositional aspect of reality while putting in the background the pre-predicative comportment to reality. This dynamic shows us how a certain level of unconcealment (the propositional) can simultaneously conceal a different level of Being (the pre-predicative entity).

This brings us to the second plank of unconcealment which is the uncoveredness of entities. Entities only come to be recognized as entities when they are understood as meaningful entities. In turn, meaning only inheres in the referential totalities that *Being and Time* addressed when speaking of the worlds presupposed by tools, i.e., (a hammer presupposes nails, which in turn presupposes objects to hammer, which presuppose living rooms, houses, people with needs for shelter etc.). These meaningful referential totalities ultimately presuppose a Da-sein with practical purposes that then engages in comporting relations with entities in order to fulfill these practical purposes. Hence, an entity is unconcealed or lit up when one approaches it in a comporting relation within a referential totality that allows the entity to become meaningful. Conversely, an entity is concealed when one cannot comport oneself to it, “when it is not available as something toward which I can direct myself in a basic intentional comportment” (*U* 346). In other words, when an entity is outside of the structure of meaning within which one comports toward things, the entity becomes lost so to speak. As an example, Wrathall speaks of listening to a symphony with absolutely no understanding of symphonic form, “I might be able to hear beautiful music, but I couldn’t hear it *as* a symphony” (*U* 346).

Level two unconcealment is closely tied to the level of concealment appropriate to discovering entities. That is to say, if entities are discovered by our comportment to them, then entities are also concealed by our lack of an ability to comport with them, due to a lack of knowledge, skill, and practical understanding. For example, when a surgeon opens a

body to perform surgery, she sees things—organs, tissues, vessels—and has the technical know-how to see these entities as meaningful in a way that an average person does not. This ability to “see” or unconceal requires many years of training and schooling to uncover previously covered over entities. Before this training that allows one to have the relevant referential totality of meaning for organs, most of the entities in this medical realm would have been concealed. In addition to this type of concealment that arises from a lack of an ability to comport with entities, there is also another type of concealment that one effects when one comports with entities in a given referential totality. This other type of concealment will lead us to Wrathall’s level three unconcealment.

When one understands entities by comporting to them within a given referential totality, one also precludes the possibility of understanding them in other ways, at least for the moment when engaged with them. For example, when a surgeon is comporting with organs within the referential totality of meaning of the medical world, she is also simultaneously concealing the manifestation of these human organs as entities from the referential totality of augury. Augury is one of many referential totalities within which one can interpret phenomena. So long as one operates within local levels of referential totalities of meaning, one continues to operate in level two unconcealment/concealment. But when one goes beyond a local standard of intelligibility and engages in a global schema, then one reaches level three unconcealment/concealment. This global schema of intelligibility is what Heidegger calls the Being of beings. The truth or intelligibility of an entity is dependent upon the standard of intelligibility within which an entity can be judged as the entity that it is. But level three unconcealment refers not just to the local standard of intelligibility, but the global one. As Katherine Withy explains, “The key to identifying... plank three is to recognize that, at this level, what is in question is not the individual standards for counting as this or that but the entire contexture of these. Standards, norms, essences—these never occur or operate individually but only ever as part of a whole.”²⁶

²⁶ Katherine Withy, “Concealing and Concealment in Heidegger,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 25:4 (2017): 1501, doi: 10.1111/ejop.12236.

Now, what does concealment at plank three consist in? The unconcealment of a global standard of intelligibility (the Being of beings), which is usually dominant in a historical period, precludes the positing of other global standards of intelligibility. Wrathall gives an example of how gold is understood in the modern period versus the medieval period. According to modern chemistry, gold is an element with an atomic number of 79. This at least is how our epoch of Being, ruled by the technological drive to order resources, is disposed to classify gold because this kind of classification allows us to order gold as a resource. Our epoch picks out just that feature in gold that is consonant with our pre-understanding of Being, i.e., the global standard of intelligibility operating in the background of our practices (*U* 354). However, the medieval mindset operated under a different standard of intelligibility. For the medieval age, the most salient feature of what made anything real was how closely its being approximated the real Being of God. In light of this standard, gold is classified as the most noble of metals, because its most salient feature is its nearness to God (*U* 354).

This example shows us both what unconcealment at level three is, in terms of how the Being of beings discloses a certain world to us, and it also can show us what concealment at plank three might consist of. When one global standard of intelligibility is operative, its effectiveness for guiding behavior depends upon the standard itself being concealed from sight as a global standard. That is to say, for people within the medieval era, they did not classify gold as the noblest of metals with an explicit understanding that this classification was contingent on the operation of one standard of intelligibility (nearness to God as standard for reality) out of many other possible standards of intelligibility. The medieval standard of intelligibility is operative precisely because it conceals its contingent status as one of many other possible standards. For the medieval period, their standard of intelligibility is operative precisely because it excludes other standards, and in excluding these other standards, the true protean nature of Being is also concealed. Likewise, in our modern technological age, we classify gold atomically because we pick out that feature of gold that is consonant with the operative background of intelligibility most ascendant in our technological era—the understanding of Being as the standing reserve of resources (*U* 354). Apart from this scientific classification, other ways of classifying gold are unthinkable

to us because the background standard of intelligibility in our era grips us as *the* standard and thus conceals its contingency as one possibility among many others. Wrathall explains that the necessity with which our current global standard grips us is not a coincidence; the standard *must* do this if it is to act as an effective operative standard. The moment it loses its grip on us as the true standard, its effectiveness to bind our conceptualizations of things in accordance to it is also lost (U 354). This then is the play of concealment/unconcealment at plank three.

When one becomes aware of a global standard of intelligibility *as* one among many possible global standards that vary historically, one reaches plank four unconcealment. Plank four unconcealment is the most global level of intelligibility. Wrathall believes this level is what Heidegger identifies as the clearing (*Lichtung*). When the Being of beings opens a world, it also conceals other possible configurations of Being. Moreover, this process plays itself out in history such that Being befalls given time periods under distinct configurations in distinct historical epochs. As the most primordial level of unconcealment/concealment, this event is what Heidegger calls Appropriation, which he describes as the source for Being's sendings. With Wrathall's explanation of how the unconcealment of a global standard of intelligibility takes effect through the dimming of all other possible standards, we can now understand how Appropriation is an event in which Being is sent through a dynamic process that conceals its contingent status as one possibility among others while simultaneously revealing a given configuration of Being for an epoch.

Having gone through these four levels of unconcealment, we can now understand why the new category of Appropriation was needed (in addition to Being) and also why Being necessarily operates in the dual mode of concealing/unconcealing. *Being and Time* stops with Wrathall's level three unconcealment. *Being and Time* speaks about propositional truth, the discovery of entities, and even the worlding of the world, but it does not address the distinct sendings of Being in history. This new element is a feature of Heidegger's later thought which radicalizes the historical element that was nascent in *Being and Time*. In Heidegger's later thought, Being is no longer merely *one* structural whole that orders reality, but a set of structural wholes that vary across historical epochs, so the new term

“Appropriation” is used to refer to this meta-Being reality. Appropriation is the most primordial structure, and as Wrathall’s work shows, the subsequent sendings of Being operate in a dynamic of self-concealing/unconcealing. This is so because the operational efficacy of any one world depends upon its ability to exclusively grip people as to the universal “truth” of its permutation of Being. But insofar as it grips people on this truth, it conceals the fact that this truth is just one of many permutations of Being.

Understanding the development of the concept of Being to Appropriation is crucial because when Heidegger makes the linguistic turn, he will describe language with many of the attributes that he attributes elsewhere to Appropriation including the self-concealing/unconcealing dynamic of the worlding of worlds. My goal is to marshal this textual evidence to support my claim that there is a consistent trajectory of increasing concreteness in Heidegger’s thought, from his turn from abstract temporality to the history of Being, and then from the history of Being to the even more concretized domain of language. Showing this linguistic turn is important because it shows how the problem of historicism develops from a relativism that spans historical epochs to a relativism that spans the plurality of linguistic communities. With these considerations in mind, I shall now turn to Heidegger’s understanding of Being as language.

Being as Language

The seeds for Heidegger’s linguistic turn can be seen as early as 1944 in his essay, *Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)*. In this work, Heidegger begins by exploring the meaning of the Greek infinitive, *legein*, to speak, from which the noun *logos* is derived. Like *phusis*, *logos* is a key word in the Heideggerian vocabulary because it signals one of the first ways that the pre-Socratics thought of Being. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger tells us that *logos* had an originary connection to *phusis* (*IM* 130). For Heraclitus, *logos* signified 1) that which is constant and lasting and 2) that which “essentially unfolds as the Together in beings... that which gathers,” and 3) that which holds sway in coming into Being (*IM* 135). In our technological epoch, *logos* is used as a suffix to denote the study of a plurality of subjects from *biology*, *psychology*, to *geology* among others. *Logos* is also the etymological foundation for logic. The plurality of meanings for *logos* ranges from speech, account, and

thought to reason. But contrary to the kind of technological connotations that this word has come to convey, (which for Heidegger is a degeneration in meaning), *logos* as used by the pre-Socratics used to signify much more than logic or the mere vocalization of speech. *Logos* and its infinitive, *legein*, had a much more authentic orientation to Being, a meaning that has been buried by the metaphysical tradition.

In the *Logos* essay, Heidegger defines the infinitive, *legein*, as “the laying-down and laying-before which gathers itself and others,”²⁷ where the gathering is “the sense of bringing-together-into-lying-before” (L 61). Heidegger clarifies: “But gathering is more than mere amassing. To gathering belongs a collecting which brings under shelter” (L 61). So there is a connection between laying-down and a gathering which brings under shelter, and then there is a further connection between this gathering and unconcealment: “What lies together before us is stored, laid away, secured and deposited in unconcealment, and that means sheltered in unconcealment. By letting things lie together before us, λέγειν undertakes to secure what lies before us in unconcealment” (L 62-3). Heidegger seeks to weave his ontology of truth into the meaning of *legein* such that from laying-before he is able to connect unconcealment (truth). This original meaning that brings together laying, gathering, and unconcealing is the source for the later meaning of *legein* as speaking or talking since “Saying and talking occur essentially as the letting-lie-together-before of everything which, laid in unconcealment, comes to presence” (L 63). Thus, we can begin to see how *legein* and subsequently spoken language is related to Being: *legein* as the laying-down which gathers itself into lying before brings that which it shelters into unconcealment, into presence or Being.

Spoken language is the derivative product of this primordial gathering of *legein* which presences the unconcealment of Being. Heidegger makes this connection explicit in the following: “For, like the letting-lie-before that gathers, saying receives its essential form from the unconcealment of that which lies together before us. But the unconcealing of the

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Krell and Frank Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 60. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *L*.

concealed into unconcealment is the very presencing of what is present. We call this the Being of beings” (L 64). Key in this quote is Heidegger’s argument that language receives its essential determination from this primordial laying and not from vocalization or signification (L 64). Signification and vocalization may be aspects of language, but it is a derivative product of primordial language for “Saying is a letting-lie-together-before which gathers and is gathered” (L 64). The essence of language is to be thought from the essence of Being, and this connection is so intimate that Heidegger thinks of primordial language as identical with the Being of beings: “For ὁ Λόγος is the name for the Being of beings” (L 77). Here, in the *Logos* essay, we see Heidegger’s first step in rethinking the nature of language to primordial language, from a semiotic system of vocalization to Being itself as the primordial event of unconcealing.

Thirteen years later after the *Logos* essay, Heidegger continues to develop his view on language in *The Nature of Language* (1957-58) and *The Way to Language* (1959) where he elaborates how Being presences itself as language. In *The Nature of Language*, Heidegger reflects on the last line of a poem that says, “Where word breaks off no thing may be.”²⁸ Contrary to an instrumentalist view that sees language as a tool for labeling things with names, Heidegger thinks of language as not just having the capacity to designate and refer to things, but more fundamentally, allowing for the very possibility of showing forth things as things. The impoverished view of language as a mere instrument is a product of metaphysical thought that can only conceive of things as instruments for human purposes, but in actuality, language provides not only the designative ability, but the intelligibility to see objects as the particular kinds of objects that we understand them to be. Heidegger explains, “something *is* only where the appropriate and therefore competent word names a thing as being, and so establishes the given being as a being... The being of anything that is resides in the word. Therefore this statement holds true: Language is the house of Being” (NL 63). Language is the house of Being because it is the laying-down-laying-before-gathering that shows forth things into unconcealment. Language is that sheltering that gathers things together to allow them to become visible for all to see.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Nature of Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: First Harper & Row, 1982), 60. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *NL*.

To this insight, Heidegger adds that insofar as language illumines an intelligible world wherein human beings can think, language shows itself as a phenomenon that is not produced by human agency. As the condition that produces human intelligibility, language discloses the environment within which human agency is first elicited to act. Language is a kind of Kantian *a priori* that precedes all of our thinking, acting, and experiencing. Even our reflections on language itself are only made possible through language. For this reason, Heidegger argues that language is always already ahead of us:

if we want to inquire into the being of language, then that which is called nature or being must also be already granted to us. Inquiry and investigation here and everywhere require the prior grant of whatever it is they approach and pursue with their queries. Every posing of every question takes place within the very grant of what is put in question. (NL 71)

Every one of our speech acts always already involves the prior speech act of language itself, or what Heidegger calls the Saying. Hence, a thinking that is oriented toward Being should listen to the Saying of language. There is thus a sort reversal of agency, much like what happened with Da-sein and the history of Being, but now with language becoming the primary agent in the relation of intelligibility that obtains between it and human thought. Insofar as language shapes human thought, since it discloses to it the world of intelligibility that is specific to its historical epoch, language functions like a supra-human agent that reveals and conceals different worlds to human beings. Language thus takes on a functionally identical role to Appropriation in the history of Being.

The fact that language is always ahead of us insofar as it discloses certain worlds of intelligibility and not others means that we can never have a fully transparent understanding of language as such, and this means we can never grasp Being as a whole. This is so for at least two reasons. For one, since language is historical, we can only have access to the world in light of the historically accessible languages of our epoch; we cannot have access to other worlds of intelligibility that could be made possible by different

languages unknown to us. Second, the fact that any inquiry into language is only possible in virtue of language means that any investigation will always have an unexamined linguistic remainder, namely, the language needed to carry out the investigation. If we seek to think of language itself, the language used to think of language escapes us. If we try to think of the language used to think of the language used to think of language, the language at the third level will remain outside of our thematization, and so on. For language to do its work of disclosing a world, it itself must retreat from full view. Heidegger succinctly describes this limiting predicament in the following way: “We are not capable of seeing the nature of language in the round because we, who can only say something by saying it after Saying, belong ourselves within Saying,”²⁹ and “... we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else. Thus we always see the nature of language only to the extent to which language itself has us in view, has appropriated us to itself” (*WL* 134).

Like Being, language also has an internal dynamic of unconcealing and self-concealing. Like Being, language also displaces Da-sein as the transcendental condition for intelligibility or world disclosure. In the next section, I want to show how language not only takes the attributes previously ascribed to Being, but also becomes identified with Appropriation. This will round out my sketch of Heidegger’s thought from *Being and Time*, to the history of Being, to Appropriation, and finally to Appropriation as language. In the final section, I will consider how Heidegger’s understanding of intelligibility as language expands the problem of historicism to now encompass a cultural relativism.

The Event of Appropriation as Language

If language is a further concretization of Being, then this specification can clarify how Being “sends” different epochs that all together constitute the history of Being. Human languages come and go in and out of existence, or change, all without any particular person directing these events. If language discloses worlds of intelligibility, then the configuration of Being eludes the control of any single human being. Furthermore, the understanding of Being as

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Way to Language,” in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: First Harper & Row, 1982), 134. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *WL*.

language mitigates the temptation to reify Being into a supra-human deity-like phenomenon that authoritatively predestines certain epochs of history from on high. Understanding Being as language explains how changes in world disclosure come about without individual human agency and without appeal to supernatural forces; changes in world disclosure are simply due to the mundane phenomenon of language.

While language is thoroughly mundane, Heidegger is never one to abstain from showing the mystery of the common. For Heidegger, language is literally mysterious because it hides itself from the full transparency of thought due to its self-concealing nature. Heidegger says:

There is some evidence that the essential nature of language flatly refuses to express itself in words—in the language, that is, in which we make statements about language. If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is in the very nature of language. (*NL* 81)

Furthermore, what language reveals and conceals about itself changes from epoch to epoch. This dynamic leads Heidegger to say that, “All language is historical” (*WL* 133).

What we have then is language as a self-concealing and unconcealing source for a historically changing series of disclosive worlds, which mirrors Heidegger’s description for Appropriation. Given their nearly identical descriptions, we should expect language to be identified with Appropriation, and this is precisely what Heidegger does. He says, “The moving force in Showing of Saying is Owning. It is what brings all present and absent beings each into their own... This owning which brings them there, and which moves Saying as Showing in its showing we call Appropriation” (*WL* 127). Appropriation, as the most primordial structure that shows itself in the Saying of language cannot be represented, just like the language that inquires into language also cannot be fully represented:

That Appropriation, seen as it is shown by Saying, cannot be represented either as an occurrence or a happening—it can only be experienced as the abiding gift yielded by Saying. There is nothing else from which the Appropriation itself could be derived, even less in whose terms it could be explained. (WL 127)

At times, Heidegger will distinguish between human language as an ontic phenomenon and language as “Saying” or “Language” as the ontological phenomenon that corresponds with his idea of Appropriation. Language as Saying shares in the paradoxical feature of Appropriation’s sendings of Being where Appropriation performs its role as the *es gibt* both in its concealments (seemings) and unconcealment (true Being):

All human language is appropriated in Saying and as such is in the strict sense of the word true language—though its nearness to Appropriation may vary by various standards. All true language, because assigned, sent, destined to man by the way-making movement of Saying, is in the nature of destiny. (WL 133)

Saying is the mode in which Appropriation appropriates or sends forth the distinct historical epochs of Being. As Heidegger says:

Saying is the mode in which Appropriation speaks: mode not so much in the sense of *modus* or fashion, but as the melodic mode, the song which says something in its singing. For appropriating Saying brings to light all present beings in terms of their properties—it lauds, that is, allows them into their own, their nature. (WL 135)

These passages show how Saying is a further concretization of Appropriation, which is the source for the history of Being.

Thus, we can see how Heidegger's central question of the meaning of Being, i.e., what is that in virtue of which entities are entities, goes through several phases, all building on one another and becoming more concretely specified. Being is first understood in terms of time, then this temporal meaning is further concretized as the history of Being with Appropriation as the source for this history of Being. Finally, Appropriation is further concretized as language. In all these developments, Heidegger's original question of the meaning of Being or what it is for something to show forth intelligibly as something is always the animating principle of inquiry.

But what is missing from this new development of Being as language is reflection on the consequences that language's world-disclosing power has for the vast number of distinct linguistic communities living within any given historical epoch. If language is *the* transcendental condition from which intelligibility arises, and if each historical epoch houses thousands of concrete languages,³⁰ then it follows that there are thousands of simultaneously existing worlds, all with their own distinct standards of intelligibility. If language *establishes* intelligibility, it is difficult to see how different linguistic communities with competing interpretations about a state of affairs could adjudicate their differences. Each community would appeal to the standards of intelligibility intrinsic to their respective world-disclosure and since language is the basement of intelligibility, there would be no further common ground by which disputes could be settled. The result of holding language as the transcendental condition for world disclosure seems to be a rampant relativism that is not restricted to historical epochs, but that also extends to the linguistic cultures within any historical epoch.

Heidegger does not show awareness of this problem, and this could be because he thinks of language primarily as a transcendental phenomenon that lights up the world for a civilization (specifically Western civilization), and not as the concrete languages that are spoken. As the *Logos* essay showed, Heidegger steers clear of thinking of language primarily as a semiotic system of vocalization, opting instead for a view of language as a

³⁰ According to worldatlas.com, there are 7099 languages currently spoken today.

primordial laying-gathering that shows forth presence. The problem is that there is never a showing-forth presence as such apart from concrete particular languages. Instead, there is a showing-forth presence in an Italian way, a Chinese way, an English way and so on. In principle, Heidegger should agree with this point because he himself argues that Being is not an independently subsisting ground apart from beings (to think this would be to think of Being onto-theologically); rather, Being is the showing-forth of beings. If this is true, then it follows that there is never language or Saying apart from particular and concrete languages. But what make these languages particular and distinct from one another are their distinct vocalizations and distinct ways of signifying.

There is thus a tension in the Heideggerian system. On the hand, he wants to de-emphasize the thinking of language in terms of vocalization and signification. The result of this is to demote the concreteness of languages, which in turn obscures the plurality of human languages because languages derive their individuation from distinct vocalization and signification. On the other hand, Heidegger wants to think Being more concretely, which is what I have argued is Heidegger's impetus for turning to language. It is this inconsistency, that of aiming for concreteness but then demoting it, that leads Heidegger to both thematize language as the new important domain of reflection for the question of Being *and* dismiss language from serious consideration, insofar as he demotes the individuating features of languages and *eo ipso* concrete languages. By not paying enough attention to concrete languages, Heidegger seems unaware of the cultural relativism that his thought produces.

In contrast, Heidegger seemed fully aware of the charge that his thought entailed historical relativism, but he did not see this as a problem. Historical relativism is only a problem on the assumption that a universal standard that cuts across historical eras is possible. But if this universal standard is shown to be illusory, as the finitude of Da-sein and the history of Being are supposed to have shown, then the objection of relativism is also moot.

Conclusion

What we have in Heidegger then is a thinker who was consumed with the question of history and its effect for thought, but instead of seeking a way to reconcile history on the side of formal universal validity, Heidegger opts to solve the problem on the side of pure facticity. As stated before, Heidegger thinks he has successfully deconstructed the origins for the demands for universality and shown their contingent origins in historical and linguistic facticity, showing the demand for universality as mistaken and moot. However, the demand for a universal standard is neither illusory nor moot as it was shown that Heidegger himself assumes universal validity for his view that Appropriation is not just one more historical epoch in the flux of Being. Rather, Appropriation is the truth, the vantage point from which the history of metaphysics can be seen as metaphysics. And this objection is applicable to any thought system that takes itself to be true. The claim of truth inescapably includes a demand for universal recognition grounded in universal validity. The scope of this demand for universal recognition inherent in that which one takes to be valid cuts across all time and space, as Heidegger's own defense of Appropriation shows.

Instead of solving the problem of historicism, Heidegger furthers the relativism of historicism because his thought does not just problematize normativity with history—it also adds language as a further source of relativism. While Heidegger does not thematize the issue of linguistic relativism, many after him made the issue of the incommensurability of conceptual schemes the centerpiece of their thought from Rorty, Feyerabend, to Wittgenstein. The question of the twentieth century then became not just how to think of thought as conditioned by history but by both history and language.

In order to examine this dual threat of relativism, I will next turn to the work of one of Heidegger's students, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's work is vital to this narrative because he makes a powerful argument against historicism and against all fragmentations of understanding, whether they stem from a historical or linguistic basis. In this respect, Gadamer's work is an advance from Heidegger's reflections on language. But while Gadamer attempts to restore the connectedness of reason, he also gives up on its normative

basis, choosing instead to seek the grounds for truth in the historical tradition of one's past. Gadamer's thought promotes a contextualism that dissolves normativity into the facticity of one's historical past.

After having examined Gadamer's work on historicism, I will then be in a place to present my own understanding of normativity through Karl-Otto Apel's notion of the *logos-a priori*. I will conclude that reason not only establishes a universal horizon between human beings, as Gadamer's refutation of historicism will show, but also that rational thought engages all human beings in a series of idealized and necessary presuppositions that provide the normative grounding needed to validate truth claims. I will argue that these presuppositions are constitutive of rational thought and comprise the rational core of argumentative discourse. These idealized and rationally necessary presuppositions will show that a minimal condition for what it means for a claim to be true is for this claim to be able to be recognized in virtue of the force of its argument by an unlimited community of discourse participants. It is this ideal community that constitutes the proper standard for rational normativity, and not, as Gadamer will argue, the historical tradition in which we partake. But to understand why Gadamer thinks that truth is the event of tradition that happens to us, we must next examine his groundbreaking work, *Truth and Method*.

Chapter 5: Gadamer's Refutation of Historicism and the Contra-Factual Agreement

Introduction

With the work of the later Heidegger, the problem of historical relativity comes to include within itself linguistic relativity as Heidegger comes to understand Being's historical epochs in terms of the distinct world disclosures that language effects. The transcendental status that *Da-sein* occupies in *Being and Time* gets transferred to language such that it becomes the condition of possibility for any intelligibility. As the condition of possibility for intelligibility, language is not subject to critique because it is the condition that makes critique possible. Any hypothetical critique must presuppose language's intelligibility, so language becomes inscrutable. Additionally, Heidegger describes Appropriation as sending, meaning that its specific configuration of intelligibility for any particular epoch is not decided by any individual. Language's configuration of intelligibility in any historical epoch is an event that happens.

But if language is the condition of possibility for intelligibility, then the different sendings of language produce different configurations of intelligibility where no single configuration can claim primacy as *the* standard of reason. This consequence is consistent with *Being and Time's* denial of a universal standard of intelligibility across historical eras. In addition to the historical relativism that this view of language implies, there are two further potential consequences that Heidegger does not directly address.

The first consequence is that the historical relativity posited by this view of language can potentially entail a further linguistic relativity that spans across the vast number of different linguistic communities at any given point in time. This is so because for any historical era, there is no such thing as language as such, but rather a myriad of distinct

concrete languages. If language discloses a world, then there is no one single intelligible world, but rather a plurality of worlds. Thus, a historical relativism that previously spanned the vertical axis of time now includes within itself a linguistic relativism that spans across the horizontal axis of culture.

The second consequence of Heidegger's view of language is that it has the potential, contrary to Heidegger's intent, to privilege one's past, and specifically, one's past linguistic tradition as a normative source for discourse. If a linguistic tradition discloses a world of intelligibility, then all of one's conceptual resources are owed to one's past linguistic tradition. In this case, the past is the privileged axis of time in light of its function in grounding intelligibility.

Heidegger himself never accepted the past's primacy because for him, the future is the ecstasy of time which opens the past. Throughout his career, Heidegger was highly critical of his past, the philosophical tradition of the West. He understood himself as one of "the future ones," a sort of philosophical prophet who heralded a non-metaphysical way of thinking at a time when the West had to decide if it would continue down the metaphysical path that would lead to nihilism or choose a different path. However, Heidegger's argument for the transcendental status of language potentially jeopardizes his privileging of the future. For if language discloses intelligibility, then even the future oriented concerns stemming from Da-sein's existential structure as care are only ever disclosed as such by the linguistic tradition of the past. One's coping projects, self-concept, and all future possibilities that one can imagine for oneself are all made possible by the linguistic tradition of one's past that discloses these concepts as intelligible.

This insight into the primacy of the linguistic past is one which Heidegger's student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, develops into a robust theory of what understanding is and in turn what it means for something to be true. Gadamer's theory is highly significant for our narrative, not least because he understands his work as a systematic argument against historicism. As part of his theory of understanding, Gadamer attempts to rehabilitate tradition and undercut the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice. Gadamer argues that prejudice

is an indispensable element of knowledge and functions as the crucial element in grounding intersubjective understanding between interlocutors of different historical or linguistic horizons. While both Heidegger and Gadamer hold a transcendental view of language as world-disclosing, Gadamer's theory tries to do justice to the infinite reflexivity of language, i.e., language's capacity to express all that can be expressed, and the subsequent ability to enter into an indefinite number of distinct horizons that this infinite reflexivity gives to human beings. Despite this dimension of his project, Gadamer's emphasis on tradition threatens to replace genuine normativity with the contingency of one's historical context, or so I will argue. This reduction of normativity to tradition threatens to eliminate reason's critical function.

To see why this is so will take us to the heart of Gadamer's systematic argument for how understanding occurs through a historically effected consciousness. In making this argument, Gadamer offers his own critique of historicism, and specifically historicism's acceptance of scientific objectivism. Gadamer argues that what allows historicism to fragment historical eras into their own islands of understanding is an unreflective and ill-conceived reliance on the objectivism of scientific method. Once we examine how understanding actually occurs, we can see that its nature presupposes not a subject-object relation but a subject-subject relation, an I-thou that always already has bound us together. With an accurate model of understanding, we will be able to see that intersubjective understanding across historical epochs and linguistic communities is possible because of a pre-existent agreement in our subject-subject relation with one another. This is the basis for Gadamer's insight that every misunderstanding presupposes a deeper understanding.¹

Gadamer's insight about a pre-existing agreement founding all our subsequent disagreements will form the foundation for my own response to historicism but with a modification. In Gadamer's work, the pre-existing agreement that he refers to is language as it is concretized in its linguistic tradition. Because Gadamer understands the pre-existent

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, trans. David Linge, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 150. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *UHP*.

consensus as the factual agreement of linguistic tradition that grounds our claims to truth, the normativity of truth is reduced to the event produced by historically effected consciousness. Given the transcendental primacy of tradition, truth becomes a mere modification of pre-existing tradition. But as Jürgen Habermas will argue, traditions are suffused with power, domination, and untruths. No tradition, regardless of its size or prestige, can ground its claims to truth or justice on the mere basis of its longevity. Thus, while Gadamer is right that all our disagreements are based on a deeper and long-standing agreement, his identification of this long-standing agreement with linguistic tradition is false. Along with Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, I will argue that only a contra-factual agreement that anticipates an idealized universal consensus can take the place of Gadamer's linguistic agreement that precedes all disagreements.

While contra-factual, this long-standing agreement is built into the structure of human rationality. It is what unifies all historical eras and linguistic communities making translation, intersubjective understanding, and meaningful critique possible. This contra-factual agreement is a formal structure that cuts across time and space, and it is also what grounds human dignity. Hence, while historicism is correct in understanding knowledge as materially changing, Habermas and Otto's insight into the formal precondition of knowledge shows us that this change can be judged as progressive or regressive in light of the universal procedural rationality that inheres in all human beings. But before getting to this conclusion, we must look at how the problematic of historicism is furthered in Gadamer's thought. The sections to follow will include a discussion of 1) Gadamer's argument against the objectivism of historicism and for historically effected consciousness and 2) Gadamer's debate with Habermas over the nature of the transcendental condition grounding truth. In the next chapter, I will use the insights gained from this debate along with Apel's work to provide my own argument against historicism and to provide a positive description of the formal element of understanding that Apel calls the *logos-a priori*.

I. Gadamer's Polemic against Historicism

Gadamer's *magnus opus*, *Truth and Method*, is set against the background of the nineteenth century's long-standing dispute in Germany about the objectivity of the social sciences and the humanities. With the fall of Hegelianism and the rapid rise of the natural sciences, the humanities faced increasing pressure to justify themselves. Much of the success of the natural sciences was due to their emphasis on method in securing the objectivity of their results. This in turn pushed the humanities to articulate their own method so that they could in like manner ground the objectivity of their truth claims. This pressure was keenly felt by the historical disciplines as evidenced by the Baden wing of the Neo-Kantian school where thinkers like Windelband and Rickert developed considerable methodological treatises arguing for the objectivity of history. The Baden school was unique in that while it acknowledged the desirability of scientific objectivity, it also argued for the distinctive nature of history over against natural science. Apart from their theoretical innovations, the bulk of nineteenth century historians took the natural sciences' adoption of method as the paradigm of knowledge and worked to reformulate their methodology to secure objectivity for historical knowledge. Method in the historical disciplines aimed to eliminate the subjectivity of the historian in securing historical knowledge. If history was to be an objective science, then the historian had to eliminate her own present perspective as much as possible lest the validity of her work be compromised. It is to this issue that Gadamer addresses his work.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that the scientific ideal of objectivity fundamentally mischaracterizes the nature of understanding and that the humanities' search for a method is misguided. Additionally, it is history's search for objectivity that is responsible for the *aporias* of historicism, chief among them being the radical fragmentation of understanding. Gadamer traces this ideal of objectivity to the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice.² In light of this prejudice, Enlightenment thought brackets the validity claims of tradition and holds them up for rational scrutiny:

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 272-73. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *TM*.

It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source of all authority. What is written down is not necessarily true. We can know better: this is the maxim with which the modern Enlightenment approaches tradition and which ultimately leads it to undertake historical research. (*TM* 274)

The Enlightenment's suspension of tradition's validity claims leads to historical research because once tradition is discounted as a source of truth, the only attitude left to approach tradition is an objectifying one that considers not its truth claims but the causal conditions that led to the tradition's claims. This objectification of tradition can lead either to a study of the historical conditions that led the tradition to make the outlandish claims it did, or to a psychologizing approach that seeks to understand the psychological mindset of the thinkers of a tradition and how they could come to believe such outlandish beliefs. As Gadamer says, "It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to 'understand' the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion" (*TM* 294). Whether it is historicism or psychologism, the devaluing of tradition leads to a shift in understanding, from taking the subject matter that a tradition claims seriously, as one would attend to a subject posed by another person in dialogue, to taking the tradition itself as the object of understanding, as a psychotherapist would examine a patient. In sum, Enlightenment thought occasions a shift in understanding with respect to tradition, from the second person to the third person, from an I-thou to an I-it.

The first consequence of this objectifying attitude is that the historian falsely detaches herself from the process of understanding. Under the guise of objectivity, the aim of historical method is to extinguish the self in order to provide an objective representation of the past. But when the past is approached this way, as an object denuded of serious validity claims, one obscures the bond that unites historical inquirers with their historical subject matter. More will be said about what this bond is shortly, but for now, one can think of this bond as the condition for the openness of a dialogue where anyone can enter into a dialogue and debate interlocutors over the validity of any claim that tradition makes. Gadamer will argue that for open conversation to occur, a deeper long-standing agreement

must be present among the dialogue participants. However, historical method covers over this bond by replacing the I-thou nature of understanding with an objectifying I-it form of causal explanation.

A second consequence of the objectification of the past is that historical periods become fragmented from one another. When people in distinct historical periods are denuded of their validity claims, they become rationally incommensurable toward one another because it is precisely their claim to truth that makes dialogue possible across space and time. Without the claim to a common subject matter, historical subjects are reduced to their sheer historical facticity, which will be radically unique because no single spatial-temporal coordinate is identical. Methodological objectification leads to the fragmentation of truth and rationality that in turn leads to an incommensurability of value and norms across historical periods, and this is the problem of historicism. If Gadamer is right about the consequences of history's objectifying attitude toward the past, then he will have identified a central cause for the historicist thesis. The question then becomes how Gadamer will respond to this diagnosis.

Gadamer's answer will be to recover the sustaining consensus that binds us all together before we begin to agree or disagree with one another, and he will identify this sustaining consensus with linguistic tradition or "prejudice" as he provocatively calls it. As Gadamer's argument is elaborated in the ensuing sections, it will be clear that while I will agree with his call to recover the transcendental bond that makes dialogue possible, I will disagree with his particular identification of this bond as tradition. But before these critical remarks, it is important to clarify Gadamer's account of the restoration of prejudice and his argument for tradition.

Restoring Prejudice

Following in the footsteps of Heidegger, Gadamer begins his restorative project of rehabilitating tradition by criticizing the long-venerated philosophy of consciousness bequeathed to modern philosophy by Descartes. Under this model, the individual finds the

ultimate principles of thought and rationality from an introspective self-examination. But in opposition to this model, Gadamer raises the following objection:

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorted mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being. (TM 278)*

Gadamer's argument begins from Heidegger's discovery of Da-sein's existential of always already being *Mitsein*. That is to say, human subjectivity is always already preceded by intersubjectivity because the very recognition of a self as a self is only made possible by others who recognize the self as such. But the unique twist that Gadamer contributes to this Heideggerian insight is that he extends the *mit-sein* existential beyond the self's present historical horizon and into its past horizon, the self's tradition from which one draws the resources to conceive of oneself as a self.

It is not just one's self-conception that tradition shapes; rather, it is all understanding whatsoever. Tradition shapes the experience, interests, and motivations that guide our questions about the world. Every question begins from some horizon of understanding, some experience about what the world is like. If we had no understanding of anything whatsoever or no experience, it would be impossible to ask meaningful questions because a question presupposes some subject matter that is apprehended as questionable and worthy of further inquiry. Questions presuppose some degree of experience. In turn, the experience from which we begin our questions is the effect of a culmination of factors that include one's culture, family, society, institutions, and other factors that precede our questioning.

Furthermore, Gadamer argues that what allows us to question our experience is that experience is intrinsically questionable. Taking an insight from Hegel, Gadamer thinks that

human experience is characterized by its negativity; it is *open* to being reversed so that there is an intrinsic questionability to experience. As Gadamer explains,

the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that. It has the structure of a question. And just as the dialectical negativity of experience culminates in the idea of being perfectly experienced—i.e., being aware of our finitude and limitedness—so also the logical form of the question and the negativity that is part of it culminate in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing. (*TM* 356)

Experience is characterized by its openness, its contingency, and questionability; what is intrinsic to *human* experience is its finitude. But this experience does not occur in a temporal vacuum. Our experience is shaped by the historical circumstances that leads to our present horizon. Hence, even the questions that our experience makes possible depend upon a historical tradition for their coming to be as questions. Historical tradition gives us the experience that opens the horizon from which our questions can begin.

Our present consciousness then, which includes our experience, interests, and the questions which these prompt is historically effected. Historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) is not simply an awareness of the historical effects of the past; it is rather the form of consciousness by which we know anything (*TM* 336). Historically effected consciousness is indispensable for understanding because it provides the perspective from which we cognize something. One chooses the viewpoint from which we cognize just as little as we choose our culture or the time in history in which we are born as Gadamer explains:

The way the interpreter belongs to his text is like the way the point from which we are to view a picture belongs to its perspective. It is not a matter of looking for this viewpoint and adopting it as one's standpoint. The interpreter similarly finds his point of view already given, and does not choose it arbitrarily. (*TM* 325)

This is why Gadamer argues that “history does not belong to us; we belong to it” (*TM* 278).

If historically effected consciousness is not only the form of our consciousness, but also the indispensable condition for understanding anything, since it is that which provides the point of view from which we ask questions, then this leads to the conclusion that tradition is a transcendental condition for understanding. Though the Enlightenment demeaned tradition as a source of unwarranted authority and ungrounded prejudice, Gadamer argues that tradition is actually productive of knowledge (*TM* 280). As a transcendental condition, tradition is constitutive for the validity of any of our claims which means that we cannot merely look at tradition as an object of criticism (the objectifying third-person mode of understanding). Insofar as we must presuppose tradition to have a disclosed world in which positing claims and scrutinizing them take place, we implicitly confer tradition’s validity since tradition’s transcendental necessity grounds all our subsequent claims to validity. Gadamer draws out the consequence of this insight for the objectifying methodological approach of the social sciences:

Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which we, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process-i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. (*TM* 283)

From this appeal to the indispensability of tradition in disclosing a world, Gadamer goes on to defend tradition from the Enlightenment’s critique.

Contrary to being dogmatic and restrictive, tradition is a source of freedom and the dependence on tradition is an act of reason. Enlightenment thinkers like Kant had characterized tradition and religion as a pedagogue, a caretaker of humanity that was needed until civilization had reached a point where human beings were mature enough to reason for themselves. From this perspective, tradition was the antithesis of reason, being

the institution that held people back from properly exercising their reason to its full capacity. Contrary to the Enlightenment, Gadamer argues:

the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one’s own... It rests on acknowledgement and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. (*TM* 281)

For Gadamer, the descriptive fact that tradition discloses a world for our questioning also entails a normative claim on one’s thought, and this normative claim is transcendently rational.

The reasonableness of tradition, as a transcendental condition of intelligibility, is distinct from the reasonableness of a self-reflective judgment. The rationality of tradition is grounded in its world-disclosive role, and it is a more foundational rationality than the rational grounding of an individual reflective judgment because the latter depends for its rationality on a prior framework of tradition. Gadamer illustrates this distinction in rationality with respect to morality:

The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity. And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding [the grounding of a reflective judgment] and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes. (*TM* 282)

As evidenced in this quote, Gadamer identifies the descriptive fact that tradition “in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes” with “a justification that lies beyond rational grounding”—“rational” in this case referring to the self-reflective rational critique that Enlightenment thought advocates. Tradition transcends reflective judgment because all critique, all self-reflection, and even all attempted modifications of tradition in some way presuppose the world-disclosure that tradition makes possible through historically effected consciousness. For this reason, Gadamer characterizes truth as an event, as opposed to a subjective judgment (*TM* 291), and specifically as an event that precedes us: “In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe” (*TM* 484).

While there are many critical aspects about Gadamer’s theory of understanding that are worth exploring in detail, for the purposes of the next section I will only touch on those that help elucidate my primary focus of showing how Gadamer’s restoration of tradition helps solve the problem of historicism. This will then lead to an examination of Habermas’ critique of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, specifically its lack of genuine normativity along with Gadamer’s response. In brief, Gadamer’s solution to historicism is the following: if historicism is the problem of the fragmentation of knowledge into countless and incommensurable historical epochs, and if the source of this fragmentation is an illegitimate ideal of knowledge as a process of objectification grounded in method, then a successful critique of methodological objectivism along with a theory of understanding that demonstrates how all acts of understanding are interconnected through a supporting consensus has the potential to relieve historicism of its bite. To grasp Gadamer’s solution, we will need to look at how he thinks language brings together individuals across different traditions in a supporting consensus that constitutes a common horizon for dialogue. Specifically, I will explore Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and examine how this event occurs.

Fusion of Horizons

The union of perspectives that Gadamer first discusses in detail is the fusion of past and present horizons. For a historicist outlook that employs an objectifying methodology aiming to extinguish present prejudice, this fusion is a real problem because its ideal of

objectivity demands a separation of historical horizons. Under a historicist outlook, the aim of historical method is to reproduce the author's meaning without a tinge of the historian's own worldview interjected into the historical reconstruction, lest the objectivity of historical knowledge be comprised. However, Gadamer argues that this conception of knowledge is not only impossible to achieve, but actually counter-productive to actual historical knowledge because it mischaracterizes the real nature of understanding.

In an act of historical understanding, the historian cannot simply adopt her historical text's point of view without using her own horizon of understanding to find points of contact between her present horizon and the text's, which then allows her to do the translation. Gadamer explains, "However thoroughly one may adopt a foreign frame of mind, one still does not forget one's worldview and language-view. Rather, the other world we encounter is not only foreign but is also related to us. It has not only its own truth in itself but also its own truth for us" (*TM* 439). When we encounter a foreign work, our prejudices become activated, and the contrast between our horizon of understanding and the foreign work allows us to become conscious of our own prejudices as prejudices. With this self-knowledge at hand, we are then in a position to hear the other of history address us in its own unique voice and even allow its perspective to question our own prejudices (*TM* 298).

But this questioning need not entail a rejection of our prejudice as Gadamer explains, "If a prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us, this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person accepted as valid in its place" (*TM* 298). Instead, what happens is that when the historian enters into a dialogue with her text about a subject matter, the final product of this interaction is a synthesis of horizons of understanding between the historian and the past. This conclusion may seem objectionable to those persuaded by the ideals of nineteenth century historical methodology, but this is only so if one holds to the reproduction of meaning as the historical object. Gadamer rejects this claim: "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other [the unity of present and past horizons], a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (*TM* 299).

To illustrate Gadamer's insistence on historical knowledge being a synthesis of past and present horizons, it will be helpful to look at a concrete example from Arthur Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History*. In this work, Danto explains that, "Completely to describe an event is to locate it in all the right stories, and this we cannot do. We cannot because we are temporally provincial with regard to the future."³ To illustrate this principle, Danto reflects on the proposition, "The Thirty Years War began in 1618." To a contemporary historian writing in 1618, the identification of the opening of the war as "The Thirty Years War," would be impossible as the duration, course, and ramifications of this war would have been wholly unavailable to someone writing prior to the war's end. Not only the war itself, but also all the ramifications of the war for European history would also be unavailable to historians in 1618. It is impossible then for historians writing in the twenty-first century to reproduce the exact meaning of a historian of 1618 because twenty-first century historians are privy to events unavailable to seventeenth-century historians, and these events greatly determine the significance of the historical subject matter. Furthermore, twenty-first century historians cannot but use the narrative of events posterior to 1618 since an account of this war without these posterior events (how the war progressed, how it ended, who won, what were the consequences of the war etc.) would make this historical subject matter unintelligible to twenty-first century readers.

What Danto's example illustrates is the well-known hermeneutical principle that the part gets its meaning from the whole, and it shows this principle as applied to historical understanding where individual historical events are the parts of a greater narrative whole. The narrative whole will be constituted by the series of events that spans from the war's beginning to the present of the historian writing about the war. This means that the narrative whole will change, depending on when the history of the war is being written, and with a change in the whole will come a change in the interpretation of the parts. Thus, Danto's example shows that historical accounts of the past will always change because the narrative whole through which the part is interpreted will continue to expand as future historians write the history of the Thirty Years War for their own generations. Because

³ Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 142.

time keeps moving, the whole of history is never given, and the lack of a determinate whole leads to the indeterminacy of meaning of a historical event. Because the future continues to give us new experiences and new horizons from which new provincial wholes are posited, the past must be continually rewritten to account for new contexts of meaning.

While Danto's example illustrates the hermeneutic circle latent in understanding, Gadamer stresses that this principle is not merely a methodological tool of interpretation, as classical hermeneutics had believed. Taking an insight from Heidegger, Gadamer argues that the hermeneutic circle is to be understood ontologically, as constitutive of Da-sein's existence. We think this way because meaning is self-proliferating, and meaning is self-proliferating because being is constitutively temporal. Gadamer explains:

The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. (*TM* 296)

Once we understand the true nature of being and subsequently the true nature of meaning, we will realize that the fundamental flaw of historicism is its false ontology. Gadamer continues:

Hence temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naïve assumption of historicism, namely that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance toward historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us. Here it is not too much to speak of the genuine productivity of the course of events. (*TM* 297)

The interconnection of historical horizons is grounded in the unity of understanding. In turn, the unity of understanding is grounded in the unity of being, and following Heidegger's linguistic turn, Gadamer also concludes that "Being that can be understood is language" (*TM* 470). The tradition that supports all our agreements and disagreements with the past and with our contemporaries is language. Language discloses a world to us, and this disclosure allows us to enter into dialogue with one another.

Gadamer realizes that his thesis on the infinite productivity of meaning is liable to the charge of relativism, and it is important for him, in order to maintain his thesis of the interconnectivity of all understanding, to show that no relativism follows from his theory. Consequently, Gadamer argues that the charge of relativism stems from the same ontology that presumes the existence of the meaning-in-itself of a text that is to be reproduced by the interpreter if she is to get at the correct meaning of a text. When it comes to world events, this same ontology presumes the existence of a world-in-itself that acts as a standard by which historical accounts can be assessed with respect to how closely they reproduce in their narrative the world-in-itself. Under this ontology, if interpreters in different historical eras offer distinct accounts of the past that are inconsistent either with the original meaning of a historical event or with each other, then this kind of historiography would be charged with relativism.

While this account of the proliferation of meaning is precisely the one that Gadamer offers, he denies relativism because he rejects the underlying ontology of the charge of relativism. Historicism's ontology presupposes a faulty present-at-hand ontology that covers over the temporally constituted ontology of Da-sein's historicity. Gadamer explains:

The later Heidegger himself emphasized that the experience of the thing has as little to do with merely establishing simple presence-at-hand as with the experience of the so-called experimental sciences. Thus we must keep the dignity of the thing and the referentiality of language free from prejudice originating in the ontology of the present-at-hand as well as in the concept of objectivity. (*TM* 452)

Instead of the faulty present-at-hand ontology, Gadamer proposes that, “Our starting point is that verbally constituted experience of the world expresses not what is present-at-hand, that which is calculated or measured, but what exists, what man recognizes as existent and significant” (*TM* 452). But if Gadamer rejects the model of paradigm and copy that grounds the concept of objectivity for historicism, then how does he propose that different interpretations across different historical eras relate to one another? What grounds their unity as a collection of interpretations of the same historical event if the existence of the historical-event-in-itself is denied?

In response, Gadamer proposes a ground of unity for distinct interpretations that follows Husserl’s example of an object of perception and the infinite number of profiles from which the object can be viewed. Gadamer explains:

Seen phenomenologically, the ‘thing-in-itself’ is, as Husserl has shown, nothing but the continuity with which the various perceptual perspectives on objects shade into one another. A person who opposes ‘being-in-itself’ to these ‘aspects’ must think either theologically—in which case the ‘being-in-itself’ is not for him but only for God—or he will think like Lucifer, like one who wants to prove his own divinity by the fact that the whole world has to obey him. (*TM* 444-445)

An interpretation of a text from a given historical era can be thought of as a historical profile or vista from which the text is seen: “The way the interpreter belongs to his text is like the way the point from which we are to view a picture belongs to its perspective” (*TM* 325).

Husserl’s model of perception is helpful in elucidating Gadamer’s concept of objectivity, but the analogy has limits because Husserl’s model can be interpreted in one of two ways, an objective and subjective way. In the objective model, one can understand an object of perception as having within itself the infinite number of profiles that could ever be manifested. Then, when an observer approaches the object with her particular perspective,

the observer *receives* the distinct profile that her perspective makes possible. In this case, the observer does not substantially add anything to the object, but simply draws out from her unique perspective what was there. On the other hand, the subjective version of Husserl's model would maintain that an observer does not draw out the profile from the object but actually *creates* a new profile by the stipulated interaction of observation. Given that Gadamer explicitly says that "the actual object of historical understanding is not events but their 'significance'" (*TM* 325), it seems like Gadamer holds to the subjective model where observers continually create new historical profiles through new observations. In this model, interpretation is not simply the articulation of a latent intelligibility that was already there in the historical subject matter; interpretation is a co-constitution of history.

This thesis of co-constitution is the basis for Gadamer's argument that understanding, interpretation, and application are all one phenomenon (*TM* 308). By uniting what were traditionally separate concepts in the classical hermeneutic tradition, Gadamer means that we cannot understand a historical event without mediating the subject matter to our horizon of understanding through our concepts. To successfully mediate the subject matter, we must apply our experience to the subject matter in order to find it meaningful. For example, if a historian read a text from antiquity with the word "dog," she could only make sense of this word by interpreting it back to her familiarity with the word "dog" from her horizon of understanding. Concretely, this means that she has to apply her experience of seeing dogs in order to ground the meaning that the word "dog" would have for her. It is through this process that a historical document with the word "dog" becomes intelligible for her. This is the basis for Gadamer's claim that:

application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pre-given universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditional text tries to apply it to himself. (*TM* 321)

The true meaning of a historical event is never fixed because it is being co-constituted through time as new interpreters engage the event from their distinct horizons.

The problem I see with Gadamer's model is that if the objectivity of a historical event is its significance for later interpreters, it is difficult to see how one could ever judge a good interpretation from a bad interpretation of a historical text or event. If one eliminates the norm of a text-in-itself or an event-in-itself as a regulative ideal, and if texts and events are reduced to their significance for future interpreters, then one is left without a basis to discriminate between responsible interpreters and careless ones that use texts for their own nefarious ideological purposes, which is also a perspective from which significance arises. In addition, I think there is a distinction to be made between the facticity of an event and the significance and meaning that a historical event has for us. Hence, while historians of 1618 could have no idea that the Bohemian revolt would become the first phase of a consequential war lasting thirty years, historians of today could still be in agreement with past historians about the *fact* of a revolt occurring in 1618. Where they would part ways is in their ascription of *significance* to this revolt and their understanding of the consequences of this event for Europe. Because later historians are privy to the consequences that followed the Bohemian revolt, they would have a much better grasp of the significance of this event relative to historians of 1618. But even this divergence on the grasp of significance depends on the *fact* of some revolt having occurred. Without the stable ground of a fact having occurred, it is difficult to find a suitable common basis upon which different interpretations can be thought of as different interpretations of the same thing. Furthermore, without a world-in-itself or a text-in-itself, it is also difficult to find a suitable norm by which to judge interpretations as good or bad.

What we have in Gadamer's theory of objectivity is a sort of linguistic idealism where the facticity of historical events is replaced by the conversation that ensues after the event. In this new paradigm, truth is not one fixed ground, upon which different interpretations can be judged as good or bad; rather, truth is, as Heidegger claims, a process of unconcealment, or as Gadamer describes, an event that occurs that is determined not by our reflective

judgment as much as by the linguistic tradition that precedes us, given the role of linguistic tradition in shaping our historically effected consciousness.

Cristina Lafont has remarked that these revisionary accounts of truth stem from an understanding of language as world-disclosing. In this account of language, observers have no access to reality apart from linguistic symbols, so that linguistic meaning determines reference. In other words, we cannot refer to anything in the world without first having some linguistic understanding of what we are trying to refer to. Linguistic meaning is that which secures the identity of things and that which allows us to refer to the same thing. In a nutshell, the Heideggerian picture of language as world-disclosing entails the thesis that meaning determines reference.

But according to Lafont, this thesis, that meaning determines reference, is plagued by serious problems. For one, if two historians have different interpretations, i.e., different meaning configurations, of a historical event, they would have not just two different interpretations but two different historical events because distinct interpretations refer to distinct events under the thesis that meaning determines reference.⁴ Secondly, these historians cannot even engage one another in argument about their interpretations because they would be arguing over two completely different things.⁵ One could also never refine one's own interpretation of an event because every time one's description changes, this would, under the thesis that meaning determines references, entail a change in the event. Hence, even though Gadamer seeks dialogue as the replacement for a world-in-itself, his own account of language, which includes the thesis that meaning determines reference, makes dialogue impossible among people with different descriptions of an event. The problem of an ultimately suitable common ground among dialogue participants will be pursued in more detail when Habermas' criticism of Gadamer is discussed, but for now it is important to round out Gadamer's explanation of how his theory of understanding refutes historicism.

⁴ Cristina Lafont, *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, trans. José Medina (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT press, 1999), 233.

⁵ Ibid.

Having replaced a world-in-itself with the dialogue that ensues between a historical event and future interpreters and having likened this proliferation of meaning with Husserl's phenomenology of sense perception, Gadamer goes on to qualify how his model differs from Husserl's. In the perception of an empirical object, different perceptual profiles are to some extent exclusive of another because they present the same object but from different perspectives. For example, a profile of the underside of a table would look very different than a profile of the side-view of the table. But in Gadamer's model, the different profiles are not perceptual slices of the object; rather, the profiles of a subject matter are what he calls "linguistic shadings" that are interchangeable with one another. Gadamer explains:

In the same way as with perception we can speak of the "linguistic shadings" that the world undergoes in different language-worlds. But there remains a characteristic difference: every "shading" of the object of perception is exclusively distinct from every other, and each helps co-constitute the "thing-in-itself" as the continuum of these nuances—whereas in the case of the shadings of verbal worldviews, each one potentially contains every other one within it—i.e., each worldview can be extended into every other. It can understand and comprehend, from within itself, the "view" of the world presented in another language. (*TM* 445)

Gadamer's claim for the inter-translatability of languages is crucial for him to block the potential transformation of historicism's fragmentation of knowledge into an incommensurability of linguistic worldviews. That is to say, once Gadamer takes the linguistic turn, he is aware that a potential consequence of this move is a fragmentation of understanding relative to the number of concrete languages that exist. And if this is the case, then he will have made no serious advance against historicism's fragmentation of knowledge. So to prevent this relativism, he argues strongly for a concrete language's ability to extend itself to any other language: "Thus, we hold, the fact that our experience of the world is bound to language does not imply an exclusiveness of perspective" (*TM* 445). In the following section, I will show Gadamer's strongest defense for the interconnectivity of all understanding through his account of language.

Language as the Universal Horizon

According to Gadamer, language is that which allows human beings to rise above their immediate environments. Whereas animals have environments, human beings have worlds in virtue of language, and this means “to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one can present it to oneself as it is” (TM 440-441). Language then is the source of human freedom that allows us to rise above our immediate environment, and this includes the freedom from being “imprisoned within a verbally schematized environment” (TM 441). This freedom includes the freedom to designate things by different names, and this is the source for the multiplicity of human languages (TM 441). Language provides for the distanced orientation to our environment that we call world; language discloses a world (TM 442). The capacity for language to disclose intelligibility is boundless as “every language has a direct relationship to the infinity of beings” (TM 449). At one point, Gadamer even speaks—somewhat paradoxically—about the “superior universality” of the verbally constituted nature of reason⁶ that allows it to transcend the limitations of any given concrete language (TM 403). More will be said about this paradox in the next section.

This aspect of Gadamer’s account of language that emphasizes its superior universality is where his Hegelian instincts concerning the infinite reflexivity of reason shine forth, but they are soon enough moderated by his Heideggerian emphasis on thrownness. Having spoken of the boundless ability of language to disclose being, Gadamer brings this account back to the influence of tradition on one’s reflective ability:

On the other hand, however, it must be emphasized that language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*... It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out... It is well known that the consensus

⁶ This is particularly paradoxical because Gadamer presses hard against a formalist view of language, opting instead for understanding language in its concrete content. The problem then is that if by “verbally constituted” Gadamer has in mind a concrete account of language, then how is this concretized language of reason different from a concrete language like French or German? Gadamer’s account of language as a concrete phenomenon along with his distinguishing of reason from concrete languages, together with his affirmation of reason as linguistically constituted seems to result in a concrete language of reason itself, different from concrete languages. If this is so, then Gadamer owes us an account of this concrete language of reason.

by which an artificial language is introduced necessarily belongs to another language. In a real community of language, on the other hand, we do not first decide to agree but are always already in agreement, as Aristotle showed.

(*TM* 443-444)

While Gadamer often vacillates between the philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger, Gadamer is enough of a Hegelian to advocate for the universality of language's ability to disclose commensurable intelligibility across all historical horizons and concrete linguistic traditions:

It is true that historical "worlds" that succeed one another in the course of history are different from one another and from the world of today; but in whatever tradition we consider it, it is always a human—i.e., verbally constituted—world that presents itself to us. As verbally constituted, every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its own world picture, and is accordingly available to others. (*TM* 444)

Language is that universal property of human existence that binds us to one another irrespective of our historical horizon or our concrete linguistic community and culture.

The hermeneutic goal of coming to an understanding is valid and reasonable because undergirding it is the always already supporting consensus of language. In fact, this universal supporting consensus of language actually shows us that distinct historical horizons are in reality only an abstraction from the one grand universal horizon in which we all dwell. Gadamer explains:

When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the

historical depths of our self-consciousness. Everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon. Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition. (TM 303)

Horizons, by their very nature, are open. The introduction of new insights from the past or from other cultures then is not something that is fundamentally incommensurable with an open horizon. Rather, these new insights are capable of being plugged into the ready-made spaces of an open horizon:

In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.* (TM 305)

This account of the openness of a horizon is supplemented by Gadamer's account of the intrinsic openness of experience.

Like thought itself, experience is also verbally constituted. And as Gadamer showed in his identification of understanding, interpretation, and application, words and concepts gain their meaning by applying new experiences to the abstract word that then gives us a more concrete differentiated understanding of a word. For example, take the word "dog" and some definition of what this word means. Without much experience, the definition of "dog" will be fairly empty and abstract, perhaps something like "a four-legged animal with hair." But when you add experiences of particular dogs, this formal definition gains life and one acquires a much more differentiated meaning so that one comes to reformulate one's

understanding of “dog,” adding the further concrete richness that one gains from experiences of many different dogs. The key is that this process continues for the entirety of our lives. New experiences will reformulate our concepts, and these new concepts once formed are ready to be further negated and further differentiated by even newer experience.

This process is what Gadamer calls the negativity of experience, which he describes as follows:

experience is a process. In fact, this process is essentially negative. It cannot be described simply as the unbroken generation of typical universals. Rather, this generation takes place as false generalizations are continually refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical is shown not to be so. (*TM* 347)

It is in the nature of experience to negate itself because experience can only be apprehended verbally through categorial terms, but any verbal schematization of experience is subject to be negated as new experience further differentiates the prior verbal schema that presented the original experience. This then is why Gadamer says that “The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience” (*TM* 350) and that “The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (*TM* 350).

Once we understand the nature of experience, we can see why our horizons of understanding *have* to be open to the foreign—whether it be the otherness of past historical horizons or the otherness of other cultures and languages. In essence, our horizons of understanding have to be open because the negativity of experience that constitutes understanding needs further and corrective experience for its fulfillment. Understanding needs a diversity of experience in the same way that an understanding of “dog” needs a plurality of observable dogs to form a rich and thorough concept of the kind of animal singled out by this term. This, in summary, is Gadamer’s argument for why the

historicist thesis of historically incommensurable contexts of knowledge or the linguistic version of this argument in terms of the incommensurability of conceptual schemes must fail. Understanding is never fragmented into self-contained islands of thought.

Understanding is intrinsically ecstatic, outwardly reaching for its other, and what guarantees the possibility of this reaching out is the verbally constituted nature of reason, which binds us all together in a supporting consensus that precedes all our concrete agreements or disagreements with one another.

While I agree with Gadamer's conclusion about the universality of understanding, I disagree with the central role he allocates to linguistic tradition, and specifically his concrete account of language, in grounding what Gadamer comes to call the event of truth. Gadamer's account of tradition as a transcendental condition for understanding has the potential to undermine the universality of reason with which he wishes to stake his claim against historicism. Additionally, while Gadamer makes a laudatory case for the necessary *intersubjectivity* of understanding, he also, through his appeal to tradition, dissolves the *normativity* of understanding. In Gadamer's hands, truth becomes the epiphenomenal effect of a historical background of events whose occurrence is not subject to the rational scrutiny of reflective judgment since the process of events culminating in an event of truth is itself constitutive of reason. The irony in this situation is that while Gadamer vociferously argues for the unique status of the human sciences and their irreducibility to natural science, Gadamer actually performs his own naturalization of reason and truth—not in physical or psychological terms—but in historical terms. Gadamer reduces the *oughtness* of truth into the *is* of tradition and thereby dissolves the notion of normativity that is essential to reason, truth, and understanding.

To show why I think this is the case, I will first need to expose a tension in Gadamer's thought between his account of reason as transcendent of concrete languages and reason as also being verbally constituted, where verbal constitution is understood in terms of concrete traditional content. The problem is that it is contradictory to hold that 1) reason transcends concrete language, 2) reason is verbally constituted (reason and language are one), and 3) language is concrete. The holding of these contradictory elements is the cause

for why Gadamer speaks both of an infinite universal horizon within which understanding operates *and* for why he holds the necessity of tradition in transcendentally effecting the process of understanding. Ultimately, Gadamer's emphasis on tradition makes it impossible for him to fully underwrite his argument for the universal nature of understanding. What is needed to remedy this problem and give a truly universal basis upon which historicism can be refuted is supplementing Gadamer's account of language with a formal dimension. I propose that this is precisely what Habermas and Apel's idea of the contra-factual agreement is meant to effect. This formal supplement is what is needed to restore normativity to truth and to ultimately refute historicism. In the next section, I will exposit Gadamer's account of language with an eye toward how it can be normatively supplemented in order to realize Gadamer's ultimate goal of refuting historicism.

Gadamer's Content Account of Language

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer gives a brief history of the various accounts of language in the West in order to situate his own account of language as constituted by the historical content of the language's tradition. Prior to discussing his own view, Gadamer reviews Humboldt's account, to which he owes much for his own view, but one area in which he is quite critical of Humboldt is his formalism:

Although Humboldt revealed the significance of human languages as mirrors of the individual mentalities of the nations, nevertheless he thereby limited the universality of the connection between language and thought to the formalism of a faculty. Humboldt sees the main significance of the problem when he says that language is 'really situated in relation to an infinite and truly boundless sphere, the epitome of everything that can be thought. Thus it must make an infinite use of finite means and is able to do so through the identity of the faculty that generates thoughts and language.' The actual essence of a faculty that is aware of itself is to be able to make infinite use of finite means. It embraces everything on which it can act. *Thus the linguistic faculty is also superior to any content to which it can be applied.* Hence, as the

formalism of a faculty, it can always be detached from the determinate content of what is said. (TM 438)

But in contrast to Humboldt's prioritization of the formal aspect of language, Gadamer says:

Nevertheless this concept of language constitutes an abstraction that has to be reversed for our purposes. *Verbal form and traditional content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience.* If every language is a view of the world, it is so not primarily because it is a particular type of language (in the way that linguists view language) but because of what is said or handed down in this language. (TM 438-39)

To strengthen his case for the priority of content in language, Gadamer provides the example of learning a foreign language and how it is the actual use of the language that gives us a glimpse into the worldview of the foreign culture. In learning this foreign language, we never let go of our own language, as we need our language to make sense of the foreign language (TM 439).

Gadamer's prioritization of the traditional content of language is consistent with his rehabilitation of tradition. For if tradition is the historical transmission of content that gives us the initial basis to understand and experience anything, and if tradition is concretized for us in terms of language, then it makes sense for Gadamer to emphasize the content aspect of language. This account of language puts in the final touch on Gadamer's systematic argument against the Enlightenment's prejudice against tradition. By showing that language discloses a world to us, and that this disclosure consists in the content that linguistic tradition makes available to us, Gadamer thinks he has secured the necessary, universal, and transcendental role for tradition that refutes the Enlightenment's dismissal of it. In light of this aim, Gadamer's account of the content basis of language and his reversal of Humboldt's prioritization of form can be understood as another vehicle through which Gadamer continues his polemic of the superiority of the content of tradition over the Enlightenment's prioritization of reflective judgment.

In responding to Gadamer's rejection of a formalistic account of language and proposing instead an account that emphasizes the traditional content of a language, it is important to first determine what Gadamer gets right about language. When he says that every language is a view of the world in terms of its traditional content, he is claiming that concrete languages that contain the culture's maxims, aphorisms, jokes, proverbs, etc., are a necessary condition for intelligibility—seeing the world as a particular world. This thesis goes back to Heidegger's hermeneutical lesson that we always already interpret the world in terms of a holistic framework given to us by our culture. When we open our eyes in the tool shop, we do not see wooden sticks with iron pieces on their end; instead, we see hammers. We can study a hammer theoretically as a scientific object, but this theoretical reconstruction of the hammer depends upon our natural language shifting into a theoretical mode, for the formal is dependent and can only exist because of the concrete. In fact, for Heidegger, and quite likely for Gadamer as well, the formal is the abstraction of properties from the concrete object, so the formal is nothing but the concrete viewed theoretically. This I think is why Gadamer talks about reversing Humboldt's formal account of language—it is the concrete that gives rise to the formal—so the reversal consists in showing the priority of the concrete from which the formal is derived. What I think is sensible in Gadamer's account of language is that the world disclosure that the content of linguistic tradition makes possible does precede and make possible many of our engagements in the world, including our learning of foreign languages or our theoretical and formal activities like linguistics. Having said that, and this is where the heart of the disagreement lies, *it is another matter to ascribe a normative role to the concrete language—and hence the particular traditional content associated with this language—that initially discloses a world to us merely in light of this genetic priority.*

To illustrate this point, I will provide examples, including some which Gadamer gives, as illustrating the principle that genetic priority *does not* entail normative priority. Gadamer uses the example of learning a foreign language to show that in this process we must use our own concrete language to make sense of the foreign. Insofar as we always use our concrete language in learning a foreign language, the prejudices from our linguistic tradition are always operative and in fact make it possible for us to receive the foreign

language as it has to be related to us: “the other world we encounter is not only foreign but is also related to us. It has not only its own truth *in itself* but also its own truth *for us*” (*TM* 439). Without this prejudice from our concrete linguistic tradition, there would be no point of contact and we would not be able to learn the foreign language (*TM* 439). Gadamer takes this example as validating our prejudice and the tradition associated with it, and it is in light of the indispensability of prejudice that Gadamer exalts tradition over reflective judgment. But this last step is where Gadamer goes wrong because the genetic priority of the content of our natural language does not entail its normative priority. As a counter-example to Gadamer’s thesis, it is possible to learn the verbal system of a foreign language like Attic Greek, admittedly through translating it to one’s native language, but then turn around and critique one’s language in light of the new foreign language learned. It is a pretty commonly accepted view among classicists that the English verbal system grammatically pales in comparison to the highly differentiated and much more precise verbal system of Attic Greek. The Greek verbal system has very precise ways of conveying information about contra-factual situations and different aspects of actions that make English’s verbal system look like child’s play. In this case, the fact that a native English speaker must use English to learn Greek does not entail a normative priority for English as the Greek language is superior in many ways to English. As another example, it is common for many cultures to speak about seeing the rising of the sun. Now, it is true that one has to use this immediate experience of seeing the sun rise in order to understand that what appears in this way to one’s senses is a product of one’s perspective in an event where the earth is revolving around the sun, and not the other way around. However, it does not follow that because one’s tradition talks about the sun rising, that this use of language has any kind of normative authority over the scientific explanation of this phenomenon. Gadamer is correct that one has to use one’s prejudice to understand a new scientific insight, but this insight can then correct and override one’s original linguistic prejudice.

These examples show that intelligibility as such, or what can be known about the world as a whole, is not limited to the traditional content of one’s native language *and* that while our linguistic tradition is needed to learn new things, this indispensability of use does not translate into a superiority of tradition over reflective judgment. This is a tricky point

because Gadamer is right in saying that we can only learn new insights by using the old insights of the disclosed world that we have in our natural language. But as the prior examples show, the fact that our natural language and its traditional content always coincide in our learning of new insights does not entail the normative priority of traditional content over reflective judgment. Our indispensable use of our native language all throughout the learning process does not preclude the new insights learned from critiquing and correcting the traditional content of our language.

If we then acknowledge that the power of reflective judgment can go beyond our language's traditional content, then this shows us that the reflective ability of language is not limited to its traditional content. If language were limited to its traditional content, we would be hard pressed to explain how new traditional content can arise. To learn new insights, language has to extend its reach beyond the given horizon of a tradition's content. But if language extends itself out in this way, this means that it cannot be identical or limited to its traditional content. Furthermore, if language were limited to its traditional content, it would be difficult to explain how translation occurs. For translation presupposes some kind of common referent to which both languages can point to beyond their particular traditional content. But if a language is exhausted by its traditional content, and if the traditional content of two languages are distinct, then two different languages would have no point of contact from which a translation between them could occur. In fact, the problem is worse because if we add Gadamer's thesis of language as constituting world disclosure, which Lafont explains as the thesis that linguistic meaning determines reference, then two distinct languages would not even be able to refer to a common object in the world. If meaning determines reference, and if a language is nothing but its concrete linguistic meaning, then two different languages would disclose two different worlds. So two languages would not even have a common world to point to through their own linguistic means. This means that people in a linguistic tradition would be stuck in the prison of their own linguistic tradition.

This I think is why Humboldt argues for the formality of language as essential. In addition to its material content, language must have the ability to abstract from its immediate

traditionary content and point to the world apart from its native linguistic meaning that it has developed through its historical tradition. If Gadamer is right that language is the supporting consensus that binds us all together, then language cannot be thought purely in terms of the traditionary content of concrete languages for we are clearly not in universal agreement about a common traditionary content. If language is to be the universal bond that holds us all together, then what is needed is an account of language that highlights not only the content of particular traditions but also the formal structure that allows all languages to transcend their initial historical content. Only by an appeal to a truly universal feature of language can a common bond be recognized that allows us to break free from the prison of language that a heavily concrete account of language threatens to place us in.

Gadamer actually addresses this charge of linguistic isolation and argues that hermeneutical experience shows us that we are not stuck in this way, but the problem remains that his own account of language as constituted by traditionary content does not show us *how* it is that we are not stuck in our prisons of traditionary content. If hermeneutical experience shows us that “we are not stuck in this way,” then traditionary content cannot fully determine the nature of language. In arguing against the charge of conceptual determination by our language, Gadamer says:

It is necessary to see the speciousness of this argument. In actual fact the sensitivity of our historical consciousness tells us the opposite... This shows the superior universality with which reason rises above the limitations of any given language. The hermeneutical experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself verbally constituted. (*TM* 403)

If reason rises above concrete languages, then reason cannot be fully identical to concrete language. It must, as Gadamer says, transcend them. But if Gadamer maintains that reason is verbally constituted, then the only way he can hold these two things together, that 1) reason is irreducible to concrete languages, and 2) reason is verbally constituted, is if what it means to be verbal, i.e., what it means to be a language, is more than being a concrete

language, i.e., more than being constituted by traditional content. In other words, language has to have a formal element that allows for the interchange and communication of distinct traditional contents between different traditions. So while Gadamer rejects Humboldt's emphasis on the formality of language, Gadamer's rejection of linguistic isolation requires a common basis within all languages that allows them to communicate with one another. This common basis cannot be found in the distinct traditional content of languages because by definition they are distinct, so a formal element that inheres within all traditional content while simultaneously transcending it is still needed.

Before proceeding to what this formal element could be through the proposals of Habermas and Apel, it is important to recap the train of the argument of this chapter. In response to the fragmentation in understanding that historicism posits, Gadamer argues for the universality of understanding that is secured by the universal supporting consensus of language. It was argued that Gadamer's account of language as primarily constituted by traditional content does not support his aim of securing the universality needed to refute historicism because traditional content varies widely across different concrete languages. What is needed in his account of language is a formal element that is truly universal across different linguistic traditions, and there are two reasons why this formal account is needed. First, this formal element is needed to secure Gadamer's own goal of securing the universal intersubjectivity of understanding. But secondly, this formal element is also needed to secure the normativity of understanding, which in turn ultimately secures universal intersubjectivity. Without normativity, a common understanding can be a common misunderstanding. Truly universal intersubjectivity can only be secured by the normative demands that truth makes because the truth-value of an assertion demands that everybody across all space, time, culture, and language recognize its validity. As I will argue shortly, the normativity of truth is ultimately the supporting consensus that precedes all our agreements and disagreements.

Normativity is not something Gadamer thinks he needs because he is content to reduce truth into the effect of a process of historical tradition. In doing so, Gadamer performs his own naturalization of truth. But as I will argue in the next section, Gadamer's

understanding of truth dissolves any meaningful notion of the concept of truth, which apart from being self-refuting, also dissolves any meaningful notion of critique and morality as these notions depend upon a non-naturalized understanding of normativity. These two points, intersubjectivity and normativity, are intimately related. A proper notion of truth includes both universal intersubjectivity and normativity, which ensures that the kind of universal intersubjectivity among people is of the right sort. Ultimately, only an account that includes both intersubjectivity and normativity can truly refute historicism. In the next section, I will develop these points through an analysis of the Gadamer-Habermas debate and Habermas' regulative ideal of an unlimited community reaching an unforced and universal consensus.

II. The Habermas and Gadamer Debate

Habermas is one in arms with Gadamer's argument against the objectivism of the social sciences. Like Gadamer, Habermas also rejects the relativism of historicism and the underlying objectification of the act of understanding that fragments knowledge into innumerable historical epochs. One of the founding principles in Habermas's *oeuvre* is that to understand a rational claim, one must enter into the second person perspective as a fellow participant in the dialogue of truth *with* the historical subject and not merely as a detached observer objectifying the historical subject. Unlike understanding empirical states of affairs that can be described from the third person perspective, the understanding of reasons is of a different nature. By its very nature, the understanding of a reason requires one to depart one's detached perspective and enter into the frame of reference of the historical subject as a participant in a discussion that is oriented toward truth. By its very nature, a reason must be understood as valid, invalid, or as having a validity valence that is still to be determined. On this point, Habermas supports Gadamer's critique of the objectification of understanding which is the source for the fragmentation of knowledge manifest in historicism.

However, Habermas parts ways with Gadamer in the latter's exaltation of tradition over reflective judgment. Habermas accuses Gadamer of upholding a reification of tradition that

legitimizes a problematic conservatism that opens itself to the uncritical acceptance of illicit power motives and domination inherent in tradition. Like my criticism of Gadamer in the prior section, Habermas also finds Gadamer's account of tradition as a naturalization of reason, which in turn destroys normativity. This has disastrous consequences because without a concept of normativity, Gadamer has no basis to differentiate a factual agreement from a false agreement filled with domination and distortion. In this exchange, Habermas proposes understanding normativity through the regulative ideal of a contra-factual agreement of unlimited participants coming to an agreement through the force of the better argument. As Habermas will argue, all actual agreements are subject to this contra-factual agreement because all claims are subject to being questioned with respect to their validity, which is what the contra-factual agreement seeks to illustrate. Instead of the traditional content that Gadamer proposes as the supporting consensus that binds us together, Habermas' formal proposal, i.e., the orientation to validity that is exemplified in this contra-factual agreement, has much greater potential to act as the supporting consensus that binds us all together because it is precisely its nature as a formal demand made upon all rational beings that allows it to act as a truly universal feature of reason.

What will come out in my analysis of the Habermas-Gadamer debate is that as Habermas accuses Gadamer of legitimizing power-seeking ideologies through his transcendentizing of tradition, Gadamer defends himself by redefining "tradition" in a more formal way so as to escape the charge that he is a conservative ideologue. By redefining tradition along a more formal sense, Gadamer is able to say that his account is indifferent to revolutionary change: it neither rejects it nor endorses it. Gadamer continues to uphold the validity of prejudice, but he understands prejudice in a more formal way so as to accommodate revolutionary change by saying that even this kind of change upholds the prejudice of warring parties being against one another. Of course, this kind of prejudice abstracts away from the content of the positions of either side in a revolutionary conflict, which is what a more formal account of "prejudice" and "tradition" allows one to do. But in redefining his terms in this way, Gadamer is implicitly acknowledging the validity of Habermas' substantive criticism by acquiescing to the demand for a more formal account of language and reason that can then act as a truly universal feature that binds understanding together

across different languages and historical epochs. Hence, it will be important to keep an eye on how the two positions converge to some extent as a result of this debate. But before getting to this quasi-resolution, it is important to understand the specific points of Habermas' critique.

Habermas' Critique

As I have tried to show, Gadamer's theory of understanding is intrinsically unstable because he tries to secure the interconnection of all understanding through Hegel's insights into the interconnectivity of reason throughout all historical epochs and reason's othering as constitutive of reason itself (the negativity of experience) *but* while maintaining the interplay of these dynamics within a Heideggerian framework of thrownness that reduces a subject's reflective judgment to the epiphenomenon of her traditionary content. The problem with this fusion, as Habermas points out, is that the Heideggerian side of Gadamer's theory strips away rationality from the grand historical horizon that Gadamer is trying to maintain through Hegel's insights. Habermas explains:

To be sure, Hegel could speak of thought in this connection [the intersubjectivity of understanding] with greater legitimacy than Gadamer. It is difficult to fix the moment of knowledge in hermeneutic understanding independently of the absolute movement of reflection. If the framework of traditions as a whole is no longer regarded as a production of reason apprehending itself, then the further development of tradition fostered by hermeneutic understanding cannot *eo ipso* count as rational.⁷

The basis upon which Hegel grounds the interconnection of all historical horizons is that they are all constitutive of Reason at different stages of its development. While no historical epoch, prior to the moment of absolute knowledge, is the consummation of Reason itself, every historical epoch, each building upon one another, plays a role in the progressive

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "Review of Truth and Method," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, trans. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 233-34. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *RTM*.

realization of Reason. Hence, under a Hegelian framework, the progress of history is also the advancement of Reason because history is the vehicle for Reason to realize itself.

However, in Gadamer's account, Hegel's Reason is dissolved into the facticity of traditionary content that has no normative climax toward which it is progressing. The criticism that Habermas makes is that the intersubjective nature of understanding that Gadamer proposes through his philosophical hermeneutics at best proves that there can be cultural transmission, but Gadamer's exaltation of tradition over reflective judgment dissolves the normative basis to claim that this cultural transmission of meaning has anything to do with truth. The continuation of a tradition, or even the flourishing of a tradition as measured by its increasing influence and adherence by diverse populations says nothing about the rationality, truthfulness, or rightness of this tradition. Within the framework of philosophical hermeneutics, nothing in principle can be said about these normative notions because normativity, i.e., the ought of reason, has been dissolved into the is of traditionary content.

Habermas agrees with Gadamer with his insight into the role of prejudice in mediating understanding to us, but he disputes Gadamer's claim that this shows the superiority of prejudice over reflective judgment. Habermas explains:

Hermeneutic insight is certainly correct, viz., the insight that understanding —no matter how controlled it may be—cannot simply leap over the interpreter's relationships to tradition. But from the fact that understanding is structurally a part of the traditions that it further develops through appropriation, it does not follow that the medium of tradition is not profoundly altered by scientific reflection. (*RTM* 236)

In this passage, Habermas grants that tradition is needed for our act of understanding, but what Gadamer neglects in his account is that once this understanding is secured, reflective judgment can retroactively critique the tradition that was used to secure the first act of understanding. Habermas continues:

To be sure, knowledge is rooted in actual tradition; it remains bound to contingent conditions. But reflection does not wrestle with the facticity of transmitted norms without leaving a trace. It is condemned to be after the fact; but in glancing back it develops retroactive power. We can turn back upon internalized norms only after we have first learned, under externally imposed force, to follow them blindly. Reflection recalls that path of authority along which the grammars of language games were dogmatically inculcated as rules for interpreting the world and for action. In this process the element of authority that was simply domination can be stripped away and dissolved into the less coercive constraint of insight and rational decision. (*RTM 237*)

What Habermas explains in the last portion of the quote is that when a prejudice is recognized as a prejudice, the individual now has the freedom to put this prejudice under reflective judgment and ask the question: is this prejudice true? At which point, a negative answer can be given. Gadamer's exaltation of tradition supposes that reflective judgment is limited to move within the limits of the facticity of a tradition (*RTM 237*), but the fact that we can and do reject the claims of tradition shows us that reflective judgment is not limited in this way.

If reflection is not limited to the content of a tradition, then there has to be, as Habermas recognizes, some norm not fully reducible to the given content of tradition to which reason appeals to in making its critical judgments of tradition. But what kind of framework could one appeal to that transcends one's own traditional content? For Gadamer, the only framework that we could appeal to is the framework of who we are, through the power of tradition on our historically effected consciousness, so how could we ever transcend ourselves? Habermas responds that within speech itself, we always already have an orientation toward truth that transcends the facticity of our tradition. What is needed is to thematize this orientation toward truth, which Habermas characterizes as the following:

Truth is that characteristic compulsion towards unforced universal recognition; the latter is itself tied to an ideal speech situation, i.e, a form of life, which makes possible unforced universal agreement. The critical understanding of meaning thus has to take upon itself the formal anticipation of a true life.⁸

Along with our actual agreements, what also inheres in human language is an orientation toward truth that can be understood as the anticipation of a contra-factual agreement universally recognized by an unlimited community of participants who come to this agreement free from compulsion, domination, and power, and purely on the basis of the force of the better argument.

This idea of an unlimited community achieving a universal consensus is Habermas' way of explaining the concept of truth in terms of Gadamer's language of a supporting consensus or sustaining agreement that precedes all our disagreements. Habermas does not reject Gadamer's idea that the nature of understanding demands a universal agreement that binds us all together in dialogue:

Gadamer poses the question: 'Is the phenomenon of understanding adequately defined when I state that to understand is to avoid misunderstanding?' Is it not, rather, the case that something like a 'supporting consensus' precedes all misunderstanding? We can agree on the answer, which is to be given in the affirmative, but not on how to define this preceding consensus. (*HCU* 265)

Instead of the facticity of tradition as fulfilling the role of this "supporting consensus," Habermas claims that what ultimately binds us all is a universal orientation toward truth that is intrinsic to human rationality. He explains, "It is only the formal anticipation of an

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, trans. Josef Bleicher (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 267. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *HCU*.

idealized dialogue, as the form of life to be realized in the future, which guarantees the ultimate supporting and contra-factual agreement that already unites us” (HCU 268). He goes on, “in relation to it we can criticize every factual agreement, should it be a false one, as false consciousness” (HCU 268). This idealized consensus not only is a better description of what ultimately binds us together (since different traditions will differ with one another with respect to their operative prejudices), but this idealization also provides the normative ground upon which we can criticize any false consciousness, including the forces of domination and distortion that are also operative prejudices in tradition. As Habermas explains:

If the understanding of meaning is not to remain *a fortiori* indifferent towards the idea of truth then we have to anticipate, together with the concept of a kind of truth which measures itself on an idealized consensus achieved in unlimited communication free from domination, also the structures of solidary co-existence in communication free from force. (HCU 267)

While the regulative ideal of an idealized consensus is contra-factual, it still gives concrete guidance about the nature of a true consensus and the form of life in which it most likely can be realized.

What is key in Habermas’ alternative proposal for a supporting consensus is that it is a formal anticipation, and not a realized event, as Hegel appears to have claimed in his articulation of absolute knowledge. Habermas agrees with Gadamer on the situatedness of reason and the contingency of our reflective judgments: “This type of reflection [the kind of reflective judgment that Habermas proposes] is no longer blinded by the illusion of an absolute, self-grounded autonomy and does not detach itself from the soil of contingency on which it finds itself” (RTM 236). Alongside Gadamer, Habermas also affirms that our historical epoch gives us the initial horizon from which we can view the world, but Habermas’ contention is that the power of reason, though not absolute, is such that it can open new horizons that contradict those given to us by our initial tradition: “But in

grasping the genesis of the tradition from which it proceeds and on which it turns back, reflection shakes the dogmatism of life-practices" (*RTM* 236). Reason can do this through its formal anticipation of an idealized consensus that is just as much a part of the rational endowment of language as is the content of experience that we inherit from our tradition. Hence, while Habermas is not advocating for a return to a Hegelian vision of absolute knowledge, he is arguing for the restoration of the critical function of reason, based on the formal anticipation of an idealized consensus, which is lost in Gadamer's reduction of truth to the happening of a tradition.

Gadamer's Response

In his response, Gadamer discusses Habermas' contra-factual agreement, an idea originally proposed by K.O. Apel, but in his engagement, Gadamer draws a different conclusion from the idea of an unlimited community of interpreters to defend his own truth-as-event framework. Recall that the idea of an unlimited community of interpreters coming to a universal and unforced consensus was used to explain the normative element in truth that can stand in judgment of any factual agreement. Gadamer initially appears to agree with this way of legitimizing truth saying, "he [Apel] is completely correct in his attendant claim for the idea of an unlimited community of interpretation. Certainly only such a community is suited to legitimize the claims to truth made by those attempting to achieve agreement" (*RMC* 283).⁹ Gadamer initially appears to agree with the Apel-Habermas idea of an unlimited community as an illustration of the normative element in distinguishing the true from the false, but the apparent agreement is short-lived:

Nonetheless, I doubt whether it is justified to link this legitimation with the idea of progress. The multiplicity of interpretive possibilities to be tested in no way excludes the possibility that they may mutually overshadow each other. In addition, the fact that dialectical antitheses in the process of interpretive *praxis* emerge is no guarantee of an approach to a true synthesis. In these areas of the human sciences one must view the 'results' of the

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to My Critics," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, trans. George Leiner, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 283. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *RMC*.

interpretive process not so much in terms of progress, as it always offers only a partial perspective, but rather as the sinking away and decay of projects which stand in the way of knowledge; it is the revival of language and the reacquisition of meaning that has been given by tradition. (*RMC* 283)

Gadamer takes the Apel-Habermas idea of an unlimited community of interpretation but changes the stipulation that such a community comes to a universal consensus. Instead, Gadamer stipulates that such a community could produce a myriad of interpretive possibilities that do not converge with each other, i.e., “no guarantee of an approach to a true synthesis.” Without the guarantee of a universal consensus, there is no basis to appeal to this thought experiment as a measuring stick for progress: “It is only according to the measuring stick of an absolute knowledge, something foreign to us, that this is a threatening relativism” (*RMC* 283). This truncated thought experiment of an unlimited community of interpreters where the universal consensus is cut out fits in with Gadamer’s understanding of truth as an infinitely recurring and perpetually re-appropriating event of tradition. In Gadamer’s ontology of truth, each interpreter is a co-creator of truth because truth is the synthesis that occurs between the horizon of the original work and the horizon of the interpreter. Each new horizon brings new life to the work and hence a new truth, where the work is reshaped according to a new historical vista. But apart from this concrete hermeneutical process of fusing horizons, there is no universal consensus that is guaranteed.

The problem with Gadamer’s excision of the universal consensus from the idea of the unlimited community of interpreters is that it is this aspect of the thought experiment that illustrates the *oughtness* of truth. As Habermas explained, the phenomenon of truth is such that it demands universal recognition, and the normative demand is there whether people as a matter of fact give assent to a true claim or not (*HCU* 267). It is this aspect of the demand for universal recognition due solely to the force of the better argument that distinguishes true claims from the mere cultural transmission of content. Habermas’ concern with Gadamer’s theory is that without a normative basis, it collapses truth into the mere cultural transmission of content, but the latter is clearly not identical with truth as

the propagation of mass propaganda and ideology shows. Without a normative element, one cannot distinguish truth from falsity, and this normative element is precisely what the universal and unforced consensus that Gadamer wishes to eliminate is meant to explain. The demand for a universal consensus can be thought of as a necessary condition of any claim that purports itself to be true.¹⁰ But if Gadamer excises this feature of the thought experiment, then he has no right to use normative notions that distinguish truth from falsity without providing some other basis by which one can make normative distinctions.

The problem is that in Gadamer's theory there is no normative ground to distinguish between truth and falsity. Recall that Gadamer does away with the notion of a text-in-itself or world-in-itself that can act as a standard to check the accuracy of future interpretive productions of a work. The elimination of these standards means that what must bind people together in a communal act of understanding is the practical fusion of horizons between the past and the present. But as Habermas insists, the mere fact of coming to an agreement does not guarantee a true agreement—plenty of ideological traditions, cults, and propaganda campaigns elicit wide-ranging and long-standing agreements among millions of people through long spans of time.

In response, Gadamer may refer us to his preface in *Truth and Method* where he states that his project is not about finding a normative basis; his project is not about “what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (*TM* xxvi). The problem with this defense is that Gadamer does think that he is *truly* describing the act of understanding over against the *false* objectivistic depictions of understanding championed by historicism. In other words, the idea of truth and normativity and the demand for universal recognition contained in these notions is already built into the nature

¹⁰ Cristina Lafont has argued persuasively that even a universal consensus can only be a necessary and not sufficient condition for truth. Her reason is that truth is to be thought as an achievement term, a goal, that transcends any justification practice that we engage in, including coming to a universal consensus on something. Her defense for this is exemplified in the open question dilemma which states that for any justification that we provide for a truth claim, even the hypothetical state of affairs of a universal consensus, we can still meaningfully ask the question: But is it true? So truth cannot be reduced to our justification practices. Having said, the demand for a universal consensus can still be thought of as a necessary though not sufficient condition for truth, meaning that however much truth transcends our justification practices, it minimally demands universal recognition for its content.

of Gadamer's argument—or any argument for that matter, as these notions are implicit in the very purpose and structure of an argument. If Gadamer's argument in *Truth and Method* succeeds, then it obligates all of us to reject the false objectivism of historicism that champions an ideal of abstracting the self and all its present prejudices from the process of understanding history. If Gadamer's argument is successful, then we must embrace his claim that all historical knowledge is always already mediated by our tradition and our current frame of reference, and we fail to acknowledge this at the cost of irrationality.

In addition to this implicit use of normativity, there are times when Gadamer cannot help but to appeal to normative notions even when he is trying not to as he does in this passage where he discusses the unlimited community of interpreters producing non-converging interpretations: “one must view the ‘results’ of the interpretive process not so much in terms of progress, as it always offers only a partial perspective, but rather as the sinking away and decay of projects which stand in the way of knowledge” (*RMC* 283). In this statement, Gadamer implies the existence of two kinds of projects: 1) projects which impede knowledge, and by implication 2) projects which advance knowledge. If Gadamer is determined to dissolve normativity into the facticity of traditional content, he needs to tell us what standard he is using to distinguish between knowledge-impeding projects and knowledge-advancing projects. After all, bad interpretations or knowledge-impeding projects are also events that happen to us just as much as good interpretations or knowledge-producing ones. Without the use of normative notions, Gadamer is left without a basis to distinguish knowledge-producing projects from knowledge-impeding ones, and without a basis for this distinction, the distinction itself is unintelligible. By neglecting to discuss the normative dimension of human understanding that deals with what we ought to do and the responsibilities we have in light of the reflective beings that we are, Gadamer misses an indispensable element in his theory of understanding.

Apart from this problematic reinterpretation of the universal consensus, Gadamer also defends his exaltation of tradition and prejudice by claiming that these notions, in the way he uses them, do not necessarily entail a preference for the status quo. Gadamer says:

Now it is obvious that the phrase which I occasionally use, that much depends on establishing a connection with tradition, promotes misunderstanding. Contained within this is in no sense a preference for that which is customary, to which one must be blindly subservient. On the contrary, the phrase 'connection to tradition' means only that the tradition is not exhausted by the heritage one knows and is conscious of. In this way tradition cannot be relegated to an adequate consciousness of history. Alteration of the existing conditions is no less a form of connection to tradition than is a defense of existing conditions. Tradition exists only in constantly becoming other than it is. (*RMC* 288)

The manner in which Gadamer is rejecting the label of being a conservative ideologue is to defend the concept of tradition as a malleable, amorphous, and widely capacious concept that can subsume within itself the opposite of its current content. Gadamer's theory of understanding, particularly with respect to the negativity of experience, is to some extent consistent with this understanding of tradition, but there are other aspects of his theory that are in tension with this more formalized view of what a "connection to tradition" means. Recall that Gadamer explicitly rejected Humboldt's formal view of language, instead opting for a view that heavily emphasized the content of tradition as what is uniquely constitutive of language. It was the concrete content of tradition that acted as the transcendental condition of understanding, so while traditions are capacious enough to include new insights, they are still determined enough by a core range of content such that it is meaningful to differentiate one tradition over against another just as it is meaningful to differentiate one concrete language over against another. Insofar as tradition has a determinate content for Gadamer, it is difficult to accept his statement that his "connection to tradition" is wholly indifferent to the status quo. The way Gadamer conceptualizes tradition in terms of concrete content along with his transcendentalizing of tradition as the condition for understanding suggests that he is beholden to the past, to a greater degree than he would like to admit.

As a further example of the determinate way in which Gadamer conceptualizes tradition and the implicit conservatism that this move entails, we can look at his discussion of the task of hermeneutics with respect to specific traditions. Gadamer says:

Hence the task of hermeneutics has always been to establish agreement where there was none or where it has been disturbed in some way. The history of hermeneutics confirms this if, for example, we think of Augustine, who sought to mediate the Gospel with the Old Testament. (*TM* 292)

The early Christians' allegorizing of the Old Testament to mediate its content with the New Testament is one example of Gadamer's "connection to tradition," where an established tradition has a determinate content (the Hebrew Bible), but at the same time can evolve through time and is capacious enough to absorb into itself its other. The problem with this example is that it still exemplifies a naïve acceptance of the validity of many facets of the original tradition. Even if reinterpreted, the new tradition, Christianity, still holds the validity of many facets of Judaism—scriptural revelation, the need for sacrifice, monotheism, most moral commandments—and this core of traditional content imposes itself as an authority to which human beings are to be subordinated. Gadamer's defense against conservative ideology is not fully successful because the malleability of tradition that he champions is not enough to thwart this charge. Reflective judgment does not limit itself to merely demanding that tradition reinterpret itself. Rather, the power of reflective judgment is such that it can put the entire tradition, both Old and New Testaments, into question and reject the whole thing outright in the same way that Greek mythology has no binding epistemic authority on anybody. Merely pointing to the malleability of tradition is not enough to absolve Gadamer from the charge of conservatism.

Now Gadamer will counter that even critique must presuppose tradition. Gadamer claims that the appropriation of tradition by new interpreters requires critical discernment, and that it is only within this framework—the framework which presupposes a certain level of traditional content—where real critique occurs. Gadamer says:

Indeed, I would say that only what is 'determined' [*entscheidet*] in such a relation of *praxis* [the mediation between the traditional content of the past and the present] remains real critique. A critique which in general opposes the prejudices of another individual or the dominant social prejudices because of their coercive character and, on the other hand, claims to dissolve such a delusory relation by communication finds itself [...] in very bad circumstances. (RMC 288)

In this passage, Gadamer is charging Habermas with a performative contradiction. While Habermas wants to critique social prejudices because of their coercive character, his critique can only be launched through the medium of language, but insofar as language discloses a world, Habermas' critique presupposes a shared background of beliefs, i.e., a traditional content, with those whom he critiques. As examples of this shared background of beliefs, Gadamer appeals to Habermas' own analogy of how social pathologies can be likened to a psychotherapist trying to heal her patient from pseudo-communication caused by repressed traumatic events from childhood. Gadamer says:

In the case of psychoanalysis the patient's suffering and desire to be cured is given as a supporting foundation for the therapeutic activity of her doctor. The doctor interposes his authority and, not without necessity, insistently presses for the unshrouding of repressed motivations. In this situation the voluntary subordination of one to the other is the supporting basis. In social life, on the contrary, the resistance of the opponent, and the resistance directed against the opponent, is a general presupposition held by all. (RMC 288)

Gadamer is pointing out that the psychotherapist, just like Habermas' social critic, is assuming a background of shared beliefs with the patient. In the therapist's case, there is a whole background of shared beliefs including a doctor-patient relation, the acknowledgement of psychological suffering by both parties, the doctor's authority to diagnose and treat the patient. Now, transitioning to Habermas' social critic who perhaps

denounces a corrupt government spreading propaganda, Gadamer shows that there are differences between this case and the doctor-patient case as the two parties in a political conflict do not submit to one another, so Habermas' analogy is not fitting. However, disregarding the differences in the analogy, the case of the social critic also shares a presupposition with her opponents, namely the presupposition that opponents' resist each other. So even the social critic and her opponents still depend upon a shared traditional content—namely their self-understanding as opponents and the reciprocal resistance that this entails.

What this shows then is that traditional content is presupposed both by conservatives, who seek to perpetuate the content of past convictions, and revolutionary critics, who seek to overturn past convictions. From this analysis, Gadamer argues that hermeneutical theory is indifferent about revolutionary change: "The theory of hermeneutics cannot decide from within itself whether or not the presupposition is correct that society is ruled by class conflict and that no basis for dialogue exists between the classes" (*RMC* 289). All that hermeneutical theory shows is that if a social critic attempts to "dissolve such a delusory relation [of pseudo-communication] by communication" then the social critic must presuppose a shared background of beliefs with her opponents in order to articulate a critique that will be intelligible to her opponent. Thus, Gadamer insists that he should not be understood as a conservative ideologue because the agreement that he maintains is a necessary aspect of communication is the agreement of reason itself: "It is the idea of reason itself that cannot give up the idea of general agreement. That is the solidarity which unites us all" (*RMC* 289).

What I would like to show now is that through this polemic, Gadamer's understanding of "traditional content" has become more formalized in order to allow for the rejection—and not just reinterpretation—of specific traditional content. When Gadamer speaks of the social critic sharing the presupposition of "the resistance of the opponent" with her opponent, this presupposition abstracts from the specific content of beliefs that are in dispute between the critic and her opponent. Take the example of a Russian social critic criticizing the propaganda movements of Stalinist Russia in the mid twentieth century. It is

true that both parties in this dispute share their opposition to each other. But this shared presupposition hardly warrants making the claim that the social critic acknowledges the superiority of the Soviet tradition over her own judgment. Acknowledging the superiority of the Soviet tradition over one's reflective judgment would require sharing a more material presupposition—perhaps the legitimacy of the Russian revolution and the subsequent means of securing power employed by Soviet leaders. But merely sharing the more formal presupposition that opponents resist each other can hardly be thought of as the kind of presupposition that would warrant the claim that specific traditions claim a superiority over one. Even less warranted is the idea that the critic submits to the Soviet tradition because she needs to articulate her criticism linguistically and any communication requires the sustaining agreement of language.

In his polemic with Habermas, Gadamer tries to redefine what traditional content is along more formal lines to allow for critics to disagree with their material traditions, but this is a change from his remarks in *Truth and Method*. Recall that Gadamer previously argued against Humboldt's formalism and for the understanding of language in terms of a concrete traditional content (*TM* 438-439). Furthermore, *Truth and Method* also argues for the rationality of tradition's authority over its subjects. Gadamer explains that authority is constituted by people superior in knowledge making judgments that would be rational for one to accept because of the keener insight of the authoritative person:

Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own.
(*TM* 281)

Having located the authority of tradition in particular individuals of the past, Gadamer continues his explanation of their authority as ultimately being grounded in the content, i.e., the material judgments, that they bequeath to posterity:

acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who presents them. *But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content*, since they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways—e.g., by good reasons. [Italics are mine] (TM 281)

The singular point that I wish to draw from this quote is that in *Truth and Method's* explanation of tradition and its authority, Gadamer has a very thick and concrete understanding of tradition as the material judgments made by experts that are then bequeathed to posterity. This is a content-rich understanding of tradition that calls for the subordination of people to its dictates. But in his polemic with Habermas, Gadamer provides a more formal understanding of tradition that can be limited to the mere formal presupposition that opponents resist each other such that this shared belief does not necessarily call for the subordination of individuals to the concrete beliefs of a tradition. Clearly this formal presupposition, which is really an analytic proposition since opponents by definition resist each other, has little to do with the thick account of tradition given in *Truth and Method* where what is meant by the shared background of understanding are the material judgments of past experts to which one subordinates oneself.

The issue then is that if all Gadamer means by tradition is the formal set of presuppositions that opponents must make in entering debate—like the truthfulness of analytic judgments, shared meaning, and the authority of reason—then this would dissolve Gadamer's polemic with the Enlightenment, as both Habermas and Enlightenment thought also acknowledge these things as essential for rational dialogue. But clearly, as we can see in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer has a much more concrete understanding of tradition than what he leads on in his polemic with Habermas. Tradition for Gadamer includes the authority of "experts" of the tradition and the material content they produce and bequeath to posterity. Hence, when Gadamer defends himself from the charge of being a conservative ideologue, this

defense is not fully justified because Gadamer shifts the meaning of “tradition” in order to claim that he is really neutral as to whether revolutionary change is legitimate or not. Of course, if Gadamer were willing to admit that he changed his views from *Truth and Method*, then his defense would stand by implicitly conceding much of Habermas’ critique.

One aspect of Gadamer’s thesis about the indispensability of a shared background that is legitimate, but which is also not denied by Habermas, is that the power of our reflective judgment to put things under scrutiny is limited. As Gadamer says in his explanation of historically effected consciousness, our beliefs begin before our reflective judgment has a chance to discern true beliefs from the false ones that we inherit from our upbringing in a particular historical and cultural setting. In fact, there are presuppositions that we may carry with us that will never reveal themselves as particular beliefs that could be otherwise precisely because they are so ingrained and familiar that we would never think to question them. And the specific presuppositions of this sort will vary from culture to culture and person to person. This consequence is the result of the human condition that is limited in its power of self-reflexivity.

But as we saw previously, Habermas accepts this situated nature of reflective judgment. He is not arguing for the absolute transparency of a Hegelian absolute knowledge. Instead, Habermas is arguing for reason’s capability to be oriented toward not just agreement, but truthful agreement. Insofar as this is the case, all claims of tradition must be, at least in principle, subject to the regulative ideal of a contra-factual agreement that transcends the concrete content of any tradition. So the key difference between Habermas and Gadamer lies in the question of normativity. Because our reason is situated, Gadamer is content with reducing truth to the happening of the evolution of traditional content through time. Habermas claims that when this model of truth dissolves itself of the normative demand for universal recognition, then one is left without a basis to distinguish mere cultural transmission from truth, and this reduction ultimately undercuts the validity of any theory purporting to accurately describe anything at all, including reductions of truth to traditional content. Because of this performative contradiction, the formal nature of

normativity advocated by Habermas is non-reducible. It is logically primitive and must be elucidated, but not reduced.

Conclusion

Gadamer's insights into the universality of understanding have taken us a good deal of the way toward answering the charges historicism makes against reason. Gadamer's argument for the universality of the common human horizon shows us that historicism's fragmentation of reason into an infinite number of horizons is a mistaken consequence of both an objectification of the past and an abstraction of understanding that neglects to reflect on how the self is always already mediating the past with the present. These are powerful arguments, but what is needed to properly ground them is an account of normativity that can secure Gadamer's claim about the intersubjectivity of understanding. In Habermas' response to Gadamer, we already see outlines of this account in his use of Apel's idea of the contra-factual agreement.

In the next chapter, I will use Apel's account of normativity to complete the picture of what this formal element is, how it inheres in the basic nature of human existence, and how it relates to the material conditions of knowledge. In articulating these points, I will round out my answer to historicism. My goal is to show that wrestling with the issue of historicism presents us with a two-world picture of rationality—a formal element that is invariant and a material element that changes with time. Historicism, along with linguistic relativism is wrong to reduce the formal to the material, while formalist attempts to reduce the material to the formal are also misguided. There is a tension between these two elements, and as prior chapters show, the overwhelming temptation is to reduce one dimension to the other. But I will argue that one must resist this temptation. Formalism, in light of its vacuity, cannot yield material content—this is provided to us by history. On the other hand, material facticity cannot be a condition of possibility for formal validity. The normative properties of validity are logically primitive, so they have priority in regulating material content. These properties are not only fundamental to rational thought, but also essential to concrete human life. Just what these normative properties are is what will be

discussed in the next chapter with K.O Apel's idea of the *logos-a priori* as a Heideggerian existential.

Chapter 6: Apel and the Logos-A Priori

Introduction

The Gadamer-Habermas debate shows that there are two realities that must be attended to in developing a theory of truth. First, one cannot ignore the normative aspect of truth, which is to be understood as the demand for universal and necessary recognition for that which one claims to be true. This feature of truth captures the dimension of rational validity that all truth claims, including relativistic theories that seek to undermine truth, must presuppose. Relativistic theories that seek to reduce rational validity to facticity are faced with a dilemma when this reduction is applied to their own theories: 1) either they consistently dissolve the validity of their own theory into their own parochial and ephemeral historical context that has come and gone, in which case the theory, being mere historical and parochial projection, has an expiration date and says nothing about reality for us today, or 2) they inconsistently assume rational validity for their own theory, in which case they contradict their dissolution of validity by presupposing validity. Without the backing of a sociological study on this matter, it seems to me that most relativist philosophers, when pressed, will argue for the truth of their relativism, thereby enacting the universal demand that everybody recognize the validity of their relativism. If they do otherwise and not take their theories as valid, relativist philosophers would be admitting the irrelevance of their work. Validity then is an irreducible element in a theory of truth that must be accounted for.

In addition to this formal aspect of a theory of truth, Gadamer's insights suggest a second crucial element that all our concrete truth claims must have, and this is the material content that provides the data for substantive truth claims. It is not enough to rest with the formal quality of validity in developing a theory of truth because the formality of validity remains empty. A claim to truth needs content, and this content will be gathered from one's historically effected consciousness that Gadamer describes. This means that the content is being gathered from a particular situation, a particular point in time, and from a particular

language. An acknowledgement of this point does not entail relativism so long as one does not posit that these factual circumstances exhaustively determine the truth claim. One may start from a particular content but be led by the orientation to validity to rethink this initial given through other languages, historical eras, or cultural understandings. This openness and relative independence from an initial content is what differentiates a relativistic theory like Gadamer's from a theory that rightly acknowledges the normative element in human thought.

It is in the negotiation between these two poles that Karl-Otto Apel's work is situated. Apel started out his career inspired by Heidegger's refinement of transcendental philosophy by his account of "the linguistic and historical character of our being-in-the-world."¹ Apel remarks that in his Heideggerian phase, he developed a theory of hermeneutics very similar to what years later he discovered in Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (RITH 183). When Apel did come around to reading *Truth and Method*, he realized, through Gadamer's hermeneutical elaboration of Heidegger's philosophy, that his Heideggerian commitments made any kind of progress in understanding inconceivable (RITH 183). The reason for this was that "Gadamer did not hesitate to equate the conditions of the possibility of meaning understanding (that is of the 'thrown projection' of a world of manifest meaning...) with the conditions of the possibility of the intersubjective validity of understanding, in fact of any knowledge" (RITH 184). Apel goes on to say:

I think that the idea which Heidegger supported until 1964, namely the replacing of the traditional binary correctness concept of truth with the 'more original' concept of *aletheia*, led Heidegger and Gadamer to replace the counterfactual and, therefore, *per se* intersubjective validity of truth... with the facticity of meaning as it becomes manifest to us in the particular historical situation. (RITH 184)

¹ Karl-Otto Apel, "Regulative ideas or truth happening? An attempt to answer the question of the conditions of the possibility of valid understanding," in *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View*, trans. Rolf Sommermeier, ed. Marianna Papastephanou (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 183. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as RITH.

Because Apel's work was so similar to Gadamer's, Apel saw a warning sign for himself in Gadamer's thesis that understanding is not understanding better but simply understanding differently. Realizing that his work was leading to a relativism of truth provoked Apel to reformulate his views.

What is thus unique about Apel, as a critic of Heidegger and Gadamer, is that he was once a dyed in the wool Heideggerian, and even in his criticism, he continues to hold many of the two thinkers' insights with the major exception of their dissolution of normativity. Among these insights, Apel lists the following:

I do not dispute the thesis that we, as finite and historical creatures, *de facto* understand the *interpretandum* differently in each situation context—which also implies differently than it was meant. I was, and am, quite ready to make this concession to the temporal ontology of understanding, that is, the temporal ontology of the accompanying 'fusion of horizons' and the effective-historically conditioned context-dependence. (*RITH* 185)

Apel agrees that understanding happens from a point of view, from a given context that is historically conditioned, and he accepts Gadamer's notion of historically effected consciousness. In addition, he accepts Heidegger's insight into the hermeneutic circle as the way in which we understand the world: "With Heidegger I can accept and even emphasize that no concrete understanding of the world can depend upon 'avoiding' this circle—the circle between the historically conditioned pre-understanding of the world and the corrective recoil function of the interpretandum."² But Apel rejects the conclusion that these preconditions of the content of situation-dependent understanding also apply to the "transcendental conditions of the possibility of valid or non-valid understanding" (*RITH* 185).

² Karl-Otto Apel, "Regulative ideas or sense events? An attempt to determine the *logos* of hermeneutics," in *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View*, trans. Dale Snow, ed. Marianna Papastephanou (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 168. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *RISE*.

Apel thus makes a distinction between conditions of meaning, i.e., the content of knowledge, and conditions of validity. With regard to the latter, Apel says, "Like the binary concept of truth itself, these conditions [conditions of validity] relate by their very nature counterfactually and time-independently to all imaginable interpreters' universal capacity for consensus" (*RITH* 185). Moreover, Apel rejects the view of many postmodernists that the admission of the hermeneutic circle entails the rejection of conditions of universal validity "if only because in that case one could not even refer to the insight into the unavoidability of the hermeneutic circle as a valid philosophical insight" (*RISE* 169). Transcendental conditions of validity must be complementary to empirical and hermeneutical insights because concepts like "empirical testing, falsification, fallibility etc, are understandable to us *only* so long as certain implied presuppositions are held to be universally valid: for example, that there is truth and that we, on the path of the elimination of the false, can get closer to the universal consensual (*konsensfähigen*) truth" (*RISE* 169). Thus, the task that Apel sets for himself is to "do justice to the historicity of understanding without giving up the universal claim to validity of knowledge in general and especially the claim to a progressively better or deeper understanding in the sense of a normative hermeneutic" (*RISE* 167). Apel seeks to defend the irreducibility of the conditions of validity without giving up the insights of Gadamer and Heidegger into the historically variant conditions of meaning.

In order to provide my own response to the nature of normativity in light of historicism, I will elaborate and defend Apel's exposition of the transcendental conditions of validity, as these are the conditions that are put into question in light of the historicity of understanding. I agree with Apel's judgment that knowledge has both a situated domain (the conditions of meaning) and an invariant domain (the conditions of validity). As this study on historicism has shown, most thinkers gravitate toward one or the other pole and then try to reduce one domain to the other, but what is unique about Apel is that he maintains both types of conditions without reducing one to the other. To prove the viability of this thesis, Apel must show how invariant conditions are possible in light of the many relativizing factors like language, history, and power that postmodernists propose. Apel does this through an exposition of what he calls the *logos a-priori*, which is a set of

normative commitments that all who engage in argumentative discourse must presuppose at the cost of performative contradiction. I will then test Apel's theory of the *logos-a priori* by presenting a set of arguments that Amy Allen proposes in her book, *The End of Progress*, against universalist normative frameworks like Apel's *logos-a priori*. Finally, I will respond to Allen's many arguments and show how the transcendental conditions of validity that Apel delineated in his *logos-a priori* also apply to Allen's own argumentative discourse. The major sections to come then include 1) An exposition of the *logos a-priori*, 2) An exposition of Allen's arguments against universal values in *The End of Progress*, and 3) my defense of the *logos-a priori* in light of these arguments.

I. The Logos-A Priori

Apel begins his search for a transcendental ground of validity from the impasse that he himself faced when working within a Heideggerian paradigm. The problem with all relativistic-historicistic hermeneuticisms or deconstructive semioticisms is that of performative self-contradiction. Heidegger cannot maintain his historicist dissolution of validity without invalidating his own insights. Likewise, Derrida cannot hold to an exhaustive dissemination of meaning without dissolving the meaning of his claims. Both projects lead to performative contradictions, and what Apel sees in this consequence is a positive insight into the nature of human understanding. If all relativistic attempts to dissolve validity fail because of contradiction, this means that in argumentative discourse, there is an aspect of rationality that cannot be eliminated. Using Heideggerian terminology, Apel argues that postmodernists have neglected an essential fore-structure of our rational being-in-the-world.

This he calls the *logos-a priori*, and it is to be defined as the "inter-subjective, speech-communicative agreement concerning validity claims, which is always already presupposed" (*RISE* 173). This validity is something primitive and essential to argumentative discourse and thus to human rationality. It is primitive because it cannot be reduced to historical, sociological, biological, linguistic, psychological or any other empirical domain without resulting in contradiction. It is essential because all

argumentative claims presuppose this primitive concept in establishing the kind of claims made in arguments, and in turn these claims are made toward the end of establishing an intersubjective agreement among discourse participants. Thus, the *logos-a priori* has both a grounding function for argumentative discourse and a teleological one as well.

From the necessity of non-contradiction, Apel claims that he can derive four universal claims to validity that are constitutive of the *logos-a priori*. According to Apel, the following four claims are entailments that are always already pragmatically present in *any* act of argumentative discourse:

- (i) the claim to verbally expressible and to that extent inter-subjectively communicable sense;
- (ii) for prepositional statements, the assertorically raised claim to inter-subjectively consensual truth;
- (iii) for the verbal expression of intentional states of subjects, the claim to truthfulness or sincerity (which cannot be assured through arguments, but only through behavioural *praxis*);
- (iv) for speech acts as communicative acts with appellative force, the claim—which is also always already implicitly raised for the assertive acts—to normative, finally ethically justifiable correctness or rightness. (*RISE* 173-174)

The nature of these entailments are crucial for understanding Apel's idea of the rational necessity of the *logos-a priori*, so it will be worthwhile to unpack what they mean. Because my focus is to understand the rational necessity of the *logos-a priori* in argumentative discourse, I will elucidate (i), (ii), and (iv), leaving out from my exposition (iii) since by Apel's own admission, this entailment is not assured through argumentation but through behavioral *praxis*.

Verbally Expressible and Communicable Meaning

The first component of the *logos-a priori* says that all argumentative truth claims must be meaningful, and that this meaning must be able to be conveyed verbally and hence must be intersubjectively communicable. Against deconstructionists, this means that meaning cannot be infinitely differed to the degree that language's differential sense shifting exhaustively dissipates away all intersubjectively shared meaning. If meaning were dissipated exhaustively in this way, then "the insight claimed by Derrida with respect to difference and dissemination of *signifiants* would of course also not be thinkable" (*RISE* 172).

Deconstructionists make argumentative claims about meaning, and insofar as they argue for their claims, they are committed to a logical chain of presuppositions. First, they must presuppose that there are true statements in distinction from false statements.³ This is clearly apparent when deconstructionists like Derrida claim that semantic content is "neither originary, nor ahistorical, nor simple, nor self-identical in any of its elements, nor even entirely semantic or significant."⁴ To attribute such properties to a semantic content would clearly be false, hence the presupposition that there are false claims. Positively, deconstructionists claim that what is true about meaning is its difference and deferral, hence the proposition that there are true claims. Second, deconstructionists must also presuppose that their critique of prior semantic theories and their own constructive theories "admit of examination, and that they can be proved (by means of criteria) to be inter-subjectively valid (capable of achieving consensus) or to be false" (*UFKN* 87). When deconstructionists make claims about what is true or false about meaning, they give arguments, and in doing so, they presuppose criteria as to what makes claims true or false. This criteria is presupposed to be valid across linguistic communities because deconstructionists are making claims for their views to hostile communities that do no

³ Karl-Otto Apel, "Can an ultimate foundation of knowledge be non-metaphysical," in *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View*, trans. Benjamin Gregg, ed. Marianna Papastephanou (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 87. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *UFKN*.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 145. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *LIA*.

share their views about meaning as is evidenced for example by Derrida's debate with John Searle. Third, the fact that deconstructionists implicitly appeal to criteria to establish the veracity of their claims further presupposes that "there is a community (in principle, an unlimited community) of discourse or argumentation that has at its disposal a sufficiently shared and clear language in which it can formulate not only its problems but also possible solutions to these problems" (*UFKN* 87). If deconstructionists were to contextualize their claims solely to their community or their linguistic or historical context, they would have to qualify everything they say with the proviso, "but that's just for me," which would render their claims trivial and invalid.

The force of these presuppositions can be seen in Derrida's debate with John Searle in that Derrida accuses Searle of misunderstanding his work (hence assuming the possibility of a sufficiently stable meaning that could have been gotten at if Searle had been more careful) and outright claiming that Searle's claims are not *true* but *false* (hence assuming the universality of truth). Derrida himself gives evidence to these presuppositions when he recounts his debate with Searle and responds to the objection that he is performatively contradicting himself in demanding that Searle understand him correctly:

Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn't it, the skeptic-relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in truth, stability, or the unity of meaning, in intention, or 'meaning-to-say,' how can he demand of us that we read *him* with pertinence, precision, rigor? How can he demand that his own text be interpreted correctly?... The answer is simple enough: this definition of the deconstructionist is *false* (that's right: false, not true) and feeble; it supposes a bad (that's right: bad, not good) and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which therefore must finally be read or reread. Then perhaps it will be understood that the value of truth (and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts. (*LIA* 146)

Derrida feels the force of the performative-contradiction objection and so affirms his belief in truth, but what becomes apparent is that his understanding of truth is still framed within a relativistic framework of meaning that still leads to a performative contradiction. This is evident when he qualifies his affirmation of truth and its associated values by saying that, “all the positive values to which I have just referred are contextual, essentially limited, unstable, and endangered” (*LIA* 147). He further says that:

the norms of minimal intelligibility are not absolute and ahistorical, but merely more stable than others. They depend upon socio-institutional conditions, hence upon non-natural relations of power that by essence are mobile and founded upon complex conventional structures...these structures are in the process of transforming themselves profoundly and, above all, very rapidly. (*LIA* 147)

If Derrida were to include among the “norms of minimal intelligibility” that are transforming profoundly and rapidly, Apel’s first component of the *logos-a priori*, which is the idea of a communicably shareable meaning sufficiently stable enough to share with an unlimited community of interpreters, if this norm is merely a situated socio-historical artifact of our time, then Derrida’s claims would performatively contradict themselves. As will be explained in more detail with Apel’s second component of the *logos-a priori*, the validity of truth claims cannot be justified by merely local contexts; they must be referred to an unlimited community of interpreters. Beliefs that are merely held to be true by local socio-historical communities and that are “founded upon complex conventional structures” in given historical horizons that are rapidly changing cannot be justified as truth claims because the merely localized grounding undermines their validity. For example, the fact that a majority of people once held a geocentric view of the universe as true says nothing about the actual truth of this claim. If truth claims are shown to be false, then this tells us not that they had a relative contextual validity, but that they were never true to begin with. Hence, Derrida’s idea of a contextualized truth is incoherent because the concept of truth is intrinsically universal as will be further explained soon.

But what about the claim of deconstruction that meaning is dependent on the differentials of elements within a system that spans infinitely through time, and so will always be changing depending on the context in which meaning is interpreted? This thesis is a linguistic parallel to Gadamer's point that a historical event will never be fully determined because as time continues and as the whole by which the part is interpreted continues to expand, the part's interpretation will continue to evolve.

Like the case of a historical event, one can affirm that our understanding of the meaning of a linguistic expression at the empirical level can continue to improve and be further differentiated with the passing of time and the rise of new contexts. This is something that Apel specifically considers and affirms as a valid insight of deconstruction:

one can, for example—with Peirce and with Derrida—gladly admit that the processes of human knowledge, as processes of the sign-mediated interpretation of signs, are as such empirically incomplete and, because of the sense-constitutive difference between the singular act of sign use and the repeatable model of significant form, are subject to an infinite game occurrence (*Spiel-Geschehen*) of differential sense shifting (*différance*) and of dissemination. (*RISE* 172)

However, what cannot be admitted, at the cost of performative contradiction, is that the incompleteness of meaning totally eliminates the meaning that an expression may have—otherwise the very claims that deconstruction is attempting to make would be meaningless. As Apel explains:

contrary to the—in a certain respect semiotistical—claim of Derrida, an inter-subjectively valid agreement about meaning must be not only possible but rather also already actual. For without this transcendental-hermeneutical presupposition the insight claimed by Derrida with respect to difference and dissemination of *signifiants* would of course also not be thinkable. At least

the difference of the *signifiants* must also be thematized by Derrida as *signifié* and to that extent brought to a “logocentric presence.” (RISE 172)

Even if the meaning of a truth claim undergoes change through different contexts, what allows processes of sign interpretation in these different contexts to be tested against one another and to be subsumed sufficiently together to constitute a common meaning under the “‘regulative idea’ of a ‘*transcendental significatum*’” (RISE 172) is the idealizing presupposition of the *logos-a priori* that brings together these different meaning producing contexts. One can test the validity of this claim by attending to the fact that denials of sufficiently stable meaning are also linguistic utterances, and they presuppose themselves to be sufficiently stable in meaning to successfully discharge this objection.

As Habermas understands it, Derrida is led to a thesis of the dissipation of meaning because he thinks about the interpretation of language primarily from a Heideggerian perspective of world disclosure in which the function of language as world disclosing and world constituting is primary. As texts enter different contexts they enter different worlds in which they are interpreted, and this creates a radical instability of meaning for these texts. In this sense, Derrida is a faithful Heideggerian as Heidegger also thought about language and truth in terms of its function of unconcealing and relegated truth as validity to a derivative and inauthentic product of *Das Man*. But what Derrida and Heidegger overlook is the communicative action of normal speech in which criticizable validity claims are made and rejected. Language does not just disclose the material content of the world, but it also tests this content for its truth value. By overlooking this aspect of language, Derrida covers over the idealizations of the *logos a-priori* hard wired into argumentative discourse.

Habermas gives a good summary of this situation. He explains:

For Derrida, linguistically mediated processes within the world are embedded in a *world-constituting* context that prejudices everything; they are fatalistically delivered up to the unmanageable happening of text

production, overwhelmed by the poetic-creative transformation of a background designed by archewriting, and condemned to be provincial. An aesthetic contextualism blinds him to the fact that everyday communicative practice makes learning processes possible (thanks to built-in idealizations) in relation to which the world-disclosive force of interpreting language has in turn to prove its worth. These learning processes unfold an independent logic that transcends all local constraints, because experiences and judgments are formed only in the light of criticizable validity claims.⁵

As Apel argue will, the built-in idealizations of language that Habermas alludes to are not themselves empirical phenomena. This is why they can transcend “all local constraints,” i.e., all empirical contexts. The built-in idealization is the contra-factual agreement to which all truth claims are subjected, and it functions as a formal presupposition that inheres in all argumentative discourse. Hence, if the meaning of a truth claim changes through new empirical contexts, these profiles of meaning are subjected to a rationally motivated consensus as to how these different profiles fit into the broader picture of an encompassing meaning that subsumes these distinct profiles. Because all truth claims are made from the basis of language’s world-constituting function *and* language’s idealization presuppositions of the *logos-a priori*, the meaning-producing contexts are commensurable with one another. There is just as little incommensurability of meaning as there is incommensurability of language as there is incommensurability of historical horizons. And if meaning in different contexts is commensurable across these contexts, then Apel’s claim that argumentative discourse presupposes a verbally expressible and inter-subjectively communicable sense holds true.

Intersubjectively Consensual Truth

Apel’s second component of the *logos-a priori* says that all argumentative claims presuppose themselves to be true, which means that these claims imply an intersubjective consensus that demands universal recognition. Insofar as one engages in argumentative

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “On Leveling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature,” in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), 205.

discourse, even the most virulent relativist must provide some reason or basis for her relativism—otherwise, there is no rational reason to take her relativism seriously. However, the second a relativist does this, they are engaged in making truth claims to support their relativism. Their view that relativism is true is only as good as the reasons they provide for this conclusion, but the relativist finds herself in the unenviable position that the more cogent her reasons are for her relativism, the more this cogency of argumentation argues against her conclusion because the means she employs (providing reasons she deems as true) undermines the end she seeks to effect (establishing that there is no truth).

To delve deeper into the claims being made in an act of argumentation, a distinction must be made between first-order truth claims (normative claims about what is true or what is right) and second-order metanormative claims (claims about the nature of normativity inherent in first-order claims). First-order truth claims are assertoric statements like: John broke his ankle, it is raining, or Charlottesville is a city in the state of Virginia. On the other hand, metanormative claims examine what normative concepts like truth or goodness must be like in order for these first order truth claims to be the kind of claims that they are. One can think of metanormative discourse as the background of presuppositions that first-order truth claims must draw upon to be what they are. Apel's argument is that at the second-order level of discourse, any argumentative claim—including the most virulently relativistic kind—*must* presuppose not merely a local context but the existence of a universally shared reality common to all discourse participants, i.e., a truth of the matter about whatever is in dispute.

Say for example that I have a friend from China who confuses the city of Charlottesville with Charlotte, North Carolina and in our conversations, he insists that Charlottesville is in North Carolina. Say he was so confident in this claim that even after my explaining the possible source of confusion, he refuses to budge. In this case, my first-order claim that Charlottesville is in Virginia presupposes a shared reality between my friend and myself. Likewise, my friend's claim, even though it is mistaken and different in first-order content from my own claim, *also* makes the same second order presupposition that I make about a

shared reality between the two of us. In fact, it is this shared reality that allows us to argue with one another because what allows disagreements to arise is competing claims about the same subject matter. If we did not presuppose a shared reality, there would be no friction in our claims because they would be claims about different things, which eliminates the possibility of the claims contradicting one another. Without a shared reality, you also lose the possibility of a shared argument because argumentation presupposes different stakes claiming the same ground. If I say, "It is raining right now in Charlottesville" and my interlocutor who is with me at the time I say this denies this, we can enter into argument because we have distinct stakes over the same ground. But if I say, "It is raining right now in Charlottesville," and my interlocutor says, "It is raining right now in Thailand," there is no basis on these claims alone for the possibility of argumentation over the raining as the stakes claim different subject matters. Thus, my Chinese friend's disagreement with me presupposes a shared intersubjectively recognizable reality, even if our claims about this reality are different.

Now, when I say that my friend and I presuppose a shared reality that grounds our claims to the location of Charlottesville, is this shared reality *just* between the local context of my friend and I? Say that my Chinese friend and I have a mutual Nigerian friend that joined the discussion, and he also confused Charlottesville with Charlotte, but with Charlotte, Michigan. Furthermore, suppose that our Nigerian friend was also stubbornly insistent that Charlottesville was located in Michigan, and that a three-way dispute now ensued. Would our Nigerian friend not also be making the same second order presupposition about a shared reality that my Chinese friend and I originally made? Of course he would, which is what grounds the possibility of his disagreement with me and his second disagreement with my Chinese friend. What about people from Latin America? Would they, given the same circumstances as my Chinese and Nigerian friend, also make the same presupposition of a shared reality if they entered the debate? The second they enter the debate, they are also involved in making the presupposition of a shared reality which is what grounds their disagreement or agreement with us. So is anybody excluded from making this presupposition of a shared reality when they enter our discussion? As I hope I am showing by using people of different cultures, no one who enters argumentative discourse is

excluded from the presupposition of a shared reality. This is a truly universal and necessary presupposition of argumentative discourse that is not affected by gender, race, culture, history, power, geography, or language.

The reason is that while a difference in perspective and opinion may be prompted by these social factors, they are still logically *posterior* to the formal presupposition of a shared reality about which one can have different perspectives and opinions that very well may be influenced by social factors. This shared reality is what Habermas calls a formal concept of world which means “an identical world for *all possible* observers or a world that is intersubjectively shared by *all members* of a group, and this *in an abstract form, that is, disconnected from all concrete contents.*”⁶ The presupposition of a shared reality is a formal one because the content of this reality is what is in dispute, but the sheer facticity of a common reality—its thatness as a common world—is a condition for the possibility of argumentative discourse wherein agreements or disagreements can take place.

Notice too that the presupposition of a shared reality grounds the participants’ reciprocal expectation of persuading each other to a common consensus. In argumentative discourse, the *telos* of this kind of speech is to arrive through rational means to a universal consensus about the concrete content of the formal shared reality which all dialogue participants presuppose. Thus, argumentative discourse anticipates a universal consensus among dialogue participants and this anticipation holds throughout the course of the discourse regardless of the factual extent of the current agreement or the fierceness of the disagreement. This anticipation of a universal consensus is, at an epistemic register, what the formal presupposition of a shared world is at an ontological register. When discourse participants enter debate, they presuppose a shared world and they demand, through their argumentation, recognition of this shared world from all dialogue participants; this demand for recognition is presupposed by all possible dialogue participants who enter the debate. Dialogue participants are thus united by both the presuppositions of a shared world *and* an anticipation of a universal consensus about this shared world. Agreement on

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 1:50.

these two formal presuppositions implicit in argumentative discourse is what makes their concrete agreements or disagreements possible.

This is why though Gadamer was correct in identifying a prior long standing agreement that grounds all our disagreements, he was wrong in *Truth and Method* to identify this agreement with the traditional content of language, which is a factual agreement. Factual agreements alone cannot ground argumentative discourse because they are limited in scope by social factors, but the *telos* of argumentative discourse demands universal recognition of a shared reality, so factual agreements fail to meet the universal demand set by argumentative discourse. Only the formal presupposition of a universally shared reality and the formal anticipation of a contra-factual agreement of unlimited participants can meet the demand that argumentative discourse makes on its participants. Only the orientation to normativity that is built into the nature of argumentative discourse through these two formal presuppositions can ground the universal intersubjectivity that Gadamer rightly sees as existing within the human race. Once again, Gadamer was right in claiming that all posited horizons (of linguistic, historical, or social kinds etc.) are ultimately abstractions of the one universal horizon that encompasses all of humanity. But what brings us together at the deepest level is not our current factual circumstances but a common rational destiny, which is anticipated in light of the presupposition of a shared world, and this is a necessary condition for the possibility of argumentative discourse.

A common worry associated with this type of transcendental argumentation is that it leads to infallibilism or a dogmatic absolutism. Not only is this false, but it is actually the case that the *logos-a priori* establishes the grounds for fallibility and epistemic humility. For us to be fallible, we must be capable of error, but erring requires a normative standard of truth (Habermas' concept of a formal world) by which this error can be identified as an error. Recall that what is certain in argumentative discourse (because it is a necessary presupposition of this kind of discourse) is the second order claim to a shared reality between dialogue participants, but this second order necessary presupposition says nothing about the concrete first order judgments that dialogue participants are making against each other. It is possible that despite there being a shared reality between

participants, none of the dialogue participants (up to this time) have arrived at a concrete veridical picture of what this shared reality concretely consists of. This ignorance (at the first order level) is not only fully compatible but also requires the necessary posit of a universally shared reality (at the second order level) because the ignorance at the first order level of content is about a common reality at the second order level that dialogue participants expect to discover through their argumentation. Without the expectation of a reality to be discovered, the ignorance would simply not be identified as ignorance, as there would not be anything to be ignorant about.

Furthermore, Apel and Habermas' description of the contra-factual agreement as an unlimited community of participants highlights the social and intersubjective nature of the project of discovering truth and being able to revise one's views in light of another's claims and point of view. On the other hand, if we eliminated the universal *logos-a priori* and the subsequent formal presuppositions of a shared reality and the anticipation of a universal consensus implicit in this existential, we would have no standard of truth which means we would not be capable of identifying errors. Without the universal commonality of this standard, dialogue participants could not have their views meaningfully challenged by others because the other people would be operating in different worlds with different standards for truth. Under this picture of rationality, trying to correct someone (given that everybody belongs to different worlds with different standards of truth) would be utterly arbitrary since without a common standard all critical claims are simply appealing to different contexts with no rational basis for asserting the superiority of one context over the other. It is actually the postmodernist view of rationality that leads to reducing argumentative discourse to coercive power moves. And if this is the case, then the postmodernist argument can be nothing but an unjustified imperialism. Thus, we see that Apel's *logos-a priori* actually establishes the grounds for fallibility, learning from others, and epistemic humility.

Moral Validity and Normative Rightness

Apel's fourth component of the *logos-a priori* claims that there are implicit moral valuations made by anybody engaged in argumentative discourse, and that these implicit moral judgments are necessarily made at the cost of performative contradiction. To begin to see how this is so, it will be helpful to recall the prior component of the *logos-a priori* that speaks about the presupposition of inter-subjectively consensual truth and how this concept of truth can be illustrated by the idea of having one's truth claim examined by an unlimited community of participants. What this unlimited community shows is that our claims to truth are always already involved in social relationships with others, insofar as truth itself demands an intersubjective consensus. In addition to the concept of truth itself as an intersubjective phenomenon, even the very act of linguistic utterance, as Wittgenstein's arguments against a logically private language demonstrate, is a social phenomenon because language entails following rules which can only be meaningfully verified by others. Hence, even if a solitary scholar leaves civilization to live on a deserted island to pursue truth, she is still always already involved *mit-sein*, with-others, insofar as she uses the language in which she was socialized to think.

Now, if these social relationships necessarily obtain in argumentative discourse, what kind of relationships must they be if the pursuit of truth is to be sought through discourse? Apel argues that, at the cost of performative contradiction, one must speak out what one understands as true, and not lie, if one is to pursue the truth in argumentative discourse.⁷ By the fact that argumentative discourse prohibits lying, we can immediately see that the social relationships involved in this activity involve a moral dimension. But even beyond lying, if one is pursuing truth, one must be open to hearing others and subjecting one's claims to the scrutiny of whoever has objections because if one short circuits the process of examination and discovery, then this impedes a genuine dialogue oriented toward the discovery of the truth (*ACC* 259). Additionally, the process of discerning truth is also incompatible with pressuring or forcing others to assent to one's claims through rationally illegitimate means like intimidation, ridicule, exclusion, or using heteronomous force. From

⁷ Karl-Otto Apel, "The *a priori* of the communication community and the foundation of ethics: the problem of a rational foundation of ethics in the scientific age," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Fisby (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1998), 259. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *ACC*.

this insight, Apel argues that, “in the community of argumentation it is presupposed that all the members mutually recognize each other as participants with equal rights in the discussion” (ACC 259).

What Apel is getting at is that in argumentative discourse one must necessarily presuppose that one’s claims are grounded rationally (on an autonomus ground) instead of being grounded by a non-rational basis (on a heteronomous ground like trickery, a desire for power, a desire to humiliate others). But rational autonomy is a social phenomenon, insofar as it is oriented toward truth and mediated by language, so when one is consistently pursuing truth, one is *eo ipso* honoring the rational autonomy of the virtual community to which one’s truth claims could be presented. This is to say that when we debate one another and give each other reasons for our positions, we are, perhaps unbeknownst to us, morally valuing each other’s status as rational beings capable of being persuaded by the better argument. In a genuine argument, this valuation recognizes the autonomous status of a rational agent not to be led astray by any consideration other than the truth of the matter. We recognize rational agents as ends in themselves and not merely as means to be forced into agreement by coercive and non-rational considerations. By recognizing others as ends in themselves, we transcend our own parochial self-interest in what Apel citing Peirce describes as a “basic transcendence of the egoism of finite beings—a kind of self-surrender in terms of a ‘logical socialism’” (ACC 262).

Apel extends this justification for the mutual respecting of human beings as ends in themselves in rational discourse to all human beings by further considerations. He says:

Since all linguistic utterances and, moreover, all meaningful human actions and physical expressions (in so far as they can be verbalized) involve ‘claims’ (in German ‘*Ansprüche*’) and hence can be regarded as potential arguments, the basic norm of mutual recognition by the participants in the discussion potentially implies that of the ‘recognition’ of all human beings as ‘persons’ in Hegel’s sense. In other words, all beings who are capable of linguistic communication must be recognized as persons since in all their actions and

utterances they are potential participants in a discussion, and the unlimited justification of thought cannot dispense with any participant, nor with any of his potential contributions to a discussion. In my view, this demand for the mutual *recognition of persons as the subjects of logical argument*, and not merely the logically correct use of intellect, justifies the use of the phrase “ethics of logic.” (ACC 259)

The one quasi-qualification I would make to this statement is that human beings have moral standing primarily in virtue of the rationally autonomous beings that we are, which is not separable from our ability to make potential arguments out of our claims, but I think that the emphasis should be on the being more so than the doing. Furthermore, our standing as rational beings is not to be interpreted in the sense that we never behave irrationally, but in the sense that we are the kind of being whose actions are subject to rational scrutiny because of our ability to act intentionally with a purpose, on the basis of reasons. I call this a quasi-qualification because Apel himself shifts the balance between doing and being in the last part of the quote where he says that it is the “*subjects of logical argument*” that command respect, not just the “logically correct use of intellect.” Also, Apel’s understanding of rationality is so broad that it encompasses all meaningful human utterances, physical gestures, and expressions so as to be truly inclusive of all human beings, and not just scholars. But one could misconstrue his statement to suggest that the decision to engage in rational activity alone is what constitutes our moral standing, which is not what he means, as his argument against decisionism will soon show.

If it were the act of entering into argumentative discourse that grounds the validity of morality, one could object that this makes the categorical nature of morality rest on a hypothetical imperative, which would invalidate morality’s necessary character. With respect to this objection of decisionism, Apel makes a distinction between the freedom of the will to do evil and act irrationally and the rational grounds to which the human empirical will is responsible regardless of how evil it acts. It is true that the will is never determined to act rationally and in accordance with moral norms as the irrational and immoral behavior of many shows. In this sense, it is true that “the practical realization of

reason through (good) will always requires a commitment that cannot be proven” (ACC 268). Nevertheless, the fact that a decision exists at the level of doing moral deeds should not be confused with a decision existing at the level of the rational grounding for the *logos-a priori*, which is what is insisted by those who charge Apel with decisionism (ACC 268). As I understand Apel’s point, we do not determine the validity of the *logos-a priori* by our decision to engage in argumentative discourse or not, as the relation of rational grounding is actually the reverse. If one is meaningfully deciding between entering into argumentative discourse or not, one has already accepted the rules of the argumentative language game insofar as one considers reasons for the two alternatives (ACC 268).

The choice to practically follow the rules of argumentative discourse is just a matter of whether one’s actions will be consistent with the normative demands already set by the *logos-a priori*. As Apel explains, “the choice of the criticist frame [engaging in critical rationality] as a philosophical position in a philosophical discussion is not an *irrational* act of faith. Rather, it is the only possible decision that is *semantically* and *pragmatically consistent* in terms of the ongoing language-game” (ACC 268). What the choice to realize moral and rational action in the concrete world shows is an endorsement and acknowledgement of the rational grounds for the *logos-a priori*, but the choice for rational action never constitutes the validity for this ground since the choice for or against rational action already presupposes the *logos-a priori*. On the other hand, if one decides not to enter into argumentative discourse based on no reason whatsoever, then one excludes oneself from the conversation of the justification of the moral norm (ACC 274-75). But if one excludes oneself from this conversation, one cannot raise the objection that morality has no justification, so the critique of decisionism cannot be made from this perspective (ACC 275). Anybody raising the question of justification of the moral principle is already involved in the argumentative language game (ACC 274).

Despite the hypothetical posit of an outsider who considers whether or not to join the argumentative language game, Apel argues that as a practical matter, one is never really in this position because we, as language speakers, are socialized by communities consisting of lifeworlds that present alternatives to us and prompt us to make decisions about some

things, thereby activating our engagement in the consideration of alternatives based on reasons (ACC 269). This lends further support to the point that it is not a decision to engage in argumentative discourse that grounds moral validity—as our socialization pre-decides this for us in always already engaging us in argumentative language games— but rather it is the kind of rational way of being that constitutes human life that grounds moral validity.

To further highlight our inseparability from the *logos-a priori*, I would argue, deviating slightly from Apel's emphasis, that our entering into argumentative discourse, if understood solely as an activity, is not itself the ultimate ground for morality. Argumentative discourse reveals the moral status of human beings insofar as it allows human rational nature to be displayed, but the actual ground for morality is the rational nature of human existence, which is not a choice that one chooses to engage in but a way of life or a way of being-in-the-world, as the connotation of the *logos-a priori* as a Heideggerian existential suggests. Trying to pin down Apel on whether the moral status of human beings is grounded on the act of argumentative discourse itself or the rational nature of human beings is hard to do because on the one hand, he initially argues strongly against a human decision grounding the *logos-a priori* with his claim that the acknowledgement that the will is never necessitated and that it must choose to act morally "does not mean the renunciation of a *rational grounding*" (ACC 268). But after Apel gives this argument, just two pages later he says the following: "we can resume the discussion of the first objection which asserted that our approach can, at best, ground 'hypothetical imperatives'. This objection is even now still valid inasmuch as the validity of basic moral norms (which we must ground) is dependent upon the will to argumentation"(ACC 270). To be fair, Apel addresses this last objection by saying that insofar as we seek to be meaningful, we must presuppose the *logos-a priori* and hence we must presuppose the validity of basic moral norms. However, one wonders if this successfully refutes decisionism as an opponent could argue that the will to argumentative discourse has simply been replaced by a will to meaning. But Apel's reply to this objection is that meaning is such a deeply ingrained part of human existence that the only way one could really decide against meaning is to destroy one's life through suicide (ACC 269-270). In this sense, through a longer chain of argument, Apel's conclusion seems to come very close to my

claim that ultimately it is human rational nature that is the bearer of moral dignity and not an act of this nature *per se*. Ultimately, our intuitions may come to the same thing because what a thing is, is deeply intertwined with what it does, so that talking about “human nature” in abstraction from what we do is not very meaningful. My concern for choosing the language of being rather than doing is that I want to ensure that human dignity is distributed to all human beings and that it remains a stable property of our existence, and not a characteristic that can come and go based on the choice of certain decisions.

But if we press hard on this point, that it is the *fact* of human rational nature that grounds the *ought* of moral validity, we now face a new Humean objection which claims that we cannot derive an ought from an is. Apel addresses this objection by arguing that the “fact” of the *logos-a priori* can never be equated with a Humean empirical fact, so the term here is not univocal. This distinction is clearly visible insofar as the “fact” of the *logos-a priori* is a precondition “for the possibility and validity of the empirical-scientific establishment of facts” (ACC 271). At an ontological level, empirical facts presuppose the formal concept of world, which is the ontological equivalent of the inter-subjective consensus of truth that was the second component of the *logos-a priori*. At an epistemic level, the establishment of empirical facts also presupposes the rational autonomy of oneself and the community of observers that can correct, supplement, or revise one’s observations, so that moral norms are always already presupposed in the empirical establishment of facts. If this is the case, then one can clearly see that a Humean fact cannot be equated with the “fact” of the *logos-a priori*. This false equivalence can further be seen insofar as Hume’s facts tell us what the world is like at a descriptive level, but the moral norms implicit in our judging of these facts are idealized counter-factual presuppositions, telling us what we must be like and how we are to be directed to one another if we are to successfully and truthfully produce accurate empirical descriptions of what the world is like. This is why Apel argues that if we are to think of the *logos-a priori* as a fact, we must think of it more like Kant’s “fact of reason” than a Humean fact (ACC 271).

Having established the basic moral norm of the mutual treating of others as ends in themselves, Apel further specifies this norm into the concrete generalizable interests of

society. So far, we have established that the discourse of truth is dependent on an unlimited community of participants and that the intrinsic intersubjectivity of this enterprise evidences a set of moral relations between the participants where each mutually respects each other and commands respect for the rational autonomy of the participants. But how do concrete ethical norms get established from this broader acknowledgement of respect? Apel claims that insofar as argumentative discourse establishes duties in the communication community to justify claims to one another, this also entails that the:

communication community (and this implies all thinking beings) are also committed to considering all the potential claims of all the potential members—and this means all human ‘needs’ inasmuch as they could be affected by norms and consequently make *claims* on their fellow human beings. (ACC 277)

Just as there is a kind of self-surrender when one submits one’s truth claims to the scrutiny of others, there is also a self-surrender of an exclusive self-interest in the acknowledgement of other discourse participants as moral beings worthy of respect and hence worthy of having their human needs considered (ACC 277). Furthermore, one must “strive for an agreement for the purposes of the collective formation of the will in every matter that affects the *interests* (the potential *claims*) of others” (ACC 278). This means that one must design political and legal institutions and structural systems that promote the formation of autonomous human wills oriented toward the common good such that the human autonomy of all is maximally respected and human needs are justly met. These institutions must also include mechanisms that ensure the free expression of these needs and contribute to open participation in the discussion of the justification of the concrete political and legal norms by which we govern ourselves. It is through these actions that one can realize the ideal communication community presupposed in our moral norms in the real community (ACC 282).

Philosophy of History

In light of the universal normativity provided by the *logos a-priori*, Apel maintains that it can act as an objective standard for a minimal teleology to reconstruct history and the evolution of culture (*RISE* 175). As Apel understands it, “every attempt at a critical hermeneutic reconstruction of the evolution of culture or of social or spiritual history... stands *a priori* under the regulative principle of having to understand its own presuppositions in the sense of the *logos-a priori*” (*RISE* 175). As Rickert showed, every historical reconstruction presupposes some selection principle that is an implicit value judgment. If there were no objective standard, the historian would be unable to judge the validity of her value judgments, leaving her historical reconstruction as a mere projection of her parochial interests. Moreover, the ability to judge historical progress or regress would be impossible as these notions presuppose an objective standard that can judge historical change as development or regression. But with the use of the *logos-a priori*, one does have recourse to an objective standard, on the basis of which the direction of historical narratives—whether they depict progress or regress—can be tested by subjecting the presuppositions of these narratives under the regulative ideal of the *logos-a priori*. This principle of subjecting social or spiritual history to the regulative ideal of the *logos-a priori* Apel calls “the self-recuperative principle” because it allows all reconstructive sciences to recover the essential rational aspect of human existence in its subject matter, whether that be history, developmental psychology, or any other reconstructive science.

This self-recuperative principle acts as a source for a minimal teleology that can take the place of the metaphysically thick teleology of Hegelian or Marxist speculative histories. Apel insists on differentiating his minimal teleology from thick teleology as follows:

the former [thick teleology] presupposes a causal and/or teleological determinism with respect to the empirically discoverable path of history; the latter, on the other hand, presupposes only that an incontestable condition of arguing, from which we can and must today take our point of departure, has factually been reached through the course of history, and that over and above

this the necessarily postulated and contrafactually anticipated ideal relations of communication in discourse can and should be a goal toward which we aim. With respect to the causally conditioned dynamic of the historical process, no necessity will be presupposed. (*RISE* 177-178)

Central in Apel's qualification of his minimal teleology is that it is not determinative of historical events, and it does not posit a necessary course to history. It gives full reign to the contingency of history, and it allows itself to be open to the surprise of new historical events that change our concrete views about the world. But what it does insist in is that even in the encounter of new events or in the formulation of new perspectives, what will continue to hold as valid is the *logos-a priori* because this element is what constitutes validity, which is a quality that all new rational views about the world must necessarily presuppose.

Apel further maintains that the different components of validity that were delineated as constitutive of the *logos-a priori* can act as the appropriate standards for the respectively different kinds of history that can be reconstructed. For example, writing a history of the progress of science, where science (*Wissenschaft*) is understood in the widest possible sense, would require one to measure progress by the second constituent of the *logos-a priori* which is the component that entails the universal consensus of truth (*RISE* 178). Writing a history of normative correctness in terms of moral or legal development would require one to use the fourth constituent of the *logos-a priori* which is the moral value dimension of validity that is grounded on the concept of autonomous freedom. Finally, writing a history of authentic self-expression of human subjectivity would require using the third constituent of the *logos a priori* which is the claim to truthfulness or sincerity. By describing the different kinds of histories that could be written and assessed in terms of their progress or regress, Apel is showing how the different dimensions of the *logos-a priori* can act as normative standards for the three dimensions of reality that have traditionally been thought to make up human existence: aesthetics (claim to truthfulness), ethics (claim to normative correctness), and science, or what used to be understood as metaphysics (claim to truth). Though Apel does not concretely explain how these

regulative principles would be used in historical reconstruction, I can attempt to illustrate what these reconstructions may look like by sketching the outlines of each type of history that Apel mentions.

Since the second component of the *logos-a priori* understands truth in terms of a universal consensus among an unlimited number of participants, this would mean that scientific theories would be judged as better or worse depending upon their scope of explanation and the number of different phenomena that they are able to fit under the theory's purview. This scope must also be combined with the *logos-a priori's* emphasis on consistency and coherency, so that the explanation of different phenomena must cohere with one another and form a coherent picture of the world. From a cursory glance at the history of science, one can see scientific development occurring that is increasingly obeying the imperatives of the *logos a priori* as scientific theories have progressed in terms of their ability to explain and bring together diverse phenomena. A frequent occurrence in this history is that newer scientific theories, like Newton's laws for example, subsume more local and fragmentary ones like Kepler's laws or theories that posited two separate systems of physical law for the motion of the earth and the motion of the heavens. The genius of Newtonian physics was to explain the whole universe through one equation. But even the elegance and simplicity of Newtonian physics has been replaced by Einstein's general theory of relativity, not only because it could explain the phenomena of Newtonian physics with much more precision and nuance, but also because it explained that gravity worked the way it did because of the curvature of space-time, and this had eluded Newton. When asked why gravity worked as it did in the Newtonian equation, Newton famously said: "*hypotheses non fingo.*" Additionally, Einstein was able to explain the behavior of phenomena as it approached the speed of light, which was something Newtonian theory could not explain accurately. For this reason, Einstein's theory has been judged as superior to Newton's, and the *logos-a priori* tells us that we are on good grounds in this judgment. What is visible in the standards of the scientific community is the regulative ideal of the *logos-a priori* that truth is found in the universal, so that theories of reality are judged by the degree of universality that is expressed by their ability to explain greater amounts of phenomena within a simple and coherent picture.

For normative correctness, the moral dimension of the *logos-a priori* shows us that moral progress is measured by the degree to which human beings, in virtue of their autonomous rational natures, are recognized as moral ends. In the normative demand for truth, there is also the implicit valuation of what Rickert calls the autonomous will that values truth as an absolute value, but this will actually exists in concrete human beings. Insofar as the value of a will is commensurate with what it wills, the valuing of truth as an absolute value is at the same time the valuing of the human being in which this will to truth resides. For this reason, normative correctness in history is to be judged by the degree to which societies recognize human beings as autonomous, as ends in themselves and not merely as means, or in other words, as free beings. Historical eras are judged by the degree to which they promote freedom through the social, cultural, political, and legal systems established in these time periods. And when we take a large time span of history we do see, akin to the scientific domain, an overall pattern of the gradual emancipation and the establishment of wider domains of laws intent on protecting basic human rights. Even the notion of a human right, which is a claim to value that must be necessarily recognized by all regardless of the power differentials between us, is an important development in human history. Over time, we have transitioned from societies established and ruled by the strength of those in power to an increasing number of societies legally constituted by democratic institutions and governed by the rule of law. As was evident in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, Kant successfully predicted the increasing establishment of international law and cosmopolitanization that has characterized the twentieth century. Socially, the latter half of the twentieth century to our current time is also emblematic of how freedom is spreading through the rise and greater recognition of marginalized groups, who continue to demand respect and the recognition of their standing as autonomous agents with inalienable rights.

In order to apply the normative standard for the dimension of the *logos-a priori* that deals with the authentic self-expression of human subjectivity, we must look at how we have conceptualized who we are as a species, and then try to understand why over the course of history, we have taken some theories to be more accurate as to who we are than other theories. My hypothesis is that like the case of science, we take certain theories to be more accurate in representing who we are because the better theories are able to include more

human phenomena into account than other theories. For example in art, the theory that held sway for a very long time was representational art. The ideal of the work of art in this period was to replicate reality in the artist's work, and the value of this work was then judged by how closely the artwork mirrored reality. The implicit assumption behind this mimetic theory was that human beings are simply observers, or sponges of nature, and so authentic expressions of human subjectivity should be faithful to this ideal. After the Renaissance, our understanding of reality and of ourselves changed dramatically. What came to be emphasized was the unique human contribution to knowledge and how the human perspective brought something unique to reality that was not to be understood as merely a mirror of nature. The human being is not a sponge, but an active participant in the construction of perception and the presentation of reality. Art followed this new understanding of human subjectivity, and this shift was understood as an improvement over the inert mirror of nature theory because the new theory accounted for a previously hidden dimension of human existence: our active role in constructing perception. Henceforth, there arose movements like Impressionism, which sought to depict not just the world, but the unique human perception of the world. In our day, much contemporary art has ceased altogether to strive for representation. Abstract art seems to articulate the human ability to transcend all perception, whether of an external world or an internal consciousness. The imagination is not confined to the external world or the internal world, but is rather infinitely open to unlimited possibility. One might argue that this shift in art presents a more authentic picture of human existence since its understanding of human subjectivity transcends the picture of subjectivity as the subject of perception altogether. This then is one possible way in which Apel's regulative ideal of the claim to authenticity for human self-expression could be used in reconstructing a history of art.

As indicated earlier, these hypothetical reconstructions are merely illustrative of how Apel's concept of the *logos-a priori*, in its three dimensions of validity, could be used as a regulative ideal in judging development or regress in history. The *logos a priori* is an essential element in the construction of history because without an objective standard, historical narratives are subject to parochial norms that will produce arbitrary historical narratives for which there is no rational justification. If all historical work presupposes

some implicit norm in the selection principle of gathering historical data and assembling it into a non-real meaning configuration, then it is important to have some way to test whether the norms used are rationally justified or not.

Additionally, it is also important to note the relation of logical dependency between a historical reconstruction and the *logos-a priori*. Nothing about the hypothetical historical reconstructions that I sketched—or any other historical reconstruction for that matter—justifies the *logos-a priori*. The justification relation is the reverse as it is the *logos-a priori* that justifies any particular historical reconstruction's validity—whether its shape as depicting progress or regress is justified. Furthermore, as Apel noted in his distinction between a minimal and maximal teleology, nothing about the *logos-a priori* necessitates the future course of history in a progressive direction. The *logos-a priori* merely delineates the essential aspect of human rationality, which is the source of validity for thought, but whether its imperatives are followed in history is a separate matter independent of what the *logos-a priori* says *ought* to happen. Nevertheless, in light of the brief sketches offered, it does appear that history shows a tendency of our species to learn from our prior mistakes and to move forward with a better and more comprehensive understanding. While I think history does, as a matter of fact, show progress, it must be stressed that there is no necessity for this tendency, either to continue in the future or to even exist at all. The *logos-a priori* cannot prevent a nuclear holocaust or an environmental crisis that plunges the planet into a new dark age. The *logos-a priori* simply places a set of demands to the human race, but it is up to us to fulfill them.

In contrast to Habermas' theory of communicative action, Apel's *logos-a priori* places full justificatory weight for its regulative ideal on the *a priori* dimension of thought, which has the virtue of making this theory more defensible. The *logos-a priori* is based on the indisputable presuppositions that thought must hold to at the cost of performative contradiction. The theory is not dependent on historical or empirical confirmation, and it is this issue that separates Apel from Habermas. In explaining this issue, Apel says:

I have from the very beginning protested against Habermas's devaluation of his own philosophical insights, in that in his concept of reconstructive sciences he did not wish to make a distinction between the transcendental-pragmatic reconstruction of the ultimate presuppositions of argumentation—thus of the philosophical *logos*—on the one hand and an empirical-hypthetical reconstruction of cultural evolution or concrete history on the other. (*RISE* 175)

Apel thinks (and I agree) that Habermas' attempt to confirm the idealizing presuppositions of communicative action through empirical means is deeply mistaken because the transcendental conditions of validity, by their very nature, operate at a level prior to empirical events. The justificatory relation is reversed in that both empirical confirmation and empirical reconstruction depend on transcendental conditions, but transcendental conditions do not depend for their validity on empirical ones. Apel explains:

it makes no sense and is precisely what cannot be of help to the special sciences if, like Habermas, one suggests that the necessary presuppositions of argumentation mentioned above are to be empirically tested by the questioning of competent speakers, analogous to the method of linguistics. For in order even to understand what 'empirical testing' is supposed to mean, one must at least presuppose the validity of those presuppositions of argumentation. And it is transcendental-pragmatic proof of the function of presuppositions—and not an empirical confirmation—that is capable of distinguishing the universally valid pronouncements of philosophy from the hypothetical universals of empirical science: for example, Chomsky's universal pertaining to the inborn language-learning capacity of human beings (*RISE* 176).

The problem with Habermas' acceptance of empirical confirmation of transcendental conditions is not only that it reverses the justification relation between the two, but that it

also potentially undermines the validity of these conditions by grounding them in a historically contingent form of life as follows:

If it is supposed to be possible to discover a normative standard of measure for the grounding of critical-reconstructive social sciences from the universal validity claims of human discourse... then it is not enough to take the empirically reconstructible validity claims of the communication found in the lifeworld of human beings as a point of departure. For these, because of their relativity to historically conditioned forms of life, are not non-circumventible (*nicht hintergehbär*). They can even, as Max Weber has shown, be called into question in the post-Enlightenment age as non-redeemable (*uneinlösbar*) in principle. Rather it is far more imperative to take recourse to the consistently undebatable presuppositions of discourse qua argumentation, which are upheld even by the sceptic and relativist as long as he or she argues, and to 'reconstruct' these as the transcendental-pragmatic ultimate presuppositions of every empirical-hermeneutic reconstruction of social and spiritual history. (*RISE* 177)

The importance of Apel's points will be clearly visible when Amy Allen, a philosopher who is not nearly as friendly to Habermas' project as Apel is, criticizes Habermas' grounding of normativity as a self-congratulatory methodology that arbitrarily selects the historically situated form of life of the European Enlightenment as the model on the basis of which he reconstructs normativity. Though I am not convinced with Allen that Habermas' grounding of normativity ultimately depends on historical reconstruction for its validity,⁸ the fact that he is liable to this attack and Apel is not shows the superiority of Apel's method.

⁸ The reason I am not is that in both "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification" and "Remarks on Discourse Ethics," two of the major essays in which Habermas explains his grounding for the validity of morality, Habermas explicitly acknowledges and then follows Apel's method of deriving incontestable presuppositions of argumentative discourse to ground moral validity. In fact, the whole line of argumentation in which Habermas grounds moral validity does not once appeal to empirical confirmation to establish universal truths, in the sense of the hypothetical universals of empirical science. But Habermas at times does seem to suggest that the idealizing presuppositions he has shown could be falsified at some point in the future through empirical means. This may be a case where Habermas, in practice, proceeds in the way Apel argues, but nevertheless understands his results differently.

Finally, the *logos-a priori* can give us broad guidance as to the forms of life that would promulgate the normative values intrinsic in this human existential. Clearly, the most relevant dimension of validity that addresses the concrete conditions of human existence is that of normative correctness and its value of freedom. For the maximization of human freedom, Apel's regulative ideal calls for institutions that respect human rights. The validity dimension of truthfulness calls for the protection of human expression. The validity dimension of truth tells us that truth is that which is universally valid, so if universality is the operative criterion, then this means that the greatest diversity of people should be admitted into the discussion of matters of truth and the norms which govern their societies with no exclusions. Diversity is important because universality requires all voices to be heard. Dialogue should be conducted on the grounds of respect for one another based on the strength of the reasons given, the force of the better argument, and not on factors like power, status, and social and economic privilege. This gives us broad guidance as to the form of life entailed by the *logos-a priori* that one ought to pursue. Of course, the details of this vision of life will depend on the kinds of historical situations that we find ourselves in the future, the new historical discoveries—whether of scientific, cultural, or of a moral nature—that come about in the future, and the changes to our social, political, or geographical situations. But despite these unpredictable material conditions, what the *logos-a priori* gives us is a standard by which we can subject these new elements to rational scrutiny and employ them to bring about a more just, free, and truthful world. We are not left to the whims of the capricious sendings of Being that discloses new worlds along with radically new normative standards immanent in these new worlds. While local norms will change, the ultimate transcendental nature of the *logos-a priori* will remain constant, as this is what most essentially characterizes the rational dimension of human existence.

II. Amy Allen and the End of Progress

In contrast to Apel's invariant existential of the *logos-a priori* that always already characterizes our being-in-the-world, Amy Allen claims that the historicity of human existence goes all the way down, and that a denial of this historicity by appeal to some invariant transcendental ground is a dogmatic and authoritarian gesture used to

perpetuate the marginalization of oppressed peoples. In *The End of Progress*, Allen argues that the privileging of ideals like autonomy, freedom, and necessary rational presuppositions is an illicit privileging of the ideals of the historically situated form of life of Enlightenment Europe that is designed to perpetuate European hegemony over all other competing systems of thought and forms of life.⁹ In Allen's view, the kind of transcendental thought appealed to by Apel is an imperialist, racist, dogmatic, parochial, and historically situated system of thought that needs to be decolonized. Although Allen never explicitly addresses Apel's thought, she does interact extensively with prominent members of the Frankfurt school like Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rainer Forst who share many of the foundational insights that Apel appeals to in his transcendental pragmatics. With respect to Apel's idea of the *logos-a priori*, Rainer Forst is the best proxy for Apel's thought because both thinkers strongly distinguish the *a priori* element of thought from the empirical element, and both also appeal to an *a priori* element as the most basic ground of justification.

As such, in my exposition of Allen's work, I will focus on her criticism of Rainer Forst as this will be the best way to bring Allen into dialogue with Apel's thought and for that matter my own. Presenting Allen's critique of transcendental thought will be an important and strategic element to showing how, even in fierce critics like Allen, the central elements of Apel's *logos-a priori* are always already presupposed in their critiques. Allen's critique is grounded on a contextual relativism that will be shown to be self-defeating insofar as she makes claims about what is good and what is true that transcend her own particular context. Using Gadamer's insights, I will also problematize Allen's idea of a local epistemic context as the relevant context for justification. Allen's critique is another variant of the historicist thesis, so many of Gadamer's insights against historicism will apply. Furthermore, Allen's critique will highlight Apel's important distinction between the transcendental and empirical levels of thought and how the invariant nature of the transcendental dimension does not deny but rather fully allows for drastic change at the empirical level. Allen's critique will also serve as an occasion to bring forth possible

⁹ Amy Allen, *The End of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3. Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *END*.

misgivings about the *logos-a priori* and to show how these misgivings are unfounded. The very concerns that Allen brings up with transcendental thought are concerns that are only made intelligible through the use of the *logos-a priori* and can only be meaningfully addressed through this same human existential. For all these reasons, I will devote the rest of this chapter to reviewing Allen's work. So what is Allen's argumentative strategy to prove her historicist claims?

In *The End of Progress*, Allen critiques critical theory's use of the notion of historical progress that is used to ground a universal normative framework taken by Frankfurt theorists to describe practical reason as such. Allen thinks that Frankfurt theorists project their own parochial European norms onto a universal stage, which is then used to perpetuate European imperialism. To demonstrate this thesis, Allen considers the work of Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rainer Forst, but whereas Habermas and Honneth are interpreted by Allen as using historical progress to justify universal normativity, Forst is understood as providing an independent *a priori* account of normativity which is then used as a standard to measure claims about historical progress (END 15). The order of dependency between progress and normativity is very important because the critique that Allen makes against Habermas and Honneth is that they illicitly use the historical "fact" of progress to ground their universal normative frameworks, but their reconstructions of what counts as historical progress illicitly and without independent justification smuggles in Enlightenment ideals of autonomy, freedom, and universal reason that themselves are historically situated and particular to European civilization. This is a problem because by taking the European form of life as the pinnacle of historical development and subsequently judging non-European forms of life as less developed, "progressive or developmental theories of history serve as an ideological rationalization and justification for ongoing racism, neoracism, colonialism, and neoimperialism" (END 17).

On the other hand, Rainer Forst does not use the fact of historical progress to ground his normative framework, but actually starts from an *a priori* account of practical reason as such, and this account can then be used to measure historical progress or regress, which is exactly how Apel proceeds. In Forst's case, Allen cannot make the same critique that he

does not provide an independent justification of Enlightenment ideals of autonomy and freedom, as an independent justification is what foregrounds Forst's account of practical reason as such. Nevertheless, Allen claims that Forst's alleged universal and freestanding conception of practical reason is "really a thick, particular, and Eurocentric notion in disguise" (END 15-16). Against Forst, Allen argues that he begs the question in favor of his account of practical reason and that his justification for his account ultimately reduces to a dogmatic foot stomping that is at best arbitrary and at worst authoritarian (END 137).

In light of considerations of space and in virtue of the fact that my own position aligns more with the *a priori* account of normativity provided by Apel and Forst, I will not critically engage Allen in her reconstruction and critique of Habermas' and Honneth's positions other than pointing out what she thinks they are. This is not to say that I concede either Allen's critique of Habermas or her reconstruction of his account. In fact, I have very strong reservations about Allen's reconstructive claims, but the view that I will defend as an answer to historicism is Apel's *logos-a priori* and not Habermas' full blown theory of communicative action, so I will instead focus my attention on Allen's critique of Forst due to his similarity with Apel. The sections to come include 1) an overview of Allen's general critique of the Frankfurt's school universal account of normativity, 2) Allen's specific critique about Forst's account of practical reason, 3) and Allen's alternative proposal of a metanormative contextualism to ground normativity. In the last section of this chapter, I will respond to Allen's objections and show that Apel's *logos-a priori* is operative in both Allen's critique of the Frankfurt school and in her alternative contextualist proposal to ground normativity.

Allen's General Critique of Transcendental Normativity and Historical Progress

Frankfurt school critical theorists like Jürgen Habermas have long been proponents of universal principles of rational discourse as the procedural court of appeal by which debates are to be resolved, but Allen thinks that this universalism is deeply problematic. Citing Edward Said, Allen agrees with his assessment that such universalism connects European culture with imperialism because "imperialism as a political project cannot sustain itself without the *idea of empire*, and the idea of empire, in turn, is nourished by a

philosophical and cultural imaginary that justifies the political subjugation of distant territories and their native populations" (END 1). Universalism privileges the ideals of the European Enlightenment and denigrates other modes of thought as inferior and less developed (END 3). Additionally, the philosophical and cultural superiority of Europe is then used to justify colonialism under the guise of the "so-called civilizing mission of the West" (END 3). The European ideals being referred to here include autonomy, freedom, democracy, universal human rights, and progress. Allen thinks that this covert colonializing mission, hidden under the guise of universal ideals, continues to this day to "underwrite the informal imperialism or neocolonialism of the current world economic, legal, and political order" (END 3).

In addition to this political objection, universal frameworks, so thinks Allen, face the further problem of justifying their normative principles in a historically conscious world. On the one hand, many Frankfurt theorists are sufficiently sensitive to the historicity of knowledge that they do not wish to be foundationalists. For example, Allen cites Habermas' commitment to a project of detranscendentalization, by which he means that critical theory must avoid the "purism of pure reason." In light of this commitment, Habermas is committed to grounding critical theory immanently, "within the existing social world" (END 13). But if critical theory is to be grounded in the existing social world, then it faces the relativistic problem of how to avoid endorsing whatever existing social norms are operative in a particular society. If critical theory is not to be reduced to rubber-stamping existing social norms, if it is to be truly *critical*, it needs some basis for normativity over and above the given historical situation. So what is a critical theorist who wants to avoid both foundationalism and relativism like Habermas to do?

Within Frankfurt thought, the strategy to ground normativity differs. As Allen understands it, Habermas' strategy is to employ a Hegelian strategy where Enlightenment ideals are "justified insofar as they can be understood as the outcome of a process of progressive social evolution or sociocultural learning" (END 14). In keeping with his commitment to justify norms within the existing social world, Habermas takes the history of the social world, and specifically a progressive evolutionary account of this history as a normative

ground by which to support Enlightenment ideals. In short, normativity needs to be grounded on the fact of historical progress.

Now, there are two forms of progress that Allen identifies that are nevertheless entangled and necessarily so in Habermas. On the one hand, there is progress as historical fact or the “backward-looking story about how ‘our’ modern, European, Enlightenment moral vocabulary and political ideals are the outcome of a learning process and therefore neither merely conventional nor grounded in some a priori, transcendental conception of pure reason” (END 14). On the other hand, progress can also be understood as a forward-looking moral imperative (END 15). Allen accepts progress as a future-oriented moral imperative, but rejects progress as a historical fact because of the entanglements of power and the imperialism that this notion of progress has prompted when used by Europeans to justify the superiority of their form of life over others.

As Allen sees it, her option of selecting progress as a future-oriented imperative, but not as a historical fact is not open to Habermas and Honneth, because their Hegelian strategy of grounding normativity depends on a progressive history (END 15). But it is precisely this inability to disentangle progress as a fact from progress as a moral imperative that prompts Allen to think that the normative foundation of critical theory needs to be rethought, and the first step in this rethinking is rejecting progress as a historical fact. In fairness to Habermas, Allen concedes that his notion of progress is distinct from prior and even more problematic Hegelian or Marxist accounts of progress. Whereas earlier accounts of progress were based on philosophies of history that proposed a substantive *telos* to history, were determinative of historical events, and, in Hegel’s case, claimed to have arrived at absolute knowledge, Habermas’ philosophy of history is much more modest in that it is “empirically based, practically oriented, and postmetaphysical” (END 22). Habermas’ understanding of history is a fallible reconstructive science that “seeks to uncover deep sociohistorical structures that condition historical change; as a reconstructive science, it is open and fallible and dependent upon empirical confirmation from the social sciences” (END 22). But for Allen, even this attenuated form of historical

progress as fact is problematic for its entanglements with grounding a normative framework that actively supports imperialism.

In order to attack the notion of progress as fact, Allen provides a political objection and an epistemological objection. The political objection has already been alluded to in that Allen thinks that the narrative of historical progress has been used by Europeans to justify their colonializing in terms of a humanitarian and civilizing mission to spread civilization to the lesser peoples. Allen adds that these historical narratives of progress fail to take into account the material conditions that allowed the European ideals of the Enlightenment to take place in the first place. Capitalism and the economic activity that made European ideals possible were in turn made possible by Europe's "extraction of natural resources from its colonies and the exploitation of colonized subjects" (*END 17*). Allen charges Europeans with paradoxically grounding their free market economic system on the back of slavery (*END 18*). Allen introduces Europe's material dependency on its colonies to make the point that its own ideals were not purely a product of Europe's own making, but rather a product of Europe's interaction with the non-West (*END 17*).

In addition to this political objection, Allen also launches her epistemological objection with the following questions: "On what basis do we claim to know what counts as progress? Does a judgment about historical progress not presume knowledge of what counts as the end point or goal of that historical development" (*END 19*)? According to Allen, the presumption to know the goal of history presupposes access to "some God's-eye point of view or point of view of the Absolute, ideas that go against the basic methodological assumptions of critical theory" (*END 19*). Given that we do not have access to some God's-eye point of view, Allen infers that "we have to make judgments about what counts as progress from our own, internal, reconstructive point of view. And in that case, we must confront the worry that... they may appear, as Charles Larmore has put it, 'irredeemably parochial'" (*END 19*). Given that all judgments of progress must be made from within our power-laden and self-interested perspective, they are liable to be "nothing more than self-congratulatory defenses of the status quo" (*END 22*). For Allen, European accounts of developmental progress in history as culminating with European ideals are ultimately

subject to the worry that these are grounded in a “normative decisionism” where Europeans are arbitrarily and self-interestedly elevated above non-Europeans (*END 22*).

In fairness to her interlocutors, Allen acknowledges that Habermas and others have recently embraced the idea of “multiple modernities” to accommodate for the fact of difference within societal institutions, but for Allen this concept does not go far enough toward accepting genuine difference. According to Thomas McCarthy, one should be wary of accounts of historical progress because of the temptation for self-congratulation, but McCarthy insists that the theory of development cannot be fully reduced away into “some postdevelopmental thinking of difference” (*END 29*). We cannot, says McCarthy, give up on essential developmental insights that modernity has brought, like historical and hermeneutical self-reflexivity, as the criticism of modernity itself presupposes this. Allen summarizes McCarthy’s view as follows:

In other words, critics of modernity have no choice but to tacitly acknowledge the superiority of posttraditional forms of discourse even in the process of trying to call them into question, and ‘we’ have no choice but to judge traditional forms of life to be inadequate and inferior to ours insofar as they do not regard themselves as simply one point of view among others.
(*END 28-29*)

In this way, defenders of modernity try to embrace a certain level of alterity while still defending the central insights of the Enlightenment.

For Allen, this concession is not enough because it continues to perpetuate the hegemony of European universalist thought. She says, “There is a kind of all roads lead to the same end logic to McCarthy’s talk of multiple modernities, even if he grants that societies take different paths along the way and instantiate capitalist economic and democratic legal and political institutions in very different cultural forms of life” (*END 30*). Even if McCarthy grants that some of the normative universals developed in the Enlightenment must now be opened for contestation to non-Europeans, this contestation is set “on terms set by the

demands of posttraditional, hyperreflexive, modern discourse” (END 30). But for Allen, this way of fixing the debate on modernist grounds is just another way to ensure that European ideals are secured. Instead of trying to incessantly hold on to European heritage, Allen suggests, citing David Scott, that Europeans must be willing to “*unlearn* the taken-for-granted privilege of their traditions and *learn* to think inside of the moral languages of their historical others” (END 31). Allen sees this as the proper way to inherit modernity’s reflexivity (END 31).

In summary, this is Allen’s critique of historical progress as a fact and the universal normative framework that it grounds (at least for Habermas and Honneth). Allen is in favor of progress as a forward-looking moral-political imperative, but she is against the view of progress as a backward-looking historical fact that then is used to ground universal frameworks. Allen is not opposed to specifying local examples of progress in local situations, but one must be wary of sweeping judgments that History is progressing. Nevertheless, even in local judgments of progress, Allen warns against the seduction of self-congratulation (END 33). Having looked at Allen’s global critique of progress and universal normative frameworks, I now want to look at Allen’s specific critique of Rainer Forst’s account of practical reason. What will be apparent is that Allen uses many of the same tactics and strategies from her global critique to undermine Forst’s account as she argues that despite Forst’s claims to an *a priori* grounding of practical reason, his account is also just another disguised vehicle for the upholding of European ideals and the subsequent imperialism entailed by them.

Allen’s Critique of Forst

As mentioned before, Allen’s argument against universal normative frameworks grounded in historical progress as a fact will not apply to Rainer Forst because Forst explicitly rejects a strategy of grounding normativity on what Allen understands as a Hegelian basis of using a teleological reconstruction of history. Instead, Forst’s strategy for grounding moral normativity is to appeal to “a neo-Kantian conception of practical reason that is designed to provide the freestanding foundation for normatively dependent concepts such as toleration” (END 123). For Forst and Apel, this freestanding account of practical reason

provides the standard to measure whether historical progress or regress is occurring. Furthermore, this account of reason remains valid independently of the familiar provenance from which we reconstruct it (*END 123*). So what specifically is Forst's account of moral normativity?

As Allen reconstructs it, Forst's project begins with an admission of the problems that prior notions of progress have played in the colonial West, but he still insists on the indispensability of such a concept. At a transcendental level, all critiques of progress presuppose the notion of progress as a political-moral imperative, so we can only be against progress by being for it (*END 126*). Specifically, the postcolonial critique that the notion of historical progress is a vehicle of Western imperialism (since it judges progress by Western ideals of justice, autonomy, and self-determination) also presupposes autonomy and self-determination as its normative basis (*END 127-128*). After all, the whole point of postcolonial critique is that the hegemonic West is not respecting the autonomy and self-determination of non-Europeans. Furthermore, progress is also deeply intertwined with the call to emancipation; it is the demand of marginalized classes who suffer injustice (*END 126*). While specific accounts of historical progress have to be scrutinized and can be contested, the notion of progress itself cannot be deconstructed away since it is what fuels the call for justice (*END 126*).

The critical question for Forst is who determines what counts as progress (*END 127*). To this question, Forst answers that progress is a normatively dependent notion and as such, "it derives its normative force from a concept of justice that is understood in political terms as democratic self-determination" (*END 127*). Forst argues that human beings have a basic right to justification, which means that, "no one shall be subjected to rules or institutions that cannot be justified to him or her as a free and equal member of society" (*END 127*). While allowing that members of societies should decide the specific material accounts of concepts like progress, justice, freedom, and human rights, Forst is insistent that the formal imperative that these concepts place on members of a society as to how they are to treat each other is not itself a product of historical or sociological insight, but rather is derived from the basic human right to justification, and this in turn is derived from practical reason

as such (*END 128*). With respect to the validity of Forst's core normative principle of the basic human right to justification, there is no further principle of justification to which one can appeal to justify this principle because it rests on the autonomous nature of morality itself (*END 129*).

While the right to justification forms the normative core of Forst's theory, concrete moral norms gain their validity from surviving an idealized procedure of practical deliberation, which Forst calls a justification procedure (*END 129*). This justification procedure is constituted by the criteria of 1) reciprocity and 2) generality. Reciprocity entails both that 1) one may not raise specific claims while rejecting similar claims raised by others and 2) one may not assume to speak for others and to assume that these others will assume one's convictions, beliefs, and interest (*END 129*). Generality entails that one cannot dismiss the objections of others who are affected by a proposed norm and that the reason for a norm's legitimacy must be shared by all (*END 129-30*). Thus, specific and concrete moral norms are procedurally decided by a justification procedure that judges moral norms as reasonable or not based on the criteria of reciprocity and generality (*END 130*).

Finally, the last aspect of Forst's theory that Allen presents is the hierarchical contexts within which a justification procedure takes place. According to Forst, there are four major contexts within which a justification procedure can take place, and in practice they intersect and overlap one another. These are the 1) ethical, 2) legal, 3) political, and 4) moral contexts. These contexts are differentiated from each other because they raise distinct kinds of validity claims. Whereas ethical contexts are constituted by individuals who identify themselves with certain values and affirm them as central to their identities within an ethical community that shares these values, legal contexts refers to all members of a legal community (*END 133*). On the other hand, moral contexts have an even greater universality in that they provide the validity for legal norms because morality refers us to a moral community of unlimited participants. The moral context is the sphere of basic human rights that all human beings have, among which lies the basic right to justification, which is constituted by the two criteria of reciprocity and generality (*END 134*). As Allen explains, "ethical, legal, and political norms may be justified with respect to the context of distinct,

ethical, legal, and political communities, but they cannot violate or contravene the dictates of morality” (*END* 133). The upshot of this hierarchy of contexts is that norms at the ethical, legal, or political level always have the limit concept of the moral context, which acts as a normative standard of last resort for the other more concrete levels.

Through this delineation of distinct yet overlapping contexts, Forst thinks that he can do justice both to the universalism of justice and the contextualism of specific concrete norms. Forst’s aim is to show how universalism and substantive contextualism are connected insofar as the moral context constitutes a formal framework within which concrete ethical, legal, and political norms are reiterated in distinct ways in light of the political communities’ self-understandings, institutions, and practices (*END* 134-35). Like Habermas, Forst insists that his account is non-foundationalist in that he is not positing substantive metaphysical principles as providing a normative ground but rather relocating moral-universal justification to a procedure of reciprocal rational argumentation (*END* 135).

In beginning her critique of Forst, Allen rightly sees that Forst’s account ultimately rests on his account of practical reason or what it means to be moral since this account is a normatively laden one, so Allen demands justification for the normative content of Forst’s account of practical reason (*END* 136). In response, Forst claims that his principle of justification just articulates what it means to be engaged in practical reason as revealed by his reconstructive account, but if this is the case, then Allen maintains that the norms that Forst takes to be constitutive of practical reason “threaten to become arbitrary, or, even worse, authoritarian” (*END* 137). If Forst’s account of practical reason includes the basic human right to justification, then a lack of justification for this principle is a problem for his account (*END* 137).

Furthermore, Allen claims that Forst’s account is not likely to be free of ideological distortion as the barrage of feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theorists have shown how universalist accounts like Forst actively marginalize the members of these groups (*END* 137). Allen says:

Such critiques claim that the Kantian Enlightenment conception of practical reason explicitly or implicitly excludes, represses, or dominates all that is associated with the so-called Other of reason, whether that be understood in terms of madness, irrationality, the emotions, the affects, embodiment, or the imagination, all of which are symbolically associated with black, queer, female, colonized, and subaltern subjects. (*END 137*)

Allen even thinks that Kantian accounts of practical reason “reinforce certain stereotypical understandings of black, queer, feminine, and subaltern identity as closer to nature, more tied to the body, more emotional, more prone to madness, irrationality, and violence, and so on” (*END 138*). Citing James Tully, Allen agrees with his assessment that Kantian accounts of practical reason are intimately tied to imperialism: “because of their formal, abstract, universal, necessary, and obligatory character, ‘cannot recognize and respect any other of the plurality of narratives, traditions or civilizations as equal yet different, and enter into a dialogue with them on equal footing’” (*END 138*).

Allen summarizes many of these points into an argument that she describes as a “pessimistic induction” (*END 138*). The argument claims that in light of the many prior universal normative frameworks that have been shown to be entangled in objectionable relations of domination and exclusion, “we should reasonably worry that whatever conception of practical reason we now endorse will turn out to have similar biases built into it that we are not now in a position to see, and thus will not be as formal, abstract, or universal as we think” (*END 138*). Though Forst denies arguing for an ahistorical or transcendent point of view from which we could give an account of practical reason, Allen charges that “his account of practical reason as such has the formal, abstract, necessary, universal, and obligatory character that Tully identifies as imperialist in form” (*END 139*).

In addition to this line of criticism, Allen also provides a problematizing genealogy of the obligatory character of morality that is constitutive of Forst’s account of practical reason in an effort to undermine it. Allen begins by remarking that we are not born moral but are rather socialized into the moral point of view. From the perspective of the child, “The threat

of parental or social sanctions—whether positive or negative—and the mechanisms of guilt and shame play a crucial role in this process. Until that point is reached, parental reasons, from the point of view of the child, all seem to rest on one ultimate ground: because I said so” (*END 142*). Even more problematic is the fact that the norms that parents pass on to their children are not “disentangled from existing relations of social authority, dominance, and hegemony” (*END 143*) in the prevailing social order. Without intending to and “Inasmuch as parents stand in for and are themselves profoundly shaped by the normative demands of the existing social order,” (*END 143*) parents socialize their children into replicating problematic identities. The result is that “in societies that are highly stratified by identity-based forms of dominance and subordination such as those of race, gender, and sexuality, this process often entails being socialized into taking up positions of subordination” (*END 143*).

In light of this problematizing genealogy, Allen concurs with Adorno’s judgment that Kant’s appeal to the dutiful nature of our moral experience says nothing about the validity of this authority (*END 142*). On the contrary, the genealogical account provided shows that, “the ultimate ground of normativity in this Kantian picture, is not an unconditioned but rather a contingent ground” (*END 142*). As Allen explains, “the space of (autonomous) reasons is *also* a space of (heteronomous) power in the sense that it is constituted through a certain kind of power relation that can only be justified to the participants after they have entered it and accepted its demands and constitutive norms” (*END 142*). The conclusion we should draw from this is that, “power relations are constitutive of subjectivity and moral personhood, that power relations provide the condition of possibility for entering the space of reasons in the first place, which means that the space of reasons is... always already a space of power” (*END 143*).

These considerations lead Allen to conclude, in agreement with communitarian critics of Forst, that his universal normative framework is not truly universal but is rather merely replicating a contingent and historically situated, modern, Western, and post-Enlightenment form of life (*END 144*). Additionally, the genealogical critique shows Forst’s account not to be so freestanding after all (*END 144*). In response, Forst insists that the

validity of morality cannot be grounded in any particular historical form of life without undermining itself because morality requires an unconditional normative ground for the sake of the good of others. Without an unconditional ground established for the sake of the universal good, morality reduces into a façade for the advancement of one's self-interest. But Allen responds that for a non-Kantian, this is merely foot-stomping. She says:

The most that Forst seems entitled to say at this point is that in order to count as a genuine morality in his neo-Kantian sense of that term, a system of normative principles would need to have an unconditioned ground; but claiming that this is a necessary feature of morality as such is not, by itself, sufficient to show that this unconditioned ground actually exists. (*END 145*)

Allen insists, citing a similar genealogical critique of Forst by Charles Taylor, that the Kantian account of practical reason does reduce to a historically situated form of modern life first appearing in the Enlightenment (*END 145*).

Forst counters that these communitarian critiques do away with the notion of validity, but then Allen responds that while they may do away with an absolute notion of validity, she can give an alternative account of validity that is less demanding and "is indexed more to particular and local conceptions of practical reason rather than the idea of practical reason as such" (*END 146*). Allen's account of validity and justification will shortly be presented and critiqued, but before this, it is important to look at one final critical point that Allen makes against Forst.

As has been noted, Forst's central insight behind his account of practical reason is the basic human right to justification, which takes places in different discursive contexts like the moral, ethical, legal, and political where moral subjects propose, debate, and justify to each other different norms. Drawing on the work of Kevin Olson and Pierre Bourdieu, Allen alleges that this account of practical reason has an implicit class bias. She says that Forst's account is biased in favor of knowledge experts like politicians, policy experts, journalists, writers, and academics, and that this account of morality replicates their form of life (*END*

152). This shows that Forst's account is not only parochial relative to his particular time horizon, but also parochial relative to his particular profession. Allen approvingly cites Olson's work where he argues that, "justification is not a basic human right, but a mode of practice that is the expert domain of others. It does not recognize one's basic humanity, but implicitly universalizes a vision of humanity whose signature characteristics are most comfortably practiced by the members of elite groups" (*END* 152-53). Through his account of morality, Forst not only excludes other historical forms of life, but also subaltern subjects, illiterate peasantry, and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat as these groups cannot be heard by those occupying privileged positions of power (*END* 154). By setting up practical reason in terms of discursive justification, Forst rigs the game from the start in favor of the powerful and educated and against the marginalized and oppressed. Hence, Forst's Kantian account is dangerous both for its Western imperialism and for its cultural imperialism as it excludes not only non-Westerners but also socio-economically marginalized groups within Western societies.

In response to this criticism, Forst argues that it is actually postcolonial thinkers who are performing their own brand of cultural imperialism by infantilizing and disrespecting working class and subaltern subjects "by suggesting that they are not discursively competent or are incapable of demanding or offering justifications" (*END* 156). Forst argues that if one insists that universal human rights, like the basic right to justification, are purely a projection of a European form of life, then non-Europeans have no justifiable claims to be respected as moral equals, or that if and when non-Europeans assert this right, they are speaking in a foreign Western tongue (*END* 156-57). In this instance, postcolonial critique actually reinscribes the same kind of cultural imperialism that it is trying to attack. For Forst, the demand for justification belongs to the deep grammar of social conflict and cannot be particularized to any form of life. Allen quotes Forst's statement that, "'The language of emancipation and of no longer wanting to be denied one's right to be a participatory equal is a universal language spoken in many tongues' (JJ 184)" (*END* 157).

Allen concedes Forst's point that no one society owns the concept of justification, but she does not think that acknowledging this point forces her to accept a Kantian account of

practical reason as such or a context-transcendent metacontext of moral justification (*END* 157). Instead, Allen says:

one can acknowledge that practices and languages of justification are used in a variety of different historical, cultural, and social contexts, and that although these practices are embedded in particular social and cultural forms of life and in the webs of value that suffuse such forms of life with substantive normative content, these forms of life are also open and porous and entangled with one another. Nevertheless, the webs of value that suffuse these forms of life help to determine what can count as a reason in a particular justificatory context or order of justification. (*END* 157)

Given what Allen says here, it is doubtful that she is directly meeting Forst's critique because Forst point is that if one does not acknowledge the right to justification as a universal human right, which is to say that this right is something that inheres in human nature intrinsically in virtue of our humanity and not in virtue of the social practices or forms of life that we inhabit, then one is effectively denying people the intrinsic right to emancipation from oppression. Allen's statement that, "one can acknowledge that practices and languages of justification are used in a variety of different historical..." is a descriptive statement about how some cultures may speak, but this says nothing about what human beings are entitled to in virtue of their humanity. When I unpack Allen's own account of the metanormative context of justification, I will show why she cannot claim universal human rights in the way Forst can, but before getting to this point, we must continue Allen's response to Forst.

Having stated that it is the webs of value in forms of life that determine what counts as reasons in particular justificatory contexts, Allen then distinguishes, using the sociological work of Boltanski and Thévenot, different orders of justification and internal and external critique. Critique can be either "internal, in which case it relies on standards internal to a specific order of justification, or external, in which case the standards of one order are used to critique a situation in another order" (*END* 158). This means that one local form of life

can either critique itself, in light of its local standards, or it can critique another form of life, also in light of its standard, but this dual ability to critique “neither requires nor entails reference to an overarching context of justification that transcends and unifies all of the diverse orders of justification” (END 158). This claim is a preview of Allen’s metanormative account to come, and it is important to see what she thinks these different orders of justification do for the question of normativity. She continues:

The picture here is one of specific languages of justification supported by particular sets of practices of reasoning, with no one overarching context or metacontext that purports to transcend them all and by appeal to which one can easily translate from one context or order to another, but where the justificatory norms from one context can be and often are used to critique situations that arise in others. (END 158)

Allen uses the descriptive work of these anthropologists to make a normative claim about justification, which is that critique needs nothing more than local contexts to get going. The locality of critique and the absence of a metacontext of justification are crucial points for Allen because appeals to transcendent viewpoints “fail to acknowledge one of the central insights motivating Spivak’s critique, which I would characterize in the idiom of standpoint theory: domination, when viewed from above, looks an awful lot like equality” (END 158). In light of the imperialist problems with universal normative frameworks, Allen recommends that we forego a universalizing metanormative context to ground our ideals *while at the same time preserving our Enlightenment ideals of freedom, autonomy, and the call for emancipation*. Allen’s aim is to inhabit these ideals in a different way than the metanormative Kantian provenance from which they have historically sprung (END 159). To understand how one can forego a universalizing metanormative context while still holding universal normative ideals, we must look into Allen’s proposal for grounding normativity.

Allen's Account of Normativity

In the background of Allen's account of normativity is her pessimistic induction argument which says that we should be wary of *any* proposed universal account of practical reason, given that prior accounts of practical reason have been entangled with power relations designed to exclude and dominate others (*END* 138). In light of this tendency to dominate others through our theories, Allen proposes that we take up what she calls a problematizing genealogy. This kind of genealogical inquiry aims "to reveal both the dangers and the promise contained in the values, concepts, or forms of life whose contingent history it traces, but its aim is neither simply subversive nor vindicatory" (*END* 190-91). According to Allen, problematizing genealogy subverts elements of our normative viewpoint by showing the problematic, contingent, and historically situated nature of the origin of these claims and their entanglements with oppressive power relations. At the same time, problematizing genealogy also seeks to vindicate our normative viewpoint insofar as it "traces the historical emergence of our values with an eye toward showing those values to be justified and reasonable" (*END* 190). This latter aspect is important for Allen because she claims that ultimately, "the problematization of our point of view can and should be understood not as a rejection or abstract negation of the normative inheritance of modernity but rather as a fuller realization of its central value, namely, freedom" (*END* 195). With this claim, Allen tells us that she is also committed to the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, autonomy, and emancipation, but at the same time, she wants to inhabit these ideals differently, through a contextualist metanormative ground (*END* 159).

Drawing on the work of Foucault and Adorno, Allen constructs an account of normativity that adheres to Enlightenment ideals at a first order level of discourse, but then problematizes these same ideals at a second order level of discourse. She explains:

we take the position that we are committed at a first-order, substantive level to these normative principles inasmuch as our form of life and sense of ourselves as practical moral agents depend on them, but that we simultaneously acknowledge, at a second-order, metanormative level, that

those very ideals themselves demand of us an awareness of the violence inherent in them and also a fundamental modesty or humility regarding their status and authority. (*END 202*)

Specifically, Allen proposes that we understand the second order metanormative level, i.e., the ground that justifies our first-order commitments, as a contingent and historically situated context for which there is no absolute justification. She explains:

We could understand ourselves, at a first-order, substantive normative level, to be committed to the values of freedom, equality, and solidarity with the suffering of others, but understand these commitments, at the metanormative level, to be justified immanently and contextually, via an appeal to specific historical context rather than via an appeal to their putatively context-transcendent character. Such a metanormative contextualism offers a better way of instantiating the virtues of humility and modesty that are required for a genuine openness to otherness. (*END 211*)

Through metanormative contextualism, we can still uphold the values of freedom and autonomy, but do so in a contextual, local, and fallible way.

Now, Allen realizes that her metanormative contextualism is charged by her critics to be self-undermining because by claiming that her first-order commitments are contingent and historically situated, she is required “to add ‘but that’s just for me’ on to every normative validity claim I utter—and thus [this qualification] undermines the very idea of engaging in a discursive assessment of validity claims” (*END 212*). The charge then is that Allen’s metanormative contextualism leads to a first-order moral relativism, but Allen rejects this objection. In order to successfully fend off this charge, Allen needs to provide a thicker account of her metanormative contextualism that shows how a first-order moral relativism is avoided. Toward this end, Allen turns to the contextualist epistemologies of Michael Williams and Linda Martín Alcoff to bolster her own account of normativity.

Williams' account of justification argues that "propositions and statements only have an epistemic status at all in relation to situational and contextually variable factors" (*END* 212). As to what constitutes these contexts, Allen explains that, "Epistemic contexts are differentiated from one another by what Williams calls their inferential structure—namely, what stands fast relative to what, or which propositions are taken to be basic or indubitable within that context" (*END* 212). Additionally, "there is no hierarchical array of contexts and there is no context-independent standard or manner of evaluating the relative merits of different contextual standards" (*END* 212). The absence of a context-transcendent standard means that we can never provide an ultimate justification of a local epistemic context itself, but even though "there may be no context-transcendent conception of human knowledge as such that ties all instances of knowledge together, nevertheless the word 'know' can be 'embedded in a teachable and useful linguistic practice'" (*END* 213).

Alcoff's account of epistemic justification is similar to Williams in its contextualist nature, but Alcoff focuses on the historically situated element of knowledge. Alcoff's account is distinct from Williams in that she holds to a coherentist epistemology whereas Williams thinks that coherentist epistemologies revert back to epistemological realism because of their drive to unify all contexts. But Allen explains that while for Alcoff, coherence does imply some drive toward unification, it does not entail an all-encompassing unification of all contexts. In Alcoff's contextualist and coherentist epistemology, the local epistemic context decides which contradictions need resolution and which can remain unresolved (*END* 214). In fact, even the claim to have resolved contradictions can only be justified by the historically situated epistemic context (*END* 214).

The upshot that Allen takes away from both Williams and Alcoff's work is that "knowledge is only possible within a context, and what makes knowledge possible within that context is coherence with other beliefs" (*END* 214). Furthermore, Allen thinks that these accounts of epistemic justification show that epistemic contextualism does not lead to skepticism or relativism since "a thoroughly immanent and contextualist account of epistemic justification can still yield justified knowledge claims within particular epistemic contexts" (*END* 215). In light of these newly gained insights, Allen reformulates her own view about

the metanormative level that grounds our first-order commitments, and she explains it as follows:

Metanormative contextualism or contextualism about normative validity consists in two claims: First, moral principles or normative ideals are always justified relative to a set of contextually salient values, conceptions of the good life, or normative horizons—roughly speaking, forms of life or lifeworlds. Second, there is no über-context, no context-free or transcendent point of view from which we can adjudicate which contexts are ultimately correct or even in a position of hierarchical superiority over which others. On this view, our normative principles can be justified relative to a set of basic normative commitments that stand fast in relation to them, but because there is no context-transcendent point of view from which we can determine which contexts are superior to which others, those basic normative commitments must be understood as contingent foundations. (END 215)

Allen maintains that this account offers a *tertium quid* to the dichotomous choice between absolutism and relativism. For Allen, her account is not an “anything goes” account of normative validity, but neither does it fix normative validity in some suprahistorical foundation that is not only epistemically problematic, as it presupposes some God’s eye view of things, but also morally objectionable as these accounts are really authoritarian gestures masquerading as moral principles. While denying universalism at the second-order level of discourse, Allen admits a qualified kind of universalism at the first-order level as she explains: “It is even compatible with regarding these principles [Enlightenment ideals] as universal in the scope of their application, so long as we don’t understand these principles, from a metanormative perspective, as justified insofar as they are absolute values” (END 216-17).

In support of her account, Allen appeals to Adorno’s claim that while we may not know what human or humanity is, we know all too well what the inhuman is, and that moral philosophy ought to be directed to denunciation of the inhuman (END 217). Allen agrees

with the negativism of Adorno's claim as she sees this as more conducive to the historically situated nature of our knowledge and she also remarks that even in this negative claim, Adorno does not claim that we know what the absolutely inhuman is as there is no unmediated access to things (*END 217*). Instead, "our access is always mediated through concepts, which themselves contain the sedimentations of history, social practices, and culture" (*END 217*).

At this point, Allen proposes that her critics may still not be convinced that her account avoids relativism, since the lack of a ground for local epistemic contexts simply relocates the relativism from the first order level of discourse to the second. To this new objection, Allen says:

But if we ask the further question of what makes the lifeworld horizon that forms the social and historical context for our normative commitments and principles deserving of our support, and if we have given up the possibility of a context that transcends all contexts, and if we have problematized the idea that 'our' lifeworld horizon is developmentally or cognitively superior to others, then our answer to this question will have to acknowledge that our normative principles and commitments themselves rest on a contingent foundation. (*END 217-18*)

Allen is sensitive to the fact that this response likely seems like an admission of ultimate arbitrariness to an opponent so she qualifies it with two provisions. First, a "normative horizon is open and not closed, permeated by and formed in interaction with other normative horizons" (*END 218*), so one need not worry about epistemic isolationism. Second, her first-order normative ideals take "openness to criticism and reflexivity as normative goals, and hence as a form life it requires me to be open to being changed, including when that means learning to unlearn" (*END 218*). By this qualification, Allen wants to avoid the charge of tribalism and ethnocentrism. She says:

The second feature means that even when I acknowledge that my first-order normative commitments rest on contingent foundations, this does not lead me to embrace them dogmatically or ethnocentrically because those very commitments require me to be open to coming to see—whether through rational argument or through expressive/hermeneutic insight or through experiences of aesthetic world disclosure—that parts of my normative horizon are flawed or limited in some way. Thus, my first-order normative commitments require—in a further reflexive turn—a metanormative or second-order reflexivity about the status of my own normative horizon. (*END* 218)

In other words, because Allen is committed to the first-order normative commitments of the Enlightenment, like seeking rational justification for beliefs and opening up one's beliefs to rational scrutiny, these commitments themselves prompt her to be reflexive about these very commitments and to be open to learn from other contexts.

By forsaking authoritarian Kantian accounts of reason at the metanormative level, one can be truly open to learning from other contexts in a way in which a Kantian who is committed to metanormative universalism simply cannot, since they are presupposing their ideals at the level of the adjudicating rules that will decide an issue, which is to say universal principles of reason. Instead of universal principles of reason as the necessary presuppositions of a context-transcendent account of reason, Allen appeals to Anthony Laden's non-authoritarian account of practical reasoning as a "responsive engagement with others" (*END* 220). Instead of an account of reasoning as the deduction of conclusions from premises or persuading interlocutors by the force of the better argument, Laden sees reasoning as a social practice embodying the virtues of openness, vulnerability, and humility (*END* 225). For Laden, "a non-foundationalist account of reasoning as a social practice should rest content with describing our normative commitments not as necessary preconditions... but rather as attractive ideals toward which we might aspire (RASP 44)" (*END* 223). By adopting an account of reasoning closer to Laden's ideals, we can be better positioned to avoid perpetuating self-congratulatory accounts of progress that set

Westerners as developmentally superior to others. By adopting a metanormative contextualism, we can hold our ideals more loosely and with a greater ability to learn from others and to treat them with dignity and respect as others.

III. Critique of Allen

Through several lines of argumentation, Allen mounts an ambitious challenge to universal normative frameworks, and hence (without mentioning him by name) to Apel's *logos-a priori*. If it can be shown that the universal normative framework relied upon by Apel, Habermas, and Forst is indeed just a parochial projection of the European Enlightenment form of life that is no better or worse than other forms of life, then this would undercut the argument I have been making against historicism throughout the last chapters. At the second-order, or metanormative level of discourse, Allen explicitly appeals to the socio-historical context as the epistemic context in which beliefs are to be justified. She also denies a context-transcendent standard of normativity, which implies that ultimately we cannot evaluate different contexts as superior or inferior to each other. In light of these two claims, Allen can be seen as a paradigm historicist in that she affirms the two central claims of the historicist thesis of: 1) the radical conditioning of knowledge by history (the local epistemic context), and 2) an ultimate incommensurability between socio-historical contexts because no overarching connecting principle immanent within all socio-historical contexts exists. If historicism is to be refuted, it must be shown that Allen's multi-pronged attack against universal frameworks fails to achieve its objective, and this is what I intend to do in this section.

What is to follow is a summary, in chart form, of Allen's objections along with an exposition of how Apel's *logos-a priori* is presupposed throughout Allen's argumentation. By showing how Allen's arguments presuppose the *logos-a priori*, I aim to show the rational necessity, and hence, the justification of the *logos-a priori* as a necessary and indispensable component of all argumentative discourse and as the substantive core of what constitutes human rationality. But before developing this point, it will be helpful to categorize Allen's main objections against universal frameworks by the three sections I examined, which

included 1) Allen’s general criticism against notions of universal normativity and progress as “fact,” 2) Allen’s critique of Forst’s account of practical reason, and 3) Allen’s proposed metanormative contextualist account of normativity. In chart form, Allen’s main lines of criticism were:

<u>General Criticism</u>	<u>Forst Criticism</u>	<u>Metanormative Account</u>
1) Universalism promotes Imperialism, racism, colonialism	1) Forst’s principle of justification lacks justification—authoritarian	1) Pessimistic induction grounds need for contingent foundations
2) God’s eye view is impossible	2) Universal reason marginalizes the Other of reason, i.e., minorities	2) Problematizing genealogy is needed to affirm and subvert normative ideals
3) Universalism entails a “normative decisionism” in favor of European ideals	3) Genealogical deconstruction of the moral point of view	3) No context-transcendent standard, just contingent local historical contexts needed for justification
4) Multiple modernities are not enough because it forces others to play by modernist rules	4) Begs the question in thinking that morality needs absolute validity, but it just needs relative validity	4) No ethnocentrism because first order norm entails that normative horizon is open
	5) Forst’s account marginalizes socio-economic classes within the West	5) Metanormative contextualism allows one to be radically open to criticism and learning from others

I will take up Allen's objections, starting from her contextualist metanormative account of normativity and work my way backwards by then responding to her criticism of Forst (which is significant because of its structural similarity to Apel's *logos a-priori*), and then address her general critique about progress and universal normative frameworks. What I aim to show is that there is not a single objection in Allen's arsenal that does not presuppose the *logos-a priori*. Because Allen's objections need the *logos-a priori* for their constitutive status as objections, they end up refuting themselves insofar as the content of these objections refute the ground upon which they rest. To show why this is so, I will start by examining the problems with Allen's metanormative contextualist account of normativity.

Reply to Allen's Metanormative Contextualism

After having proclaimed universal normative frameworks as vehicles of racism, colonialism, and continued imperialism, one may be surprised when Allen tells us that she also adheres to a universal framework (at least on the first-order level of discourse). Allen says:

we take the position that we are committed at a first-order, substantive level to these normative principles [Enlightenment ideals of universal autonomy, freedom, universal human rights etc...] inasmuch as our form of life and sense of ourselves as practical moral agents depend on them, but that we simultaneously acknowledge, at a second-order, metanormative level, that those very ideals themselves demand of us an awareness of the violence inherent in them and also a fundamental modesty or humility regarding their status and authority. (END 202)

An immediate objection that may arise from Allen's postcolonial flank is: if you recognize that universal values are intrinsically violent and entangled with racism, colonialism, and continued imperialism, why do you hold to them, even if only at a first-order level? If you knowingly hold to these principles, then regardless of how much your second-order account qualifies them, are you not being complicit in the violence that these values

perpetuate? If Allen admits that her first-order values are inseparable from a racist legacy, is the qualification of these values really a morally acceptable gesture? Given how Allen characterizes Enlightenment ideals, her position of incorporating them as her first-order values is highly peculiar, so what could prompt her to do this?

The reason I think that Allen feels compelled to do this is because she has been in enough conversations with Frankfurt school theorists like Honneth and Forst—as she tells us in the preface and acknowledgements section of her book (*END* xvi)—to feel the bite of their criticism that postcolonial thinkers, in seeking to fight for the autonomy, freedom, and emancipation of marginalized subjects, presuppose the very same Enlightenment ideals that they seek to undercut. I think this is why Allen tells us that we are committed to these first-order principles “inasmuch as our form of life and sense of ourselves as practical moral agents depend on them” (*END* 202). There is a certain degree of fatalism or inevitability in this “justification” whereby Allen seems to say, “this is just who we are as modern Westerners, and this is just what we do... we fight for freedom and autonomy.... that’s just what we do, so we have to hold to these ideals if we are to continue being who we are” (as I will argue shortly, this appeal to tradition reduces to a naturalistic fallacy and an ethnocentric tribalism that is antithetical to the concept of justification). So even while Allen wants to undermine universal values, she also recognizes that her own critique of these values involves her in these values. To resolve this contradiction, Allen proposes a two-leveled account of normativity. On the first level, Allen can continue to hold the Enlightenment’s ideals of universal human rights, which allows her to continue to engage in postcolonial critique free of performative contradiction, while on the second level, Allen can continue to hold her historicist principles, which admit no standard of ultimate justification other than local and historically situated epistemic contexts. So what exactly is the metanormative contextualism that Allen proposes?

As Allen explains, metanormative contextualism entails two claims. The first claim is that “moral principles or normative ideals are always justified relative to a set of contextually salient values, conceptions of the good life, or normative horizons—roughly speaking, forms of life or lifeworlds” (*END* 215). The idea of an epistemic context is well elucidated

by Michael Williams' contextual epistemology, which claims that epistemic contexts are distinguished from one another by their inferential structure. In each epistemic context there are basic or indubitable beliefs that constitute the foundational grammar for how subsequent beliefs are adjudicated. Given that Allen draws from Williams' work for her metanormative account, one can presume that she has something of this in mind in her description of the "salient values, conceptions of the good life, or normative horizons" that constitute the contextual basis relative to which normative ideals are judged. Allen's second claim supports the idea that these local forms of life are the ultimate grounds for justification. This is so because the second claim of metanormative contextualism states that, "there is no über-context, no context-free or transcendent point of view from which we can adjudicate which contexts are ultimately correct or even in a position of hierarchical superiority over which others" (*END* 215). Thus, the two claims are complementary in that given that there is no über context, justification must always proceed on the basis of local forms of life. So what are the problems with Allen's metanormative contextualism?

The first problem is that Allen's first-order account of normativity, i.e., the first-order principles of the Enlightenment, directly contradicts her metanormative second-order ground for these first-order principles. Universal values by definition demand universal recognition from all human beings in all contexts, but a contextualist account of justification states that values and beliefs are only justified relative to a local context, so a contextualist account of justification limits the validity, standing, and recognition of a value to a local context. Enlightenment ideals, like the idea of universal human rights, claim that respect for human dignity is an unconditional moral value that obtains in any and all contexts, but grounding this principle to a local socio-historical context relativizes the justification of this claim—and hence its validity and the correlative demand for recognition—to the local epistemic context in which it is claimed. Thus, Allen's two-tiered account of normativity is self-refuting because at the first-order level of discourse, it says that the idea of human rights is a justified moral value valid for all socio-historical contexts, but then the second order claim qualifies the justification of this claim to say that it is not

valid for all socio-historical contexts, only to a local epistemic context, thereby contradicting the universality of the first claim.

Despite the contradictory character of this account, Allen insists that her first-order ideals are universal in their application. She seems to think that because she has distinguished the first-order level of discourse from the second-order level, that the universality of the first-order can peacefully co-exist with the relativism of the second-order. She says, “Once we draw out this distinction, it will become clear that contextualism at a metanormative or second-order level—that is, contextualism about normative justification, contextualism as a position in moral epistemology—need not entail relativism at the level of our first-order substantive normative commitments” (*END* 212). While affirming contextualism at the second-order level of discourse, Allen affirms the universality of application of Enlightenment ideals: “It is even compatible with regarding these principles as universal in the scope of their application, so long as we don’t understand these principles, from a metanormative perspective, as justified insofar as they are absolute values that are ‘fixed in eternity and hanging from the ceiling like herrings’” (*END* 216-17).

Allen likely thinks that a second-order contextualism is compatible with a first-order universalism because the two levels operate in sufficiently distinct dimensions that there is no possibility of collision between the two. On the one hand, the second-order level of discourse deals with normative justification while the first-order level deals with the content of the norms themselves, so a difference between these two levels need not lead to a contradiction since the account is not claiming contradictory properties about the same thing. Allen’s account claims contextualism in level 2 (C in level 2) and non-contextualism in level 1 (~C in level 1) which is not a contradiction. A contradiction would occur if she were to claim contextualism in level 2 (C in level 2) and non-contextualism in level 2 (~C in level 2).

The problem with this response is that the two levels, while distinct, address one and the same property, which is the extent of applicability of Enlightenment values, so Allen cannot transfer out contradictory properties to two distinct levels. Enlightenment values (the first-

order norms) say that they are universally applicable which amounts to a non-contextualism (norms are universal, $N=U$). Contrastingly, Allen's metanormative justificatory account of these first-order norms limits the justification of first-order norms to local epistemic contexts. This means that first-order norms are only valid and hence applicable relative to a local context, not a universal one (norms are not universal, $N=\sim U$). What we have then in Allen's account of normativity is the conjunction of ($N=U$ and $N=\sim U$) which is a contradiction. The reason why distinguishing between two levels of discourse does not avoid a contradiction is because both levels, while distinct, address the same property, which is the extent of applicability of Enlightenment norms. Allen's first-order level says they are universal while the second-order level says they are not universal and this is contradictory and thus self-refuting.

Despite Allen's protestations that her account does not entail first-order moral relativism, it is very difficult to see how it does not given its contradictory nature. Allen is acutely aware of the charge of relativism as her opponents insist that her metanormative contextualism "requires me to undermine or qualify all of my normative claims as soon as I utter them—to add 'but that's just for me' on to every normative validity claim I utter—and thus undermines the very idea of engaging in a discursive assessment of validity claims" (END 212). Allen's defense as to why this relativism need not follow was her distinction between the two levels of discourse—the normative and the metanormative—but as was shown, this distinction does not avoid a contradiction, and the contradictory nature of this account does lead to a first-order moral relativism, the "just for me" qualification.

To see how this is so, it may be helpful to take up a concrete course of action and examine it through Allen's account of normativity. Take as a proposed course of action the extermination of the Jewish race. Is this a morally justified action under Allen's proposal? Well, according to metanormative contextualism, it depends. Under the local epistemic context of American society and jurisprudence this would not be morally justified. But a contextualist epistemology dictates that this moral justification is not valid *as such* but only valid for the local context, so an American context, or for that matter, any other single context cannot be the judge of what must be valid for all other contexts. This means that

there can be other contexts, like Nazi Germany, where this mass genocide is morally justified as this will be a different local epistemic context than any other context where universal human rights are accepted. Consequently, insofar as Allen believes herself to live in a form of life that accepts universal human rights, her answer must be: “No! Mass genocide is not justified!... but that’s just for me and my context... genocide could be justified in other local contexts so long as this fits with their local form of life.”

Allen’s form of life can claim no superiority or inferiority to the form of life in Nazi Germany. The reason why no relative judgment about different epistemic contexts is possible, so Allen tells us, is that there is “no context-free or transcendent point of view from which we can adjudicate which contexts are ultimately correct or even in a position of hierarchical superiority over which others” (*END* 215). Allen is quite insistent on this as she tell us that:

But if we ask the further question of what makes the lifeworld horizon that forms the social and historical context for our normative commitments and principles deserving of our support, and if we have given up the possibility of a context that transcends all contexts, and if we have problematized the idea that ‘our’ lifeworld horizon is developmentally or cognitively superior to others, then our answer to this question will have to acknowledge that our normative principles and commitments themselves rest on a contingent foundation (*END* 217-18).

Allen’s last claim, that her account shows us how our normative commitments rest on “contingent foundations,” needs to be carefully examined. Allen’s account is full of contingency, but it has nothing resembling a foundation or a justificatory ground for normative commitments. This point will lead into a deeper discussion about the nature of justification and about Allen’s failure to provide even a relative justification or validity for her ideals.

Up to this point, I have been following Allen in her claim that local socio-historical epistemic contexts have the capacity to act as justificatory grounds for normative ideals, but it is now time to refute this assumption. To see why local forms of life cannot justify normative ideals, it will be helpful to reflect on the role that a metanormative account or ground has in securing and justifying normative beliefs. The need to appeal to a ground or second-order account of something comes into play when beliefs or actions are not self-evidently justified and instead are in need of a further source of justification. For example, if I were to buy a siren, put it on top of my car, and make it a hobby to stop and ticket cars for speeding without any state or federal credentialing to do so, people would rightly ask what my grounds were for this behavior. What they are looking for in this call for a ground is a source of justification for my behavior, an authority that legitimizes it. Intuitively, Allen agrees with this idea of a metanormative account as a justificatory ground because she also presupposes that first-order beliefs and actions are in need of justification, and to meet this demand, she proposes local epistemic contexts or forms of life as the basis for justification. But going back to my example, if when I stopped cars for speeding, the people were to ask me on what grounds I did this, and I responded that my infant children had authorized me to do this, they would be deeply perplexed. This is so because at the metanormative level, I am using a local and non-normative source (my family's approval) to justify a normative behavior (ticketing people for speeding). People would rightly see my first-order behavior as ungrounded and more likely conclude that I am not well.

The same kind of problem exists for Allen's two-tiered account of normativity. Allen tells us that she accepts universal values as first-order principles but that the ground for these principles is the local socio-historical context, which constitutes the basis for their justification. In this case, what Allen understands as first-order principles like universal human rights, freedom, and autonomy are justified *for us* by the fact that these principles are commonly practiced in our local form of life and that most of us make sense of ourselves in light of this form of life (END 202). But, as was shown with Gadamer's fallacious appeal to tradition, the mere fact that a community from a particular socio-historical context believes in a set of values as foundational, indubitable, or perhaps cannot make sense of themselves apart from these values—none of these *descriptive* states of

affairs constitute a justification for the *normative* rightness of these values. Like the case of trying to ground the normative behavior of ticketing cars for speeding on the non-normative grounds of an infant's approval, Allen is stuck with the problem of trying to ground a first-order universal framework that is normative on second-order local forms of life that *qua* local forms of life are not normative. In Humean parlance, Allen is stuck with the problem of trying to ground an "ought" from an "is," i.e., normative principles from empirical facts about how local communities happen to live their life. Hence, it is not the case, as Allen alleges, that she concedes that her account of normativity rests on "contingent foundations" because what she offers as a ground through her local forms of life is indeed contingent, but hardly a foundation or justificatory ground of any kind.

The reason why local epistemic contexts cannot constitute a justificatory ground for discerning the validity of truth claims is due to at least two complementary insights: 1) the universal openness of all local epistemic contexts and 2) the fact that the concept of truth refers us to a universal context, as Apel's unlimited community of discourse participants illustrates. As a descriptive matter, it may be the case that a local epistemic context maintains a very narrow and rigidly defined set of foundational beliefs, but this local context is not in principle a closed one, as Gadamer's argument against historicism shows. All local contexts should be understood as horizons, which are intrinsically open to all other horizons. But if local contexts are potentially open to all other horizons, this means that it is arbitrary to decree, as if by *fiat*, that it is the current local foundational beliefs of a local context that *ought* to justify all other beliefs. Perhaps the local foundational beliefs of a local context stem from a highly limited horizon that simply has not considered all the available evidence to a given question, or perhaps the local context is simply misguided about something and has perpetuated this error throughout its tradition. In either of these cases, what seems clear is that if local contexts are open to criticism from other contexts and can learn from exogenous belief systems, then the idea of a local context as the relevant context for the justification of a truth claim becomes problematic. Insofar as the local context is subject to revision and correction from exogenous contexts, the relevant context of justification and recognizing the validity of a truth claim is not what happens to be believed in any given socio-historical epistemic context, but rather what could be believed

in light of the evidence from all the contexts across space and time that address the question at issue. It is only after looking at all of the evidence from all contexts that pertain to the question at hand that one can make responsible judgments about what is true or false. By its very nature, truth refers us to a universal context, and limiting oneself to one's local epistemic context is in direct contradiction with this demand as it is a short-circuiting of our epistemic responsibility.

Surprisingly, Allen agrees with the insight that local contexts are open to other contexts. In order to defend her metacontextualist epistemology from being ethnocentric and tribal, she tells us that, "like all horizons, this normative horizon [Allen's first order Enlightenment horizon] is open and not closed, permeated by and formed in interaction with other normative horizons" (END 218). For Allen, the openness of normative horizons is crucial because this openness allows us to be open to criticism and to learn from other horizons (END 218). Allen says that "we can envision 'external' modes of critique in which justificatory standards that are held fast in one context are brought to bear on those of another, and vice versa" (END 218). Inter-horizonal dialogue is crucial for Allen's goal of developing an account of normativity that will promote a radical openness, humility, modesty, and a willingness to learn from others (END 210-211).

The problem with these noble goals is that Allen's account of normativity not only does not encourage these virtues, but actually makes the ability to learn from exogenous contexts impossible. As Gadamer shows, learning from an exogenous horizon entails putting our assumptions into question. This putting into question of our assumptions means that others can modify our views or even contradict our beliefs by showing us our errors, and this ability to learn is what Allen promotes in her call for inter-horizonal dialogue. If in light of exogenous criticism, one comes to recognize the flaws in one's endogenous beliefs, then one is implicitly acknowledging the hierarchical superiority of the exogenous criticism over one's admittedly flawed endogenous beliefs. But in Allen's account, the ultimate justificatory ground for our beliefs is the local endogenous epistemic context, not exogenous beliefs. In fact, it is the locality of epistemic contexts that leads Allen to proclaim that when it comes to judging between forms of life or foundational epistemic beliefs, no

verdict can be reached. This is because “no context-free or transcendent point of view from which we can adjudicate which contexts are ultimately correct or even in a position of hierarchical superiority over which others” (*END* 215).

So what we have then in Allen’s account is another contradiction. On the hand, she tells us that we should have the humility to acknowledge the superiority of an exogenous belief over our own where appropriate, and then she tells us that proving the superiority or inferiority of beliefs between forms of life is impossible because there is no point of view outside immanent contexts of belief. If adjudicating between different local epistemic contexts is impossible, then learning from exogenous contexts is also impossible because accepting exogenous criticism over one’s endogenous beliefs implies judging the exogenous belief as superior to one’s own which prompts one to either modify or abandon one’s endogenous belief. Allen has contradictory goals in that she both wants to appeal to a kind of incommensurability of local epistemic contexts, which she correctly judges to be a direct consequence of her rejection of a transcendent point of view, *and* she also wants to appeal to inter-contextual dialogue and learning, which presupposes a commensurability of belief between local epistemic contexts.

What I find to be Allen’s strongest argument against her first claim, the impossibility of judging between local epistemic contexts, is her second claim, which is the verifiable fact that people of different cultures do in fact learn from each other and that cultures are open and influence, transform, and correct one another. The question then becomes one of asking what account of understanding best accounts for the ability of human beings to have, in principle, a meaningful conversation with other human beings of different ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds where beliefs can be mutually contested, revised, adjudicated, or rejected. This radical inter-revisability between human cultures demands a common denominator within human existence because, as Gadamer convincingly shows, disagreement presupposes a deeper sustaining agreement that makes the points of disagreement intelligible. Clearly, Allen’s incommensurable account of local epistemic contexts will not do as this account explicitly rejects a connecting principle between

localized contexts, but her account of learning from different cultures demands a common background which makes inter-cultural critique possible.

This common background cannot be rooted solely in a common culture, a common language, or a common history as all these empirical phenomena are different across ethnic groups. Insofar as the testing of truth claims necessitates a universal community, the common background has to go deeper because it must extend to all human beings, regardless of historical, cultural, or linguistic difference. This common background has to transcend these ontic phenomena and get to the depth of human rationality and this is what Apel's idea of the *logos-a priori* does. As a human existential, it is not a product of human achievement, it is part of the *a priori* equipment that comes with the human way of being-in-the-world. The *logos-a priori* orients the discerning of the validity of truth claims to the unlimited community of rational participants across time and space and this is a necessary component of rationality because the discourse of justification, and in fact, the very concept of truth entails universal recognition based purely on the force of the better argument. The denial of this universality entails a relativization of this denial because the validity of the denial then has to be localized to a contingent context that bears no greater validity (by contextualism's own lights) than the universalist's context. In this case, the denial of the universality of rationality is self-defeating.

But positively, what needs to be emphasized is that the universality of rationality is also what allows inter-contextual dialogue, criticism, and learning to occur. The irony in Allen's attack against universalism is that the virtues which she champions—humility, modesty, corrigibility—are only intelligible within a universal framework that demands the testing of truth claims by all contexts relevant to the question at hand, and not just the local epistemic context. Allen's virtues necessitate a universal framework because these virtues presuppose a meaningful concept of fallibility. Fallibility is the ability to make a mistake, to be wrong about something, but this ability to make errors in turn is only possible in light of a standard of truth that judges these errors as a falling short. But if one limits the standard of truth to one's local epistemic standards, then one is irresponsibly and ethnocentrically

privileging one's endogenous belief system over exogenous points of view that could possibly correct errors in the endogenous standards of truth. As Habermas explains:

Every justified truth claim advocated by someone must be capable of being defended with reasons against the objections of possible opponents and must ultimately be able to command the rationally motivated agreement of the community of interpreters as a whole. Here an appeal to some particular community of interpreters will not suffice.¹⁰

If one is to posit the possibility of inter-contextual correction and the ability to humbly learn from others, then the relevant standard of truth upon which errors are judged as such must transcend one's local standards. The relevant standard of truth must be open to all possible discourse participants from any and all contexts, and all human beings are capable of joining this virtual community because the *logos-a priori* is a universal endowment that makes this community possible. Contrary to Allen's characterization of a universal framework as "context-free," what Apel's *logos-a priori* shows is that a universal framework is intrinsic to human rationality so that it is present in all contexts in which humans exist. Hence, the *logos-a priori* is not "context-free," but rather omni-contextual.

With respect to the idea that error requires a standard that measures it as such, Allen accepts this point but insists that local epistemic contexts are sufficient standards to carry out critique and that there is no need for a universal standard. For Allen, critique can be internal, where the social practices of a tradition are judged internally by that tradition's normative standards, or it can be external, where the standards of one context are used to judge the standards of another (*END* 157-158). In addition to the problematic ethnocentric character of this account of a truth standard, the problem with this distinction between internal and external standards is that if I am a consistent metacontextualist, I have to realize that although I have the factual capacity to engage in external critique by judging other epistemic local contexts as wrong, my own metanormative contextualist

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, "Remarks on Discourse Ethics," in *Justification and Application*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), 53.

commitments dictate to me that all my judgments of an exogenous epistemic context as wrong are ultimately as valid as the other's judgment that my own epistemic context—including all my external critiques of them—is also wrong.

Given the dual validity that metacontextualism posits in the event of moral conflict, what we have is an unresolvable stand-off because both sides can appeal to distinct local epistemic context to justify the validity of their contradictory beliefs, and both sides are right according to Allen's metacontextualism. Given that metacontextualism justifies both sides of a moral conflict so long as they are appealing to their local epistemic context for justification, the resolving of moral conflict cannot occur through rational or moral means, since no one side can be hailed to have the morally superior ground as Allen reminds us.¹¹ What this means is that the resolution of moral conflict between two parties appealing to their local epistemic conflict can only occur through a show of power that is not grounded by a rational or moral basis. So long as the two parties are appealing to their local epistemic contexts, there is no moral or rational superiority between Nazis and Allies, slave owners and slaves, Hitler or Mother Theresa. As such, any support for one or the other within these binaries can only be an arbitrary act of imperialist power. The irony then is that while Allen wishes to critique universal values for their entanglement with power, it is actually her account that promotes imperialism.

The objectionable imperialism in Allen's account cannot be underestimated because one of the main goals of Allen's project is to recognize the voices of marginalized groups. Allen wants to recognize and respect the plurality of narratives, and to do so, she creates an account of normativity where all narratives can be justified relative to their local epistemic context. It is in light of this goal to hear the voices of the marginalized that she becomes suspicious of universal accounts of practical reason because of their objectionable track record as was shown in her pessimistic induction argument. Allen's goal is laudable but the account of normativity she gives undercuts her own goal and leads to opposite results. By

¹¹ "there is no über-context, no context-free or transcendent point of view from which we can adjudicate which contexts are ultimately correct or even in a position of hierarchical superiority over which others" (*END* 215).

relativizing a universal normative framework through her metacontextualism, Allen effectively does away with a meaningful concept of truth and normative rightness, since mutually opposing groups can appeal to their local epistemic contexts for justification and be right according to Allen's metacontextualism. The fact that white nationalists and alt-right groups have reverted to the same contextual epistemology that Allen advocates where alternative facts and alternative values are championed as the relevant local contextual norms governing the group's form of life and where the group's racial identity is taken as the foundational value that legitimates subsequent beliefs and behavior should alarm someone sensitive to imperialism and the oppression of minorities.

Furthermore, the pessimistic induction argument Allen proposes implicitly presupposes the Enlightenment's universal framework because what this argument finds objectionable is that people are not to be dominated, excluded, and marginalized. However, these actions can only be understood as objectionable in light of a belief in the intrinsic value of human dignity and autonomy that ought to be universally recognized. If Allen takes issue with this last point of universal recognition, if she says that the values of human dignity and autonomy are indeed her own but that they are justified solely in light of her own local epistemic context, then we are back to problem of her belief in human dignity having the same validity as a Nazi's belief in racial superiority so long as both Allen and the Nazi resort to their own local epistemic contexts for justification.

Reply to Allen's Criticism of Forst

In this section, the main criticism that I will examine is Allen's charge that Forst arbitrarily and dogmatically breaks off the giving of reasons for his universal account of practical reason. This is an important objection to consider because insofar as Forst shares the *a priori* method of grounding normativity which Apel employs, Forst can be seen as a proxy to Apel, so it will be useful to take up Allen's objections in order to elucidate the kind of rational necessity that the *logos-a priori* commands in argumentative discourse.

Recall that the central insight behind Forst's account of practical reason was the basic human right to justification which is instantiated in four discursive contexts: the ethical,

political, legal, and moral. For Forst, each of these contexts stands in hierarchical relation to each other with the moral context being the ultimate arbiter of subsequent contexts because the moral dimension is the most basic normative domain which encompasses the unlimited community of discourse. In response, Allen demanded that Forst justify his account of practical reason, which is a legitimate request given Forst's principle that the right to justification is a basic human right to which Forst responded by saying that his account of discursive justification set within an unlimited community at the moral level of discourse is just what it means to be a practical reasoner. But to this, Allen responds that to a non-Kantian this sounds like mere foot-stomping and "the norms that are taken to be constitutive of practical reason threaten to become arbitrary, or, even worse, authoritarian" (*END* 137). This is the state of the debate so far. In what follows, I will argue, with the aid of Apel, why even though no further justification of a deductive kind can be given to Forst's account of practical reason, it is not arbitrary, dogmatic, or even authoritarian, as Allen alleges. Forst's account can be justified, not deductively, but through a transcendental-pragmatic form of justification.

In an essay entitled "The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language,"¹² Apel addresses the type of objection that Allen makes, which is referred to in the German literature as the Münchhausen Trilemma. The trilemma states that anybody who seeks to provide a philosophical foundation must either accept:

- (1) an infinite regress that appears to be required by the necessity of always going further back in the search for reasons, but that is not practically feasible and therefore yields no solid foundation;
- (2) a logical circle in the deduction that results from the fact that in the process of giving reasons one has to resort to statements that have already shown themselves to be in need of justification—a process that, because it is logically faulty, likewise leads to

¹² Karl-Otto Apel, "The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, trans. Karl Pavlovic, eds. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993). Henceforth, this work will be cited in parenthetical notation as *PPF*.

no firm foundation; (3) breaking off giving reasons at a particular point, which, while in principle feasible, would involve an arbitrary suspension of the principle of sufficient reason. (*PPF* 251)

In the context of Allen's polemic with Forst, Allen accuses Forst of the third option of this trilemma since she accuses Forst of arbitrarily breaking off the giving of reasons in asserting his principle of justification. Forst's response is that the evidence Allen is looking for is constitutive of the act of moral reasoning itself, so no further ground can be appealed to. Essentially, Forst is arguing that the appeal to evidence (which is what his account of the human right to justification calls for) cannot be further grounded by a further appeal to evidence. Forst's emphasis is on the moral dimension of appealing to evidence, but this principle is equivalent to the epistemic appeal to evidence, which is Apel's focus of discussion as both appeals are equiprimordial in the *logos-a priori*.

Apel responds to the kind of objection of arbitrariness and dogmatism that Allen makes by arguing that the Münchhausen Trilemma only arises if one commits the abstractive fallacy. Apel explains:

only when one abstracts from the situation of the perceiving and argumentatively engaged subject, who offers his doubts and convictions for discussion in performatively explicable statements, is it possible to characterize the (deductively mediated) appeal to evidence as breaking off the process of giving reasons and to consider this presumed suspension, along with infinite regress and logical circularity, as the third horn of the trilemma. (*PPF* 260)

The problem with the Münchhausen Trilemma is that it presupposes a deductive concept of justification where statements need to be deduced from further more basic statements if justification is to occur—all the while focusing purely on the semantic content of sentences and abstracting away from the pragmatic dimension of the subject's argumentative speech-acts. These two features, focusing solely on the semantic dimension of statements and

limiting justification to a deductive relation, complement each other in that abstracting away from the performative aspect of argumentative discourse leads one to think of justification narrowly and solely in terms of a deductive relationship.

But this semantic concept of justification and the subsequent abstraction from the pragmatic dimension of argumentation is illegitimate, argues Apel, because:

logical syntax and semantics are, as abstractive subdisciplines of semiotics, only a means of 'indirect' (that is, mediated through the construction of ideal systems of rules) elucidation of scientific-theoretical argumentation. Hence, they are in principle dependent upon their extension and integration in a pragmatics of argumentation. (*PPF* 258)

Semantic content, as the content that inheres in the signs that mediate knowledge and argumentation to us, presupposes "a (pragmatic) interpretation of the signs by a community of interpretation" (*PPF* 258). In fact, the validity of semantic claims refers us to an intersubjective pragmatic dimension because the truthfulness of a semantic claim implies that it ought to be recognized as valid by an unlimited community of interpretation. This is an insight from Charles Saunders Peirce that Apel appeals to but it is also an insight further ratified by Wittgenstein's reflections on rules and the necessarily social nature of language. This means that semantic content is intertwined with the pragmatic dimension of living breathing and socialized human beings that make arguments with semantic content. If semantic content is intertwined in this way with the pragmatic dimension of argumentative discourse of living breathing human beings, then Apel thinks that the conception of justification as a deductive relation is too narrow of a concept of justification.

Instead, Apel proposes to show a transcendental-pragmatic justification for the appeal to evidence (or as Forst understands this notion, the demand for justification). And this transcendental-pragmatic account is the same tactic he uses in presenting his idea of the *logos-a priori* in that what it means to engage in argumentative discourse is to necessarily engage in idealizing presuppositions among which are included the appeal to evidence or

as Forst argues, the demand for justification, the supposition that there is a truth of the matter that an unlimited community of discourse participants could recognize as valid and that in the process of argumentation, one recognizes the moral status of one's interlocutor by the implicit appeal to their rational autonomy that one's argument presupposes. These presuppositions must be observed at the cost of performative contradiction. A.J. Watt explains the structure of Apel's transcendental pragmatic approach to justify moral principles in argumentative discourse as follows:

The strategy of this form of argument is to accept the skeptical conclusion that these principles are not open to any proof, being presuppositions of reasoning rather than conclusions from it, but to go on to argue that commitment to them is rationally inescapable because they must, logically, be assumed if one is to engage in a mode of thought essential to any rational human life.¹³

Hence, the appeal to evidence (and Forst's moral equivalent for this in his principle of the right to justification) is not an arbitrary breaking off of the giving of reasons because it constitutes the very nature of argumentative discourse.

Using Wittgenstein's reflections in *On Certainty*, Apel argues that, "doubt and criticism are meaningful only under the presupposition that they can be sufficiently grounded by appeal to indubitable paradigmatic evidence" (*PPF* 266). The idea here is that skeptical activity is parasitic on accepted certainties that make the skeptical question meaningful. For example, when one questions whether the objects of our perception are hallucinations, the idea of a non-veridical perception implies such a thing as a veridical perception that makes the idea of a hallucination meaningful (*PPF* 264). In like manner, critical inquiry presupposes rational evidential grounds that justify the criticism, otherwise, the criticism itself is moot. From this, Apel concludes that, "'appeal to evidence' cannot, at least in this sense, be equated with 'appeal to dogma' or 'appeal to an arbitrary decision,' since criticism itself—

¹³ A.J. Watt, "Transcendental Arguments and Moral Principles," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1975), 40.

as meaningful criticism in the framework of a language game—must be justified” (*PPF* 264). The appeal to evidence then is transcendently pragmatically justified insofar as no one can call it into question without performative contradiction. Furthermore, the fact that it cannot be deductively grounded without presupposing itself does not speak to an invalidating circularity but rather to its constitutive rational and universal necessity for any engagement in argumentative discourse. The fact that the appeal to evidence is recursively justified insofar as all argumentative discourses must presuppose it can only be considered circular if one assumes that only a deductive concept of justification is possible, but as Apel argues, this assumption commits the abstractive fallacy and fails to consider transcendental-pragmatic justifications.

Finally, it will not do, with respect to the question of truth, for the skeptic to argue that she can avoid these necessary rational presuppositions by avoiding the whole language game of argumentative discourse. If the skeptic is to decide against argumentative discourse she must either 1) have a rational reason for this or 2) not have any reason. If this decision is supported by reasons, say a skeptic is convinced that mysticism and intuitionism has proven itself to be superior to argumentation, then the skeptic is already engaged in the argumentative game and its constitutive principle of appealing to evidence, so she still performatively contradicts herself. If the skeptic decides against argumentative discourse *for no reason whatsoever*, then no argument has been made as to why skepticism is warranted and hence no one need bother with the skeptic’s utterly arbitrary decision. But even this second option is hard to imagine because all meaningful human behavior has reasons behind it. As Apel says, “everyone, even if he merely *acts* in a *meaningful* manner—e.g. takes a decision in the face of an alternative and claims to understand himself—already implicitly presupposes the logical and moral preconditions for critical communication” (*ACC* 269). Habermas adds that insofar as argumentative discourse is a special reflective form of our broader communicative action that is oriented toward reaching understanding with others, the skeptic’s refusal to enter argumentative discourse would be a refusal to inhabit a sociocultural form of life with other people where he is continually asked to take

up yes or no positions.¹⁴ Habermas says, “the skeptic may reject morality, but he cannot reject the ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*) of the life circumstances in which he spends his waking hours, not unless he is willing to take refuge in suicide or serious mental illness.”¹⁵

From Apel’s transcendental-pragmatic justification of the appeal to evidence, which translates at a moral register to Forst’s demand for justification, we can see why Allen’s complaint to Forst that his reply is arbitrary and dogmatic is misguided. Allen fails to recognize that justification need not be restricted to the deductive kind, but can also take place through transcendental-pragmatic means, in which case what it means to enter into the language game of argumentative discourse of practical reason just is to ask for and give reasons or justifications for moral truth claims. Forst’s principle of justification is a basic human right grounded in the autonomous nature of morality. As such, it is an extension of Apel’s idea that the *logos a-priori* includes an implicit moral evaluation of one’s interlocutor as an autonomous moral subject worthy of respect and deserving of justification. Consequently, Forst can appeal to Apel’s argumentative strategy and respond to Allen that his principle of justification is one of the necessary idealizing presuppositions of argumentative discourse of practical reason that must be presupposed by anybody who enters the discussion about practical reason. The fact that the principle of justification cannot be deductively grounded does not speak to an invaliding circularity but rather to its transcendental-pragmatic rational necessity in all our argumentative acts about what constitutes the moral good.

In addition to the accusations of dogmatism and arbitrariness, Allen also objected to the political perils of universal accounts of practical reason. Insofar as universal accounts emphasize reason, they exclude and dominate the Other of reason, which Allen understands as irrationality, madness, the emotions, the affects, embodiment, or the imagination and that all these are “symbolically associated with black, queer, and female colonized, and subaltern subjects” (*END* 137). In response, it needs to be emphasized that

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification,” in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), 100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Habermas and Apel do not understand rationality in a mechanistic, purely means-end, or calculative manner as this is too narrow an understanding of reason. For them, rationality is broadly understood as co-incident with meaningful human behavior. This means that rationality is fully compatible, and as Martha Nussbaum has shown,¹⁶ latent in our emotional and affective life. As has been shown, the moral point of view undergirded by universal frameworks centers around the respect and recognition of human autonomy which includes the body since our rational capacities are embodied. Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of human existence is actually the third component of Apel's *logos-a priori*, so there is no incompatibility between aesthetics and rationality at all since the two coincide in Apel's concept. Insofar as irrationality and madness entail an eradication of human dignity and autonomy, as is the common practice of genocidal killers, then yes, these two traits are incompatible with universal values, but this hardly constitutes an objection to these values—if anything, it lends further support for their justification. Hence, Allen's alleged incompatibilities, with the exception of this last point, are simply mistaken.

Furthermore, the moral point of view, which deals with generalizable interests, is fully compatible with the ethical point of view, which deals with our particular self-understandings as individual human beings engaged in designing a life that is suited to our particular situations. As Forst account shows, the moral point of view is necessary to put restraints on our individual choices such that we do not infringe upon the freedom and autonomy of others. But aside from these restraints that are generated for the respect of human dignity, universal values are fully compatible with the great array of individual and societal diversity because universal values are formal enough that they do not prescribe the concrete content of the good life, but rather the rules by which the content ought to be organized.

It is also important to distinguish between the proper entailments of universal frameworks and the misapplication of these values because the latter does not invalidate the former. Allen repeatedly appeals to the colonial abuses that have been prompted by universal

¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

theories, but logically this is a non sequitur. As John Davenport remarks, one could also point out that Darwin's theory of evolution also prompted theories of social Darwinism that perpetuated unspeakably racist acts, but this hardly warrants calling evolution into question.¹⁷ The misuse of a theory does not invalidate the theory itself. In fact, the concern with marginalized subjects presupposes the ideals of autonomy and respect for all human beings, so the values of Allen's postcolonial project and her desire to respect the voices of the oppressed actually exemplify universal values.

Throughout her work, Allen makes repeated use of a genealogical method to call truth claims into question. The idea is that if she can show the entanglements with power that the origin of a belief has, then this entanglement transfers over to the validity of the belief itself making it likewise objectionable. This method is in full display when Allen shows how children are socialized into the moral point of view and come to recognize ideas of moral autonomy through authoritarian parenting. Allen claims that children are dominated by parental sanctions, which they internalize as authoritarian gestures that are then reduplicated in the problematic self-understandings that we have of ourselves as moral subjects (*END* 143). For Allen, this shows that the Kantian picture of morality is built on a contingent ground that is objectionable for its authoritarian and power-laden relations that it replicates. The problem with Allen's entire method of analysis here is that it rests on a genetic fallacy. The truth-value of a belief is independent of its genetic origination such that a belief could have a deeply problematic genealogy, yet still be true. The fact that Hitler used the truth claim that Germany had a terrible economy for the nefarious motive of rising to power to execute millions of people did not make his truth claim any less true. Likewise, Allen's genealogical narrative as to how we get the moral point of view from childhood, while interesting, is another non sequitur for the purposes of analyzing whether the moral point of view is true or not. Simply telling a story with nefarious power motives still leaves it open whether the moral point of view is a truthful discovery, brought about by a

¹⁷ John Davenport, review of *The End of Progress*, by Amy Allen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-end-of-progress-decolonizing-the-normative-foundations-of-critical-theory/>.

problematic genealogy, or if it is merely an invention or solely a human projection having no independent validity. By itself, the genealogical account does not decide that.

Reply to Allen's General Criticism

At this point, most of Allen's general criticism has been addressed in the last two sections. None of her claims about universal values logically entailing imperialism, colonialism, or racism have proven true. These claims are either grounded by the appeal to misuses of universal frameworks, in which case these misuses themselves are contradicted by the values intrinsic to the universal frameworks, or logically fallacious genealogical deconstruction.

Furthermore, my response to Allen's metanormative contextualism indirectly dealt with Allen's charge that even the idea of "multiple modernities" forces everybody to play by modernist rules. If universal values are valid, they are valid for all human beings as this is how valid claims work, and not merely for modernists, Westerners, or Europeans. There is no normative decisionism for European ideals, rather there is a rationally grounded justification for human ideals. Allen again seems to confuse the genealogical order of discovery of an ideal with the truth-value and extension of the ideal. If a belief or an ideal is found to be true, it holds true for everyone and is not confined to the individual discoverer or form of life in which the ideal was first recognized as valid.

This conclusion is further supported by the failure of proposing the local epistemic context as the relevant context for justifying truth claims. As was shown, argumentative discourse is intrinsically oriented to the universal, so the implicit values that are made in this communicative act also extend to the unlimited community of discourse participants involved in the discourse of truth. Therefore, there is no such thing as "our" rules by which non-Westerners are hegemonically pressured to obey. This is an area where Allen has to be careful of employing racist tropes of her own because the values that she says are specific to European culture include things like rational autonomy, human rights, and freedom. If Allen thinks these values are specific to Europe, then she implicitly makes non-Europeans

not have these things intrinsically, which entails that they are naturally subordinate and non-rational beings without intrinsic human rights.

Now, Allen has responded to this objection, previously made by Forst, and she does state that, “no one owns the concept of justification, or even the language of European morality” (END 157). The problem is that her metacontextualist account does tribalize values into local epistemic contexts and even her justification for why she holds to universal values (at the first-order level of discourse) gives a tribal explanation: “we are committed at a first-order, substantive level to these normative principles *inasmuch as our form of life and sense of ourselves as practical moral agents depend on them* [italics are mine]” (END 202). Notice that the reason why she holds these values is not because they are valid, i.e., human dignity and human rights really do obtain for all human beings, but because “our form of life” depends on them. If it is *just* our contingent form of life that depends on them, then presumably other forms of life need not depend on them, but if you believe that other cultures need not depend on the values of human rights, human dignity, and rational autonomy, then this is essentially an admission that you think that other non-European forms of life consist of irrational slaves with no human rights.

Allen treats universal values as if they are something we pick up or leave behind. This is evident in the way that she talks about how “critical theorists should regard them [European moral ideals] as important critical emancipatory tools” (END 157). The problem is that human dignity and rational autonomy are not tools that you pick up, they are characteristics of who you are as a human being. And it is because humans are this way that you cannot simply pick this value up or leave it behind as you would a tool. If one treats the value of human dignity this way, then what you are saying is that human beings are beings whose dignity you can pick or leave behind however this may fit your purpose. As has been shown in several places now, the continuing irony in this analysis is that Allen is in danger of embodying the very same evils that she so strongly wants to denounce.

The final objection I will address is Allen’s claim that understanding progress as a fact in history is impossible because it would entail a God’s eye view of history. This will be an

important objection to look at because it will bring to a close the exposition of the *logos-a priori* and what it has to say about progress and the direction of history, and the ways in which the formal dimension of human rationality is intertwined with the material dimension of historical life. Allen introduces her objection with the question, “Does a judgment about historical progress not presume knowledge of what counts as the end point or goal of that historical development” (END 19)? If this is the case, then this judgment is impossible to ground because it would require a “God’s-eye point of view or point of view of the Absolute, ideas that go against the basic methodological assumptions of critical theory” (END 19). If one is not willing to grant this viewpoint of the Absolute, then Allen thinks that all judgments about the goal of history must be made from “our own, internal, reconstructive point of view” (END 19). And if these judgments are made from our own local epistemic contexts, then the worry is that they will be “irredeemably parochial” and an instrument of self-congratulation (END 19).

In response to Allen’s objection against positing a legitimate standard by which one can judge progress in history, it is important to repeat that as far as the rational justification for Apel’s *logos-a priori* goes, nothing whatsoever hangs on whether a broad historical development can be shown to have taken place or not. The rational justification for Apel’s *logos-a priori* depends purely on the idealizing presuppositions that a person engaging in argumentative discourse must be made at the cost of performative contradiction. This kind of grounding for the *logos-a priori* is, at the level of validity, independent of historical experience of any kind, so history could be progressing, regressing, staying stagnant, or zig-zagging uncontrollably and none of these developmental trajectories would detract from the rational justification of the *logos-a priori*.

This is so because the *logos-a priori*, as the source of cognitive and moral normativity, acts more like a demand on human belief and conduct. It commands us to believe that which is true, that which could be assented to by an unlimited community of discourse participants, and it commands us to conduct ourselves in a way in which our behavior is consonant with the generalizable interests of the same unlimited community. These commands are not descriptions of what the world is like, or how it has progressed or regressed up to our

historical period. Rather, these commands are the counterfactual but nevertheless constitutive idealizations that human beings necessarily presuppose when they make claims about what is true or what is right. These stringent demands on what is true and what is right is what leads us to continually revise our truth claims as the human race encounters new historical experience, new scientific discoveries, or new situations that call for a rethinking of our long-held factual and moral beliefs. The *logos-a priori* is not itself the finished historical product of truth and goodness, but it does tell us what the necessary formal conditions of these two phenomena *ought* to be.

Now, insofar as the *logos-a priori* acts as the grammar of our argumentative language game, it does act as a minimal teleological principle for where history *ought* to be going. If we apply this normative principle and judge the historical experience of the human race by it, I do think we can make a reasonable judgment about relative progress having occurred in history. In the realm of our search for truth, the *logos-a priori* tells us that we must hold our truth claims to the scrutiny of all possible discourse participants, and where appropriate, we should revise these claims so as to correct for the errors that others point out in our work. The practical result of this imperative, if we follow it, is that our theories will become ever more inclusive of a greater array of phenomena. By being more inclusive they will increase in their universality because our parochial horizons will be expanded by the contributions of other horizons. In light of this standard, I think it is difficult to challenge the fact that our species has had its horizon greatly expanded, say from the axial age to now. Increasing globalization has caused an explosion in our cultural knowledge of each other. For all the complaints that Allen makes against universal frameworks, the irony is that insofar as her project is symbolic of the greater shift in the humanities to include new insights into how race, gender, and sex influence the questions we ask and thus affect our understanding of the world, her project is attempting to create a more inclusive understanding of normativity and hence a more universal framework that accounts for elements hitherto ignored.

In addition to the humanities, how the imperative to truth ought to manifest itself in science is through the formulation of increasingly universal theories that can account for a

greater array of phenomena, and this is precisely what we have seen happen in the sciences since the scientific revolution. From Newton's global theory of gravitation to Einstein's general theory of relativity, scientific progress has occurred through the production of ever more universal theories that can explain prior theories and then the further phenomena that could not be accounted for in the prior theories. This continued trend toward universalization can be seen in the current imperative of science to find a unified theory of everything which means a theory that will combine the insights of quantum mechanics and relativity theory, currently the two most important and global theories that describe the infinitesimally small and the astronomically large, respectively.

In the practical realm, the manifestation of the *logos-a priori* should manifest itself through an increased respect and recognition for human autonomy. The manifestation of this value has also appeared in the rapid democratization of much of the world in the last few centuries, and as Kant showed, in the increasing globalization and rise of international unions and international law meant to protect human rights all throughout the world. In the last few centuries this value can also be seen in the increasing recognition and respect for marginalized individuals through events like the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, women's rights movements, civil rights movements, same-sex marriage and the greater acceptance of the LGBTQ community.

No doubt, all these advances are mixed with unimaginable catastrophes, so progress does not seem to proceed in a linear direction. It is more like a graph of the stock market that has plenty of massive crashes like the great depression, but nevertheless seems to continue to trend in an upward direction. And like the stock market, there is nothing that necessitates a continuance of progress in the historical world. We could all be obliterated by a nuclear war tomorrow and that event would not disprove the *logos-a priori* because there is nothing in this human existential that necessitates our conduct to be rational. It tells us what is normative, but the human being has the ability to contradict these commands and act like a savage, and history is also filled with examples of this behavior. But it seems to me that history continues to progress (broadly speaking) because we tend to learn from our savagery and as Kant argued, even if only for our self-interest, we act

lawfully and are oriented toward law for the sake of self-preservation. But even if one wishes to resist any notion of historical progress—as mistaken as I think this would be—this empirical judgment need not detract one from accepting the *logos-a priori*. In fact, one could only meaningfully contest any interpretation of history by implicitly making the idealized presuppositions of the *logos-a priori*. And this brings us back to Allen’s contention that showing historical progress as a fact is impossible because no God’s eye point of view exists.

If Allen insists that there is no God’s eye point of view, one ought to ask her from what point of view she makes this claim? Is this claim made from a God’s eye point of view? Presumably no, otherwise the claim would be self-contradictory as in “there is no God’s eye point of view, and this claim is true because it is made from a God’s eye point of view.” But if the claim then is relativized to Allen’s local epistemic context, then the validity of this claim is just as valid as the universalist’s claim that there is a God’s eye point of view so long as both Allen and the universalist appeal to their local epistemic context for the validation of their respective claims. What the truth may be between Allen and the universalist is impossible to say because Allen has told us that no principle exists that can judge between epistemic contexts. As soon as Allen says, “there is no God’s eye point of view,” she must qualify her claim with the proviso that “but that’s just for me.” Hence, Allen’s claim is either self-contradicting or self-undermining.

But surely we are not God, and surely we have no absolute knowledge! Certainly we are not, and the *logos-a priori* claims no such divine omniscience. As has been explained, the *logos-a priori* does not give us a finished historical product of the material content of truth and goodness, rather it gives us the formal conditions that any candidate to these two must satisfy. The *logos-a priori* acts as the minimal standard by which concrete beliefs and behavior can be judged, whether at an individual, collective, national, international, or historical level. As Habermas explains, the idealizations of the *logos-a priori* are meant to explain the idea of validity, and to do so in a way that avoids the self-defeating relativism that is produced by appealing to particular forms of life as the relevant standard of

justification.¹⁸ Hence, insofar as anybody makes claims that they presume to be valid, they are engaged in the idealization presuppositions of the *logos-a priori*. This means that Allen is wrong to provincialize the universal values to European culture as these idealizing presuppositions are a common rational endowment not belonging to any single human being, culture, or form of life, but to all human beings.

Conclusion

With the help of Apel and Habermas, I have used the idea of the *logos-a priori* to give my own response to the problem of historicism. Historical content is indeed perpetually changing, but what undergirds this change is a formal imperative that remains constant and which acts as a minimal but necessary normative standard that all beliefs and behavior are subject to. This standard of validity does not free us from the responsibility of thinking deeply and debating fiercely with one another because as a minimal standard, it only provides us with the necessary, but not sufficient conditions for truth and goodness. The latter requires material content to which we only have access to through our changing historical horizons. This is why we should expect our concrete norms of belief and conduct to be subject to change to some extent because we cannot stand at the end of history from which we can see the completed historical whole.

But what this acknowledgement of the historicity of human existence should not lead us to is a relativism of all norms, including the formal ones, whereby one can only judge forms of life as different and whereby one is confined to understand historical change as simply understanding differently. Insofar as Heideggerian, Gadamarian, and Allenian forms of relativism engage in critique, they are doing more than understanding differently, and they presuppose the same idealizing presuppositions of the *logos-a priori* that they deem so objectionable. As Apel argues, the *logos-a priori* is a universal human existential constitutive of the uniquely human way of being-in-the-world, and all our refutations of it are merely further exemplifications of how inseparable this rational dimension is from human existence. Even as we seek to eradicate our rational nature, we feel compelled to

¹⁸ Habermas, *Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, 52.

justify this destruction rationally. We can only make this attempt through the kind of being that we are, and so become a tangled paradox to ourselves in trying to dehumanize our humanity. But in contrast to this nihilistic drive, the *logos-a priori* calls us to seek the truth, to include all, to act justly, to live harmoniously with one another, and to always be open to being corrected by the inevitable blind spots that our limited horizons are bound to possess.

Conclusion

Truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.¹ — Michel Foucault

At the end of this conversation on the question of history that has included contributions from Kant, Rickert, Troeltsch, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Apel, and Allen, I think it would be too histrionic of a statement to say that Hegel has stood at the end, waiting for us all along, motionless. Troeltsch was right that history has shown, through the autonomous advance of the natural and social sciences, that the world does not need a thick metaphysical system to ground its claims to knowledge. Furthermore, Hegel's attempt to reduce all historical particularity into the straight jacket of a formal system seems, in retrospect, to have been too restrictive of the contingency of life.

Having said this, the core insight of Hegel's system, that the rational is inextricably bound to the universal, does seem to be vindicated by the dialectic that has ensued since Hegel. Gadamer's refutation of historicism employed the Hegelian insight into the negativity of experience to argue for the existence of a universal human horizon in contrast to the artificiality of discrete contextual horizons. Habermas and Apel only further ratified this insight of Gadamer by arguing that universal intersubjectivity can only be properly supported by transcending the facticity of tradition through the idealized positing of an unlimited community of discourse participants.

¹ Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 235.

This mirrors Hegel's claim that the Absolute will come to realize itself in and for itself through its self-recognition in all of its prior shapes of consciousness. Though Hegel scholarship remains divided on what exactly Hegel meant by the absolute standpoint and to what degree he thought this was realized in his time,² what is true about the Neo-Hegelianism of Apel and Habermas is that they rightly make no claim about a substantive realization of an absolute perspective. Instead, they argue for the necessary formal conditions of rational thought that we always already presuppose in inquiry and thereby the rational structures by which the world becomes intelligible to us.

In light of the symmetry between Frankfurt school theorists and Hegel on this point, there is also a convergence at the moral register. Insofar as thought and world contain a formal structure that makes normative demands on us at the level of truth, these demands also translate to moral imperatives at the level of action because of the interconnection between the mind and the will. As Rickert showed, the recognition of truth is inextricably linked to an autonomous will that values this truth as unconditional. But this autonomous will does not exist in the abstract; the autonomous will exists in embodied human beings, and the nature of rational autonomy, as Apel argues, is an intersubjective endowment. Insofar as human beings reason, they must use language, and language is an intersubjective phenomenon that always already links us together at an ontological level. Therefore, the proper realization of one's rational autonomy co-implies the mutual respect and recognition of the community's rational autonomy as well as we are linked together by the kind of linguistic beings that we are.

Finally, the universal demands that reason makes on us both at an epistemic and a practical level means that we cannot exclude any human being in the unlimited community of discourse participants for either the recognition of truth or for fashioning the societal norms by which we will govern ourselves. This is where Amy Allen's concerns about the marginalized become crucial. Though I believe that the account of normativity that she provides is misguided and actually ends up contradicting her goals, what she wishes to accomplish—that society recognize and respect the autonomy of groups who for too long

² See for example the articles in Jon Steward's (ed.) *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), Part 4: The Myth of the End of History.

have been excluded—is a rational and ethical imperative which we must affirm at the cost of the dehumanization of all of us. This demand for the inclusion of *all* particulars into the universal is also a primary feature of Hegel's thought that the finite is inextricably related to the infinite, and that a true infinite encompasses all particulars (lest, if you demarcate the infinite, it becomes another particular).

Though history is far from a linear process in which the universal is realized, Kant was right in showing us a broad pattern of development where the human being proceeds from parochial surroundings to a greater universal and more cosmopolitan ordering of the world that progressively realizes the moral law of freedom. And Heidegger's idea of an existential, which is an intrinsic structure of the human way of being-in-the-world, helps explain why this pattern develops. If Apel is correct that the *logos-a priori* is a Heideggerian existential that fundamentally constitutes our being-in-the-world, then it makes sense that there is an increasing degree of unity being realized in the world, both in terms of our scientific knowledge and international alliances. We can come together in these realms because our equipment matches, and this again matches Hegel's insight that the Concept is present in seed form in all that exists.

Thus, while it is too strong of a statement to say that Hegel has been waiting for us all along, I, in agreement with Foucault, stand in wonder at the prescience of this thinker. Hegel may not be waiting for us, but he certainly made the reservation.

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