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The Ego in Germanic Philosophy: A Reexamination

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Himself as Everything. How does Mrs. Fichte put up with it?

Heinrich Heine, parodying a common misconception of Fichte's philosophy.

The notion that knowledge can *discover* anything ...is disregarded altogether: for there is nothing to discover, and even if there was mind could not reach it; it could only reach the idea it might call up from its own depths...Under the fashionable name of progress what these idealists sincerely treasure is the vital joy of transition; and usually the joy of this transition lies much more in shedding their present state than in attaining a better one. For they suffer and wrestle continually, and by a curious and deeply animal instinct, they hug and sanctify this endless struggle all the more when it rends and bewilders them, bravely declaring it to be the absolute, infinite and divine.

George Santayana, "Egotism in German Philosophy"

It was two thirds of a century ago, when things German and German philosophy in particular were— to put it politely— not particularly amenable to American thought, that George Santayana wrote his beligerent and sometimes insightful study of the post Kantian era: "Egotism in German Philosophy" he called it, and the preface (if not already the title) makes it quite clear that this was no scholarly exposition. Post-Kantian German philosophy, he suggested, was nothing but a combination of skepticism and patriotic arrogance. The arrogance of German philosophy, he argued, had turned the Germans into "heathens" with unprecedented pretensions to genius and world-historical importance, the fruits of which were evident in the (first) world war. The theory of knowledge was in fact "a screen behind which the German Will could have its day." In conclusion and by way of contrast, Santayana urges us on to "courtesy in the universe...and in everything discarding the word absolute as most false and the most odious of words."¹

Santayana's indictment seems not to have perturbed the current generation of scholars of German idealism, though it did effectively discourage several prior generations from reading the German idealists at all. But Santayana's admittedly excessive accusations have a point to them which endures and becomes more evident as we move further away in time from the horrible cataclysm caused by that particular arrogance (not unique to German royalty) of the first decades of the century. The point is that, beneath the often brilliant speculations of Kant and his followers, there lurks a geopolitical arrogance, not war-like, necessarily, but unjust, obnoxious and dangerous nevertheless. Today we call it "cultural imperialism," and it is by no means limited to philosophy in Germany. In philosophy, I refer to it as "the transcendental pretense"—and it is just as evident in the current American philosophical hegemony as it was in Kant, Hegel and their idealist kin.²

I would like to go back over some of the same turf covered by Santayana, in much the same survey style but with much more sympathy, and look once again at the ego—if not exactly egotism—in Germanic philosophy. In today's world, the debate would more likely be centered around the question of "relativism"—that is, the thesis that all knowledge is relative to some conceptual framework. In nineteenth century idealist terms, we might say that it is rather relative to the ego that provides that conceptual framework. In the following essay, it is this question that will concern me, not Santayana's admittedly delightful anti-hagiography. But I should like to go back over the same territory, and provide a somewhat different interpretation of the movement from Kant to recent continental philosophy. At the same time, I should like to make sure that always in the foreground is the problem that was not and still is not taken sufficiently seriously either in America or in Europe—the problem of cultural imperialism which, I believe, follows indirectly if not directly from the egocentric standpoint that was developed by the German philosophers. The ego in German philosophy was not only pretentious, as Santayana insisted in his blunt Victorian manner; it is also politically insidious, an implicit warrant for ignoring not only other philosophies but other cultures, other countries, other people.

Today, relativism is at least an arguable position, if not "fashionable" (according to Karl Popper); the burden of proof seems to lie on the side of those who would deny its intelligibility. But the picture then was entirely otherwise; relativism was considered an absurdity and "the Absolute" reigned over German philosophy. The key figure in this story, of course, is G.W.F. Hegel, the best known spokesman for "the Absolute" but also, I want to argue, the prime mover of the development of historical relativism, or simply, "historicism". But in this he was helped out enormously by Kant, even more of a defender of the Absolute Truth than Hegel. Between them (which includes

such intermediary figures as Fichte and Schelling), they turned what began in Kant as a powerful argument for the singularity of knowledge into an argument that can best be summarized as the recognition that "alternative conceptual frameworks" are indeed an unavoidable philosophical conclusion.

And yet, not only Kant and Hegel, but virtually all of the philosophers who followed them denied this conclusion. Kant rejected it, of course. But before him, Johann Herder, the precocious cultural relativist, nevertheless shrunk from the general relativist thesis in the name of a single, all-embracing "humanity."³ Hegel considered relativism absurd, for somewhat the same reasons that Donald Davidson now does; and judging from his somewhat embarrassed looks back at his early *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which he displayed his own historicism at its best, he came to have a horror of what some have taken to be his main philosophical contribution. Later in the century, Dilthey flirted with relativism but rejected it at uncomfortably close quarters; Karl Mannheim, whose "sociology of knowledge" is generally taken as one of the examples of relativism, refused the idea with indignation, insisting on calling himself a "relationist" instead. Even Friedrich Nietzsche, who embraced relativism in its most extreme forms, couldn't resist the temptation to announce relativism itself as the Absolute truth, thus emerging with some sometimes bizarre declarations about "truth is falsity" and the like. And as we enter this century, we find Edmund Husserl, battling against Dilthey in particular, still fighting a rear-guard reactionary action against the encroaching forces of relativism.⁴

My strategy in this essay is to look at a single theme — the early struggle against what we now call relativism (then, "historicism") in the name of "the transcendental pretense"—the still common but no longer wholly respectable tendency to project one's own view of the world as a universal or "transcendental" truth, as *the way the world really is*. The strategy is worth pointing out, for it should be made clear how the question has become reversed: Kant desperately searched for an argument that would prove the singularity of knowledge (since this was, wasn't it, the only intelligible conclusion?). I want to ask instead whether there is any reason for us to think that our views of the world, however demonstrably "necessary," are anything more than that? In other words, is the transcendental pretense anything more than just that—a pretense?

Kant's Revolution and The Transcendental Pretense

"The transcendental pretense" is the attempt to claim that one's own world view is in fact the only correct world view, for any person in any society at any time. But such a pretense, in one important sense, is an entirely new phenomenon, dating (rather precisely) from

the end of the Eighteenth Century. So long as people believed that there was simply "the world," existing independently of all human experience, the claim that there is only one correct world view (whether or not one's own) was unimpeachable. This was no pretense, only common sense. There was nothing "transcendental" about it; it was just "the way the world is." Absolutism too, therefore, was a matter of common sense, hardly a position at all. There may have been serious questions about which world view was the correct one, and which authorities should be believed, but relativism, until very recently, was not even an intelligible suggestion.

Intellectual historians tend to mark changes in epochs overly sharply, sometimes attributing vast changes in viewpoint to a single author or book. Allow me to join in this oversimplification. The philosopher is Immanuel Kant, and the book his *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781.⁵ His "Copernican revolution" was in fact the culmination of a series of bold steps in modern thinking, beginning more or less with Galileo and Descartes (another oversimplification), moving through the intrigues and internecine battles of European rationalism and British empiricism with the anthropocentric confidence of the Enlightenment, of which Kant is generally recognized as one of the leading proponents. A familiar way of summarizing this series of moves is to call it a shift to "subjectivity."⁶ This does not do justice to some of the most important participants in the series (e.g. Spinoza), and it has the obvious danger of ignoring the fact that this move was in every case an attempt to secure an objective view of "the way the world is." But the idea of "subjectivity" displays well enough the tendency to move away from a glib acceptance of the idea that the world is "a certain way," independent of our experience of it. And, at the same time, it opens up the intelligibility of relativism, for world views are now anchored in, if not wholly constituted by, the "subjects" that hold them. (In careless contemporary parlance, "It's all relative" and "It's all subjective" are roughly synonymous, equally platitudinous, and equally conducive to the intellectual sloth they rationalize.)

Before Kant, modern philosophers continued to hold onto "the way the world is" and launched momentous efforts to show how it could be that we know the way it is. Descartes developed a skeptical method that set the tone for much of the philosophy that followed. Hume demonstrated that such skeptical methods ended in skepticism as well. But what was not doubted by any of them was the idea that there is a way that the world is. (There were, of course, important theories which denied the existence of a distinct material world, by Leibniz and Bishop Berkeley, for example, but they nevertheless maintained the idea of "the way the world is" determined by God.) It is Kant who marks the beginning of the end of this old commonsensical idea. His "Copernican revolution" is an anthropocentric shift from the question, "How can we know the way the world is?" to an analy-

sis of the way the world must be according to the forms of human sensibility and the rules of human understanding. It is important that, as the above description leaves explicit, Kant continued to believe that there is "the way" the world is. But his shift in perspective from the way the world is to the structures through which we "constitute" the world as it is already undermines the traditional view.

Kant was a revolutionary, but like most revolutionaries, he was unsure of the new ground he had "liberated," and he preferred to stay safely on the familiar terrain of tradition. Kant's achievement was so great that it was almost incomprehensible. In a technical sense, it marked the destruction of metaphysics and epistemology as they had been practiced for centuries. But more importantly, he succeeded in bringing to its ultimate fruition that anthropocentric urge which had been present in philosophy since Socrates. Not only would humanity receive central attention (as in Socrates and the modern enlightenment), but even the nature of Reality itself was now viewed as dependent upon human faculties of knowledge. And this does not mean (as in Plato and virtually every philosopher since) that these human faculties were suited to discover or recognize reality; they rather "constituted" reality, and were responsible for it. At a single stroke, Kant undermined the skepticism that had been threatening the Cartesian move toward "subjectivity." And he did it, not by denying subjectivity, but by pushing it further. Descartes has insisted on the autonomy of the individual in ascertaining the truth, but "the truth" remained something outside of him/her. Kant rejects the idea of this knowable "outside" something. Truth is a function of human experience.

In undermining the old skepticism, however, Kant opened the way for a new skepticism, which, in the eyes of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment, would be even more absurd. If we supply the structures of the world, might not we supply different structures? Could different individuals or societies "constitute" the world in different ways? What sense could be made of the commonsensical claim that the world exists independently of human experience, the same for us all. By the turn of the century, these questions would have to be taken seriously. But Kant had gone far enough. To prevent this new skepticism, he developed the central argument of his first *Critique*. It was called a "transcendental deduction," and its purpose was to reestablish the common sense view that there could be but one Reality, that it was inconceivable that different individuals, or different societies, could understand this world differently. Its procedure was to lay bare the set of concepts (or "categories") and principles through which we "constitute" and understand our world and then to prove that these were the only concepts through which we could do so. These concepts and principles would be shown to hold *a priori*, universally and necessarily for all knowing creatures. The result, therefore, would be a

single Reality, even if "constituted" by us, with no possible alternatives. Any employment of these categories other than their proper application to the data of experience, Kant argued, resulted in hopeless paradox. The new skeptic was temporarily silenced by Kant's transcendental attempt to prove that the categories through which he viewed his world were the only possible categories.

Questions of knowledge were but one aspect of Kant's philosophical enterprise; he was equally concerned (and personally more so) with the unavoidable questions of traditional metaphysics concerning the nature of human freedom, the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. These could not, by virtue of his own arguments, be subject matter of (human) knowledge. And so Kant supplemented his Transcendental Deduction with a conception of the world as it is "in itself," a concept which, whatever the objections raised by his critics, allowed him to reintroduce his concern with "God, Freedom and Immortality" on the firm ground of Reason. Reason had to be moved to the practical sphere and excluded from "knowledge" as such; but it was Reason just the same, the old privileged contact with "the way the world is," even "in itself."

Although the introduction of this conception of the world "in itself" gave the perennial skeptic a new dichotomy in which to place his epistemological wedge, that was a philosophical price that Kant was willing to accept in order to avoid a consequence he feared far more. The idea that Reality might differ from our knowledge of it — the basis for the old skepticism — frightened him not nearly so much as the idea that men might irresolvably disagree among themselves, not just about abstruse problems in metaphysics but about Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics, belief in God and respect for the Moral Law. By separating knowledge from the world "in itself," Kant thought that at least he could establish the universality and necessity of a single set of epistemic principles of understanding and then could separately defend morality and Christianity with the same sense of confidence. The idea of alternative world views he found manifestly absurd; the idea of a new form of philosophical skepticism was merely troublesome. It was far better to tolerate an abstract skepticism than concrete philosophical anarchy.

In the last decade of that century, however, anarchy was as imminent in philosophy as it was in politics. The old absolutes were disintegrating under the Enlightenment attacks in which Kant was so central. The new heresies found themselves fighting among themselves for the power that soon would be theirs exclusively. And with the fighting, tensions emerged as contradictions, the taken-for-granted appeals to old traditions fell away and "common sense" was no longer common. Kant and Robespierre, with their common confidence in the Absolute (and their common admiration for the iconoclast Rousseau) attempted to hold their respective worlds together against their

own radical undermining. Both were doomed to fail. As Paris gave way to Robespierre's Terror and then Napoleon, the German philosophical world began to appreciate the radical relativism that was implicit in Kant's revolution.

The Triumph of Subjectivity

Kant's brilliant if obscure "Transcendental Deduction" is a turning point within an epistemological tradition that all but defines European philosophy since Descartes. Basic to this tradition is a philosophical method or discipline which I have called "methodological solipsism."⁷ (I borrow the term from Jonathan Bennett.) Methodological solipsism (MS) is what defined Descartes' "method of doubt," and it was adopted, in one form or another, by the British Empiricists, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and nearly all contemporary philosophers who claim to follow "the phenomenological method," which is a tedious version of MS. One might characterize MS quite simply as a first-person philosophical orientation which restricts the kinds of questions one can ask and the type of appeals one can make. In MS, every philosophical problem must be construed as my peculiar problem; the question "What is knowledge?" must, for example, be recast as "What is it for me to know something?" I must determine what is justifiable for me to believe according to evidence which I have and rules of inference which I accept. Needless to say, there can be no appeal to authority, no appeal to other persons or "common sense."

Now it is obvious how easily MS is threatened by skepticism and relativism; beginning from this "subjective" orientation, it is all too likely that we shall not get beyond ourselves, our own evidence and rules, that we might accumulate different evidence, or interpret it differently, or adopt different rules of procedure and inference. MS is the mother of the "egocentric predicament." But solipsism is not the end of MS, only its opening posture. The aim of every MS-ist, from Descartes to Husserl, is to prove the objective validity of these subjective claims. In Descartes, this proof involved a well-known set of dubious appeals to the beneficence of God; in Kant, the proof consists of "transcendental arguments" which demonstrate the necessity and universality of the principles of the understanding; for Hegel, the proof involves a convoluted "dialectic" of subjective concerns until an inter-subjective position emerges; for Husserl, the proof is an appeal to "essences" in experience whose meanings define objects of our experience and guarantee their objectivity at the same time. The mainstream of European philosophy since Descartes, in other words, has been the struggle of MS to guarantee the objective validity of our claims. "The Absolute" was but one pretentious name for success in this enterprise. Relativism, on the other hand, was the booby prize —

the position that resulted from failure to guarantee objective validity for any single position. Accordingly, the Absolute represented the power of philosophy; relativism represented philosophical impotence.

Kant's great anti-skeptical move in the "Deduction" was the rejection of the empiricist model of knowledge as passive-receptive "representation." In its place, Kant supplied the revolutionary notion of *a priori* synthesis, the idea that objects are not simply given in experience but rather constituted or synthesized as a necessary condition for experience by the pure concepts of the understanding. But even as he argued for the active and constitutive role of Understanding and Imagination in perception, he retained the conservative belief that there is but one set of categories and one possible conception of the world. The move from the idea that we supply the categories by which objects are "constituted" to the idea that we might supply other categories repulsed him. Kant spoke ambiguously of these categories as rules and structures of the human understanding. Since they were allegedly both universal and necessary, however, the difference between "rules" and "structures" was not significant. But the idea that these "necessary" principles of understanding were not indeed necessary did not bypass Gottlob Fichte, who took the germinal ideal of Kant's philosophy to be freedom, freedom from determination and freedom to apply the rules (not structures) of the understanding according to our needs.⁸ Fichte eliminated the retrogressive notion of the world "in itself" and restricted his attention to the development of a metaphysics of subjectivity. Questions of knowledge were relegated to secondary importance; he stressed above all that the Kantian "constitution" of the world was a *practical* concern, an activity whose purpose was to provide us with a moral stage upon which to enact our hopefully heroic roles. Fichte gave us a choice of rules. The concept of universal and necessary principles gave way to a distinctive relativism: "the kind of philosophy that a man chooses depends upon the kind of man that he is." The choice Fichte offered us was in fact quite sparse - between the Newtonian and mechanistic categories of the first of Kant's *Critiques* (like most German intellectuals other than Kant, Fichte thought Newton "vulgar") and the moral principles of freedom of the second *Critique*, to which Fichte supplied a spectacularly romantic and heroic interpretation. Fichte retained the notion of "the Absolute," but it no longer referred to the objective validity of our beliefs and principles as such. "The Absolute" was rather the Ego that chose and adopted those beliefs and principles. Subjectivity had now become an end in itself.

This extreme form of subjectivity, which virtually ignored the epistemological efforts of Kant's first *Critique* and left out questions of science and knowledge altogether, did not satisfy the many philosophers who followed in Kant's footsteps.⁹ Friedrich Schelling, a student of Fichte's and Hegel's younger friend, developed a "system of

Transcendental Idealism" in which the problems of science and knowledge were brought back into philosophy on an equal par with the problems of morality and religion. But Schelling, too, rejected Kant's notion of the world "in itself" apart from any possible human experience, and he also rejected the Kantian "Deduction" that proved that there was but a single set of categories of the Understanding. It was Schelling, several years before Hegel, who introduced the idea of a series of different categories, many of them competitive with and mutually exclusive of each other, each with its own "truth" but arranged in a dialectical "system" in which they could be compared and played against each other, reconciled and synthesized. Schelling, too, retained the notion of "the Absolute," but neither he nor Fichte used that term to signal a return to pre-Kantian metaphysics;¹⁰ "the Absolute" referred to the unintelligibility of any attempt to distinguish objective validity from universal subjective constitution. There was no way of distinguishing those aspects of an object which we "found" in it and those concepts through which we "posited" it. Schelling, like Fichte, expressed this important and contemporarily acceptable philosophical principle in a horrendously misleading way so far as modern philosophers are concerned. Both insisted that "the subject is identical with the object" ("The Principle of Identity"). This way of putting things won them few Anglo-American adherents, who still find such statements patent nonsense. But the ideas behind such claims, always to be viewed in the context of the MS program, is that only relativism is absolutely true. This paradoxical conclusion follows quite naturally from the history of the MS program from Descartes to Kant. Once it has been demonstrated that no "Transcendental Deduction" could prove the exclusive validity of any given set of beliefs or principles, the MS program could be saved only by acknowledging the fact that relativism was unavoidable, even desirable, and itself made into an absolute truth. It is subjectivity itself that is absolute.

Hegel's Absolute Relativism

Working a quarter century after the publication of Kant's revolutionary *Critique*, whose ideas were now as established as the slogans of the great political revolution in France, G. W. F. Hegel, without Kant's timidity and with new-found transcendental *Arroganz*, pursued to the limits Kant's ideas of *a priori* synthesis and his rejection of the idea that objects are simply given in experience. From Fichte, he borrowed the now transformed notion of "the Absolute", the rejection of the world "in itself" and the idea of alternative categories, which he called "forms of consciousness." (This allowed him to include epistemic categories and "conceptual frameworks" as well as practical principles and "lifestyles" without making the sharp Kantian contrast between

them.) From Schelling, he borrowed (Schelling would later say, "stole") the idea of a dialectic of forms of consciousness, arranged in order of increased acceptability according to principles which were "internal" to those forms themselves. According to Hegel, every "form of consciousness" had its truth; but some forms were more adequate, more complete (more "true" if you like) than others. Here was the ideal compromise between Kant's dogmatic "Deduction" and Fichte's free-wheeling "ethical idealism"; there are various forms of consciousness, all of which can be accepted and lived without further progression of the dialectic. But this is not to say that there is nothing more to be said about them. "It is all relative"; yes. But relative to standards within the various forms themselves which can also be used to evaluate them.

As in any discussion of Hegel's philosophy, it is necessary for us to remind ourselves that his notion of "the Absolute" is a multi-purpose conception. In addition to its epistemological-metaphysical significance, it is also a quasi-religious conception, used with the traditional connotations of "God as Absolute" but in the very modern and heretical sense of "God as Spirit," immanent in humanity and defensible only in terms of the Kantian Enlightenment criteria for a "natural" or "rational" religion. Moreover, "the Absolute" served an extremely important ideological purpose, the defense of political internationalism that was still a romantic dream for the underdeveloped and disunited German states and principalities in the wake of Napoleon's victories. Hegel's personal concerns, at least at the writing of his *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*¹¹ were far more aimed at overcoming problems of German provincialism and traditional Christianity than in resolving certain post-Kantian problems in metaphysics and epistemology. But of the several birds Hegel beamed with the same philosophical stone, we are here abstracting but a single one. In this sense, "the Absolute" can be narrowly viewed as a position concerning alternative "forms of consciousness"; that position is that human experience is always relative to a form of consciousness, that forms of consciousness vary considerably and may in fact be competitive and mutually exclusive, but that it does not follow that there are no ways of comparing, contrasting, reconciling and synthesizing ("aufheben") them. Moreover, any form which is not an actual form of our experience (not just an abstract possibility) has no reason to be considered.

The key to Hegel's "Absolute," following Schelling, is the "identity of the subject and the object." But once again, the meaning of this can be made out quite clearly and sensibly as the claim that there is no ultimate distinction that can be made out between those seemingly universal features of our experience that are "given" to us and those that we impose upon our experience through our forms of consciousness. This is not to say, of course, that we can never make out this distinction; on the contrary, we often do, not only in details but with

regard to the forms of consciousness themselves. From our disagreements with other people (or other civilizations) we can — unless we are very stubborn — recognize at least some of the differences between “the facts” upon which we agree and the forms or interpretations about which we disagree. And from the very possibility of recognizing an alternative form of consciousness (for example, recognizing a society which adopts an animistic rather than a mechanistic view of physics), we can see the differences in alternatively imposed forms of consciousness and reflect upon the fact that various claims are in turn relative to a form of consciousness rather than simply being “known” through experience. But where there is a universal agreement, there may be no way of knowing whether that agreement is indeed “necessary” in the sense that Kant defends — or whether it is simply agreement.

As for the question of “conceivable alternatives” (a Kantian question) that may point only to our own lack of imagination, nothing more. (Hegel was sufficiently humble on this point, in return for which he has been incessantly abused for thinking that he had “ended history.”) In Hegel’s “Absolute” there need be no transcendental pretense, no need to ever assume that we have reached a source of genuine necessity rather than general agreement upon a “necessity” relative to all of the particular forms of consciousness with which we are acquainted. It is this abstinence that constitutes Hegel’s “Absolute” — the recognition of alternative forms of consciousness coupled with the humility (not evident in his terminology) that we can never know whether we have in fact found “necessary” structures of the human mind. In fact, the upshot of Hegel’s thesis is that, because these questions are beyond the hope of meaningful confirmation, they are ultimately meaningless as well. (Contrary to his usual image as a wild-eyed “speculative metaphysician” who ignored all that Kant had argued regarding the possibility of trans-experiential knowledge, Hegel is a more thorough-going positivist, at least in this one sense, than Kant himself.)

The concepts of “objectivity” and “subjectivity” (“object” and “subject”) that are at stake here are essential. In the older metaphysical tradition, the former signified “inherent in the object” and independent of consciousness; the latter referred to “in consciousness.” With Kant, however, the traditional distinction became meaningless, and the purpose of the Transcendental Deduction was rather to prove that objective principles (maxims, beliefs) were objective (Laws) in the sense that what was personally held was in fact necessary for anyone to hold. But in Hegel (as in Fichte and Schelling), this strong notion of “necessity” drops out as well, for “the Absolute” assured us that there is no ultimate necessity, but only, at best, all-encompassing agreement. And so it is this notion of “agreement” that becomes the criterion for objectivity; a claim is objective (or objec-

tively valid) in so far as it has proven to be intersubjective. Of course, there are restraints that must be placed upon this interpretation. It is not enough, for example, that a small and closed group should believe a given claim to make it "objective." "Common sense" is not objectively valid just because it is common. We should have to add that the criteria for mutual acceptance must be impersonal, available to anyone and everyone with no *a priori* privileged authorities. The group which defines "intersubjectivity" thereby becomes indefinitely extended. In other words, a claim is objective when it is acceptable to any number of people who consider it impersonally, relative to a given form of consciousness. Otherwise, it is merely subjective, a claim which has only personal support. But this interpretation still faces a problem — the old nemesis of relativism — the possibility that two different forms of consciousness, each with its impersonal criteria and its open-ended group of supporters, are competitive and mutually exclusive. This would mean that, within two alternative forms of consciousness, one and "the same"¹² claim would be objectively valid (and therefore "true") in one and not in the other.

For example, a Newtonian would account for a given phenomenon in terms of causality and attraction, while a Leibnizian would explain "the same" phenomenon in terms which made no reference whatever to causality and attraction. More concretely, I may say of my desk that "it is solid oak," while my physicist friend assures me that it consists of tiny "particles" of negligible weight spinning in mostly empty space. Both of our views are "objectively valid" ("true") even though it is not possible for an object to be both solid and mostly empty space at one and the same time and in the same sense. The tentative reply is that these forms of cognitive consciousness, though mutually exclusive on their face, are reconcilable in reflection, through the application of certain "bridge principles" connecting them and through the (reflective) understanding that they are in fact two forms of consciousness which do not, despite appearances, make incompatible claims. The lesson to be learned from this familiar example is that the notion of competitive forms of consciousness, which make ostensibly contradictory claims, each of which is objectively valid, need not frighten us. We only require the confidence that eventually, through reflection, we shall be able to put each in its place and reconcile them. Thus the force of Hegel's "Absolute." It includes no guarantee that such reconciliations will in fact always be available, much less a commitment to the Kantian pretense that some ultimate reconciliation is necessary by the very nature of human consciousness. We can easily find contemporary examples of such disagreements, particularly at the fringes of science (e.g. in quantum theory and much of psychology), in which two very different forms of consciousness (ways of looking at the world, ways of looking at people) seem for the moment to be

utterly opposed and without promise of compromise. All we can do is hope and work for their reconciliation. (It is at this point that the indolence of vulgar relativism becomes most apparent: "Oh well, they're just different ways of looking at things.")

The preceding discussion should make easily accessible the often muddled notion of "dialectic" that is so important to Hegel's philosophy. The "dialectic" is a means of reflection, of comparison and contrast, a technique which allows us always to examine two (or more¹³) competing forms of consciousness from a third (or fourth, fifth, etc.) and see what they have in common and where they are askew, apparently making competitive claims which can ultimately be reconciled. And, of course, "dialectic" is always an attempt to appreciate real disagreement as well. (It can be argued - as it was by Marx - that Hegel placed too much emphasis on reconciliation without always appreciating the intractable force of the opposition.) From within a single form of consciousness, another form may well seem irreconcilably opposed. For example, one religion may differ from another only in a minor appeal to authority, a mythological variation, or in the importance of a particular role or ritual. The unreflecting proponents of those religions will see themselves in eternal battle, and the history of religion (and politics) teaches all too well that such self-enclosed forms of consciousness will often prefer mutual destruction to compromise. From our¹⁴ point of view, however, the differences may be obviously beside the point, given the purpose and the nature of religion. But this conception of "the purpose and the nature of religion" is only possible from our expanded point of view, not within theirs. Each of the antagonists will necessarily believe — according to one criterion — that his or her religion is the "true" one; we can say, however, that each one "has its truth," but that neither is "true" as such. (It was this relativist view of religion, in particular, that motivated Hegel, following Lessing, to develop his sense of "dialectic.")

The purpose of the dialectic is to force ourselves into a position in which we will see both the strong points and the weak points and fallacies of a given form of consciousness (in its own terms, always!) and, in doing so, come to see and appreciate alternative forms of consciousness that are ostensibly opposed. "Dialectic," simply stated, is the demand that we continuously attempt to force ourselves beyond our "form of consciousness," in order to appreciate its limitations and to thereby adopt a broader view. Hegel sometimes suggests that this drive for breadth is inherent in the human spirit, if not in every individual, something like a "Will to Truth" or a Spinozan "Conatus." More often, however, he indicates that it is the inadequacy of a form of consciousness itself that drives us onward. It is the essence of "modern civilization" (and it certainly so seemed in 1806) to change and confront what is "foreign" to it, rendering old ways of thinking

obsolete and showing established viewpoints to be narrow-minded. This is, on the one hand, the intellectual imperialism of the transcendental pretense; but it is also opening oneself up to the constant possibility of refutation and ways of seeing that may even be superior to our own.¹⁵ What characterized modern civilization, perhaps is just this tendency to seek out just such means of self-refutation.¹⁶ Thus it is the antidote to the transcendental pretense as well.

Hegel's "Absolute" is best viewed not as a position but as a hope, a heuristic principle that urges us to seek agreement where none seems possible, even at the cost of our old habits and concepts. Terminology aside, "the Absolute" is a lesson in humility, teaching us that our views of the world are never ultimate and that we can never escape our own relatively limited perspective. Hegel's "Absolute" is the final explosion of absolutism and the transcendental pretense, the ultimate rejection of the idea that it even makes sense to speak of a world "in itself" or a uniquely "true" form of experience. Thus J. N. Findlay calls Hegel's philosophy a "relative Absolutism,"¹⁷ relative to his own admittedly fragile place in an extremely uncertain historical epoch. But Hegel's "Absolute" is not just relative; rather his "Absolute" is itself relativism, or "Absolute relativism." The climax of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, so conceived, is the ultimate in philosophical therapy, *a la* Nietzsche or Wittgenstein, the reduction to absurdity of the whole history of the transcendental pretense, and ironically, in its own terms.

A nagging objection remains. If this interpretation is even plausible, why in the world did Hegel use "Absolute" language? Why was he so adamant about "science" and "truth," "absolute truth" at that, if he, in effect, was attacking those very conceptions as they had been traditionally understood? Of course, he had a career, a tradition and the critics to contend with. And he had other reasons for making universalist moves — the political motivation behind his generalizing from individual self into universal Spirit and the quasi-religious motivation for identifying the Absolute with Spirit with God. "Absolute"-type terms and ideas were dominant at the time, from Kant, Fichte and Schelling, and Hegel's original intention (pretension) in writing the *Phänomenologie* was clearly to "demonstrate"— more adequately than his illustrious predecessors— the necessity of the Absolute. And yet, Hegel also credited Kant— in particular his arguments against the "Paralogisms of Rational Psychology"— with ending the dogmatic reign of any ontological conception of the soul/self as substance, and he agreed wholeheartedly with Fichte and Schelling that any ontological notion of the world as "in itself" was equally unsatisfactory. The *Phänomenologie* began as a demonstration of the Absolute but ended up the most forceful early statement of the possibility of— and the only partial commensurability of alternative conceptual frameworks, and though the dialectic promised a mode of conflict resolution

between them, it was always clear that some conflict would remain. But having shown this, Hegel promptly denied it. By the time he sat down to write his encore to the *Phänomenologie*, the *Science of Logic* and then the so-called "system," Hegel still felt the binding force of the philosopher's need for an Archimedean point from which to defend his position, and having so thoroughly declared the relativity of all forms of consciousness, he transcendentalized his relativism to adopt a metaversion of the same transcendental pretense.¹⁸

Hegel's Hope and Hegel's Heritage

Soon after Hegel, the "Absolute" was just a word, often used in derision; Relativism was on the horizon, with its very real differences between alternative "forms of consciousness," ways of thinking, styles of life. But Hegel's hope for ultimate agreement was not enough. He had suggested, though none too clearly, that our disagreements were, in some ultimate sense, far less important (though not thereby "unreal") than our unity in the one all-embracing concept of "Spirit." But this ultimate sense could hardly satisfy those who were disturbed by the turbulent differences of opinion that defined the mid-Nineteenth Century. Ultimate or not, those disagreements demanded immediate attention, analysis, and resolution.

As in Fichte, epistemological and metaphysical relativism play a relatively small role in Hegel's overall philosophy. Both philosophers had pointed to the practical determinants of various "ways of knowing" and so much of their analysis is concerned with the pragmatic conditions relative to which a form of consciousness existed. These "pragmatic" conditions varied from the psychological to the social to the "philosophical" (in the sense in which philosophy is a practical rationalization of a life style or course of action). Given his overall concern for basic concepts, Hegel inevitably stressed the role of ideas in his analysis of these conditions. His reward for this emphasis has been a century and a half of misunderstanding, first popularized by Kierkegaard and Marx, but still current today, according to which Hegel simply ignored such conditions and treated "ideas" as if they had an ethereal life of their own.

It was the conditions relative to which a form of consciousness existed that formed the basis of subsequent attempts to resolve the conflicts which currently made relativism a real fact of human existence as well as a powerful philosophical theory. It is important to note that epistemological and metaphysical relativism were rarely if ever argued in isolation from pragmatic and sociological theses. (One of the striking features of more current debates, particularly in America, is the almost total neglect of extra-cognitive determinants. When the importance of these is acknowledged, it is usually only with a passing reference, rarely with an analysis. In Nineteenth and Twen-

tieth Century European philosophy, on the other hand, such features usually receive dominant attention.) Cognitive relativism, accordingly, could be demonstrated to be a function of these other conditions, and the conflicts to be resolved, therefore, might be settled by appeal to these conditions, or by changing these conditions, but at least by first recognizing them. But notice that these conditions, so described, seem to be a new candidate for "the Absolute." For Kierkegaard, psychological considerations became the new fulcrum of philosophy; for Karl Marx, economic conditions became the new Archimedian point.

Among the prominent post-Hegelians, Soren Kierkegaard deserves primary attention, not so much because of his avowedly violent anti-Hegelianism, but precisely because of his enormous debts to Hegel. His concept of the "spheres of existence" is roughly equivalent to Hegel's "forms of consciousness," supposedly eschewed of all cognitive commitment. ("I always say, 'All honor to the sciences, but...'"¹⁹) Superficially, Kierkegaard's differences with Hegel are widely known. Where Hegel stressed "Spirit" and intersubjectivity, Kierkegaard stresses "the individual." In fact, it would not be far-fetched to say that "the individual" becomes Kierkegaard's Absolute, except that, in the most obvious sense, this is just playing with words. The whole question of absolutism-relativism concerns precisely the possibility of a "truth" that is not necessarily true for everyone. To speak of the individual as "absolute," therefore, is to avoid the question altogether, and probably to descend into vulgar relativism as well. Kierkegaard's notoriously polemical concept of "subjective truth" has just these effects. But for Kierkegaard as for Hegel, "objective truth" means "true for everyone," and the difference between them thus concerns only "styles of life," not "truth" as such (that is, "objective truth"). But even here, the differences are not what they seem. Kierkegaard's three "spheres" (aesthetic, ethical and religious) are easily translated into more complicated forms on the Hegelian dialectic: Kierkegaard loudly protests the Hegelian argument in favor of some of these forms over others, and he offers up his own "existential dialectic" in its place, in which no life style is logically preferable over any other.²⁰ But the key here is "logically," for in fact, Kierkegaard introduces his own arguments, to the same end as Hegel, for the ultimate superiority of the religious or spiritual life. But instead of providing a "logical" argument, Kierkegaard supplies a psychological argument, one whose acceptance depends upon certain psychological preconditions in the individual. Kierkegaard further assumes that people are basically the same (although he also insists that most people have only "so-called existence"²¹) and thus assumes that his psychological arguments should, if paid heed to, work on everyone. (Most people, he complains, simply won't heed.) Thus the idea that the individual is absolute takes on a far more significant meaning, and one far closer to Hegel. Hegel may have given far less attention to the

universal psychological conditions he presupposed (for example, the need to comprehend, the need for coherence and "harmony," the need for identity) but they are always there. Kierkegaard may give far more attention to the workings of these motives in "the individual," but this does not in the least imply that these motives are not also universal, and that the psychological arguments he provides (by way of "seduction") might not serve absolutist ends as well. Finally, when we turn to the development of these themes, particularly in Kierkegaard's later writing, the undisguised authoritarianism of his defense of Christianity offers substantial evidence for the claim that, despite his strong disclaimers in the name of individuality and freedom, he is even more of an absolutist than Hegel. Hegel's absolutism, at least, is an ultimately pluralist relativism with the hope of some ultimate agreement; Kierkegaard, on the other hand, advances a very specific Absolute, Christianity, and though one must "choose" it he leaves no doubt but that one ought (psychologically) to do just that. Where Hegel left this psychology in very general terms — though still debatable — Kierkegaard ties it down to a very specific set of authoritarian needs suppliable only by Christianity.

Karl Marx identified the conditions relative to which a form of consciousness existed as the economic conditions governing material production and labor. Following Hegel with an economist's eye, Marx added to Hegel's dialectic of forms the "presuppositions" of human survival - economics.²² Compared with each other, the various forms of the dialectic might seem "relative"; but relative to what? This called for a scientific explanation, viewing the "forms of consciousness" as the products of the material conditions in which people live. Changes ("progress") in the dialectic were not a matter merely of inadequacies and contradictions in the forms themselves, but rather a matter of rationalizing changing economic circumstances and interests. But then the contradictions could be resolved as well by changing these economic conditions, in particular, by eliminating the economic class of differences which required the conflicting rationalization captured in Hegel's dialectic.

Epistemologically, Marx's concept of "science" had clearly absolutist pretensions; and economics, in effect, became the new absolute. Like Hegel, Marx required a "scientific" standpoint from which to judge the various alternatives, and his relativism did not extend to his own viewpoint. But it is important that economics, as well as the scientific method, formed the absolute basis of his theories; all the rest was mere "super-structure." This is the emphasis of virtually all of the relativistic philosophers of the Nineteenth Century: epistemological and metaphysical relativism is often accepted only as the corollary to a psychological, sociological or cultural thesis, which itself may not be relativistic at all. Kierkegaard may be a relativist with regard to marriage, but he is an absolutist when it comes to religion. Marx may

be a relativist with regard to Hegel's forms, but he is an absolutist when it comes to human dignity and the right to the fruits of one's labor. Thus the questions of cognitive relativism dovetail into more general questions about the "sociology of knowledge" and "cultural relativism" as well as the supposed universality of "human nature." If epistemological and metaphysical beliefs have these other questions as their implicit foundation (rather than the other way around, as in the past many centuries of Western thinking), then relativism must be examined on a far broader stage (anticipated by Fichte and Hegel), and the questions are no longer the domain of philosophy alone.

The Limits of Objectivity: Nietzsche and Dilthey

Friedrich Nietzsche is not usually seen in the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel²³ mainly because he has been so long and so narrowly depicted as merely a moralist and an "antichrist." It is true that he was driven by his antagonism to both moral and religious absolutism but included in this antagonism was the rejection of absolutism in all forms. Needless to say, the idea that relativism might damage the status of religion did not disturb Nietzsche in the slightest. His "perspectivism," so called, entailed that every form of knowledge, belief and value is to be considered but one among many viewpoints, including Christianity and what we typically call "Morality." Perspectivism, accordingly, would be defended as a position of integrity; all forms of absolutism would be a sign of cowardice, dogmatism, an intellectual as well as a cultural disease.

The traditional technique of philosophers and moralists had been to build a set of moral principles upon a relatively secure view of reality. Once we know about the world and about ourselves, they would say, we can figure out what we ought to do. ("Before deciding what is wrong and what is right/first we must find out what we are." Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*). This tradition had been seriously challenged by Fichte and Hegel. Nietzsche completely reverses the process: all metaphysical and philosophical views, he tells us, are rationalizations of moral prejudices.²⁴ This is true not only of the content of a metaphysical or philosophical theory, but of its form as well. In particular, the absolutist ("universal" or "a priori") form of such a view is itself the symptom of a fatal weakness, the fear of being wrong. It is the mark of the insecure attitude which can accept nothing without making certain that everyone else must accept it as well.

Nietzsche's tendency (not uncommon in German philosophy) to look at himself as an isolated innovator and iconoclast should not blind us to the fact that the themes he pursues had already been set up for him by his turn-of-the-century predecessors. Even his attack on Christianity and morality, in which Kant so often serves as the butt of his sarcasm, is made possible by Kant's "revolution." Nietzsche's epis-

temological nihilism, as it is often called, is the unyielding pursuit of those basic themes in modern philosophy since Descartes: the almost fanatical stress on autonomy and methodological solipsism, the refusal to rest with common sense and the demand that we take skepticism seriously; continuing refusal to retreat to the "other-worldly," whether Christian Heaven or Platonic "forms"; Cartesian confidence in God or the slim conception of the "world-in-itself" that remains in Kant's first *Critique*. Following Fichte and Hegel (but without giving them credit), Nietzsche incisively lambastes and lampoons (the arguments are too thin to allow us to say "refutes") the idea of "the real world"; "the apparent world is the only one, the 'real world' is merely added to a lie."²⁵ Anticipating the radical pragmatic theses of Quine, Nietzsche argued against his contemporaries (as Quine later argues against Carnap); "against positivism, which halts at phenomena — 'there are only facts' — I would say, No, Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations."²⁶ And with this emphasis upon interpretation — personal interpretation, we must add — the concepts of "the truth," "the Absolute Truth," "the Absolute," vanish before us; "what is needed is that something must be held to be true, not that something is true."²⁷ The thesis itself comes directly from Kant through Fichte and Hegel; there can be no unconceptualized experiences; every conceptualization is already the imposition of an interpretation. On Nietzsche's radical individualization of this thesis, it follows that every individual has his own "truths" — his own interpretations. "There is no truth."²⁸ No world view is any more "true" than any other; comparisons are to be made from the point of view of mental health rather than epistemology and metaphysics. In Wittgensteinian terms, truth becomes the function of a form of life.

In defense of his pragmatic relativism, Nietzsche takes a step overboard, as he often does, and moves from the thesis that "there is no truth," no world-in-itself and no "Absolute" knowledge which we must all share, to the outlandishly paradoxical thesis that "truth is error."²⁹ In response to Kant's "transcendental" pretensions, Nietzsche suggests that there are merely certain schemes of interpretation which "we cannot throw off"; but this shows only a limitation on our part, not a conceptual boundary. "What are mankind's truths? They are the irrefutable errors of mankind."³⁰ "Truth is that sort of error without which a particular class of living creatures could not live."³¹ But there is no need for him to confuse matters by couching this Darwinian theory of knowledge in traditional metaphysical language; it is here that Nietzsche betrays his own residual absolutism, as if there were still some standard according to which our conveniences could still be "false."

According to Nietzsche, "necessary truths" seem necessary only because, by virtue of the contingencies of evolution, we all happen to believe them and, perhaps, such beliefs themselves have been instru-

mental in our survival. But there is nothing more to be said. There need be no more searching for and idealization of "the Truth." The point is to live, to believe only what will "enhance life" and not to believe what "degrades life", no matter how metaphysically appealing. And so he turns to Morality and Christianity, diagnosing them as a physician would a disease of the body, as symptoms of weakness and lack of integrity and courage. He rejects the Kantian question, "How are a priori (necessary) truths possible?" and asks instead, "Why should we think such truths are necessary in the first place?"

In opposition to traditional metaphysics and epistemology, Nietzsche insists upon the necessity of keeping alive a number of "perspectives" or viewpoints; against the "Will to Truth", Nietzsche urges a bold experimentalism, "to look now out of this window, now out of that", guarding against "settling down with any dogma."³² There is no "true" viewpoint, only that which prevails. Nietzsche's philosophy, as everyone knows, ultimately turns to a "Will to Power." But without pursuing this much abused notion, we can appreciate its relativistic import; if there is no truth, and no "true" practical imperatives either, then conceptual frameworks must be viewed in open competition, not for truth but for pragmatic value and acceptance. In philosophy as in football (according to a local Texas sage) "winning is everything."³³ But even this is not an absolute for Nietzsche: he ominously warns (in Zarathustra and elsewhere) that the "higher men" do not always win, and probably will not in the struggle ahead.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) never acquired the reputation of "arch-destroyer" that has always haunted Nietzsche. His style was staid and academic, respectively obscure and unambitious. (Nothing like Nietzsche's "I am dynamite!" or "My Zarathustra is more important than Christ.") As an academic, Dilthey's Kantian-Hegelian influences are obvious; he called one of his works a "Critique of Historical Reason"; and it is worth noting that, for twenty years (1882-1901), he held Hegel's chair in philosophy in Berlin. His "epistemological standpoint" was explicitly borrowed from Kant, and his emphasis upon "Spirit" (or "Geist") and its various historical manifestations in different world-views (or weltanschauungen - a term he made famous but did not originate) is taken more or less directly from Hegel. Dilthey established, but did not invent, that philosophical doctrine known as "historicism". It is, we may anticipate, Nietzsche's "perspectivism" carried across the dimension of Time.³⁴

From Kant, Dilthey inherited the once "revolutionary" view that all human experience was constituted by the active imposition of categories (for Dilthey, categories of life, not just understanding). But he rejected the transcendental pretention that sought to find the structures of the human mind, the goals of human activity and the basic forms of human knowledge. From Hegel (about whom he once wrote

a massive study). Dilthey adopted the model of process and movement as the answer to the static Absolutism of the still lively neo-Kantian transcendentalism that flourished in Germany (see the following section, for example). From Hegel too came the great variety of forms of consciousness, scattered across the globe and, more importantly, across history, and the intrinsically human desire (which inspired Kant as well as Hegel) to formulate some total comprehension of this vast human panorama. But, in Dilthey's historicism, such comprehension was only the ideal, never a real possibility. He denied from the outset the idea that there might be any absolute source of human knowledge, any absolute or absolutely valid metaphysics or religion, any exclusive starting point for any kind of inquiry or activity, and "foundations" of knowledge of guaranteed principles of practical reason. Nor are there even any abstract terms which might be used for cross categorization and understanding; as Hegel had indicated, though often confusedly in his "dialectic", concepts are contextbound and have meanings only within the specific historical-conceptual context within which we are situated. And in terms of our philosophy, these theses have radical consequences. It means that the most we can do, with regard to any historical epoch or society, is to make the attempt to enter into their points of view, to adopt the totality of their outlook, for it is never enough to single out isolated and possibly only superficial or nominal differences between them and ourselves. (It is worth insisting that the concept of "Verstehen", literally "understanding" but usually translated as "empathy", is not simply "putting oneself in the other's place" in the usual, emotional sense. Dilthey was, even more than Hegel, interested in history as a science.³⁵ But this means for him that we must always recognize the limitations of our own conceptions, our own age and prejudices, which we can never overcome. Here again is the relativist's untranslatability thesis -that we can never really know whether we have understood another society or conceptual framework or not. This isn't to say that we can't understand or approximate, but always with a humble sense of limitations. Consequently, we can never claim confidence in any general laws of human nature which maintain themselves as Absolute.

Relativism is the key to Dilthey's philosophy. He saw himself reviving German idealism in the face of overwhelming positivism and emphasis upon the physical sciences (and human sciences subjected to inappropriately physicalistic paradigms.) In this he acted in concert with Nietzsche, his non-academic contemporary, emphasizing a "Philosophy of Life" and holistic humanism against the threats of "Absolutism" emanating from both aggressive science and defensive religion. Dilthey's relativism - or rather historicism - is not as pronounced as Nietzsche's, partly because Dilthey, unlike Nietzsche, strove explicitly and continuously for an "all embracing philosophy",

an enterprise Nietzsche considered intellectually suspect and which presents the superficial appearance (but only the superficial appearance) of Absolutism rather than relativism. He attacks Hegel's nominal Absolutism, insisting instead that there are no upper limits to human development, no Absolute but only, to use Nietzsche's phrase that fits so well, continuous "self-overcoming" (mainly through philosophy). (Hegel would agree.)

In fact, Nietzsche also had an acute sense of history. (It was virtually impossible for a Nineteenth Century German philosopher not to.) But surely the stress on history is far stronger in Dilthey than in Nietzsche. More importantly, however, the two are divided by the extreme individualism that Nietzsche imposed upon his relativism. He was very much more than a merely methodological solipsist, while Dilthey followed Hegel closely in his insistence that the "categories of life" were mutually formulated in the context of society. Nietzsche's views of "society", of course, were mostly damning; "the herd" he called it. He even went so far as to condemn language and consciousness as embodiments of everything that was common between us, thus damaging to what made each of us unique. And ultimately, because of this attack, Nietzsche's own ideals of "self-overcoming" and his "ubermensch" became, in Dilthey's words, a mere "abstract scheme of man, his abstract empty ideal."³⁶

Nietzsche stands as a warning of where the brooding individual mind leads, which tries to grasp the essence of life within its own self. He denounced history, perhaps in disgust at its unlimited critical detail, without which it is not truly a science. He believed that he had to disregard everything that this history and the community had done to him; he peeled off skins one after another. The core, the problem of what constitutes man, he thought he could then seize in an ever new anguish of brooding about himself...³⁷

Perhaps the criticism is not wholly warranted; but it points out the extent of Dilthey's relativism — which was so radical that he could accuse even Nietzsche of falling back to an "Absolute" concept of man (which he sought to find in himself). Dilthey, as emphatically as any philosopher of his time, attacked "the Absolute" and all forms of the "transcendental pretense" without a pause. His categories of life were empirical generalizations drawn from his particular set of perspectives; there was nothing "necessary" or "*a priori*" about them. And when such generalizations were "objectified" (universalized) as they almost always were, that made them no less relative. Against the empiricists and positivists of his day, he (like Nietzsche) attacked any conception of "the facts" — even including the conception of "sense data" and the like, which might provide some basis for a new claim to

Absolute knowledge, however minimal. All knowledge, he insists, is strictly subjective, subject, that is, to limitations of our perspective and our sense of history. The ideal, accordingly, is to expand our horizons (another term made famous by Dilthey, which will play an important part in the phenomenology of his most eminent critic, Edmund Husserl). Philosophy is the continuous and endless striving to broaden our scope, to "put ourselves in the place of" as many different peoples and epochs as we can, and to develop as comprehensive an interpretation of history as we can at any particular time. Here is Hegel's nominal "Absolute," indefinitely open-ended. And here is Nietzsche's "self-overcoming," not in the form of an individual "Übermensch" but in terms of a historical project in which we must all take our part. For Dilthey, as for Nietzsche, the death of the Absolute was a cause for cheerfulness and celebration. In place of indisputable deals, we now had seemingly unlimited possibilities. Here is the relativist's best answer to the cynicism of the disappointed Absolutist. And here was Dilthey's answer to the "crisis in Science and European Civilization" which was to give metaphysics and epistemology at the turn of this Century such a desperate pragmatic aura.

The Transcendental Reaction³⁸

Husserl is usually treated as one of the first great philosophers of the twentieth century; I think he is far better understood as one of the last hold-outs of the 19th. It is against the background of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche and Dilthey, that we can best understand Edmund Husserl's much-celebrated "phenomenology." His "phenomenological method", an up-dated version of methodological solipsism, was derived in essence from Descartes (one of the few historical debts acknowledged by Husserl) and constituted nothing other than a continuation of the main epistemological methodology of no less than a half-dozen generations of German philosophers. His rejection of the cultural and pragmatic determinants of knowledge was something of a regression. His feted "return to subjectivity" was virtually the oldest "return" in modern European philosophy. What characterized Husserl's self-proclaimed "revolution" was, as he admitted himself,³⁹ a conservative reaction, an attempt to stop the almost completed drift of European philosophy toward relativism. The loss of absolutes he considered a genuine "crisis," not only in the sciences but in "European civilization" as well. (This notion of "the Crisis of European Man" was in fact taken from Dilthey, Husserl's nemesis.) His "phenomenology" was a program to restore to philosophy its scientific status — that is, Absolute status, and to return European thought to the road of Rationality, that is, the True Road. It was a return to the "Absolute" Cartesian starting point, — the "self-evident" of one's own self-consciousness. This program was presented in an ill-

organized and continuously propaedeutic re-focussing on the notion of a philosophical "science" and the need for rigor and a return to subjectivity. But the aim of Husserl's philosophy, from his early *Logical Investigations* to his last works, was to go beyond the subjectively variable "facts" of experience and the relativity of theories and customs to essences or ideas, which are, as he tells us in one of his first programmatic essays, "absolutely given in immediate intuition." Phenomenology is an appeal to the evidence, not the factual evidence of experience but the apodictic evidence of necessity. The phenomenological program is a reaction to historicism, perspectivism, and relativism. Much of Husserl's perpetual restarting and his confusing obscurity can be traced to the desperate and hopeless reactionism of his program — once it is clearly recognized as such.

Husserl entered philosophy as a mathematician, interested in the foundations of arithmetic and the concept of "necessary truth." This is the turning point in all debates about Absolutism-relativism. (Are "necessary truths" necessarily true? Or are they only believed to be such by a certain sort of creature, as Nietzsche argued?) His first major work was a defense of a psychologistic thesis, following the British philosopher John Stuart Mill and his teacher Karl Stumpf, in which he argued that the necessary truths and concepts of mathematics were merely psychological associations.⁴¹ It is evident that this is precisely the thesis that lies behind the most extreme relativism, for once necessary truths are "merely" psychological, it follows that they might well (and probably will) vary from creature to creature, if not even from society to society. After a short but decisive dispute with the master logician, Gottlob Frege,⁴² Husserl abandoned this position, and spent the rest of his life trying to refute it. Relativism, in his opinion, was an "absurd" doctrine; psychologism, as its basis, must be equally "absurd." The business of philosophy, he insisted early on, was to find "decisive cognitions," "absolute principles," apodictic evidence and invariable "essences." Any philosopher that emerged embracing relativism must be viewed as its own refutation; after all, his familiar argument concludes, doesn't it thereby insist that it too is only relative, not really true at all? In 1900-1901, Husserl published his first and, by sympathetic accounts, his definitive refutation of psychologism. The first volume of his *Logical Investigations* included an exhaustive attack upon the psychologistic doctrines he had once briefly defended. In the foreword to that work, he confesses to his being disturbed "more and more by the fundamental doubt, — how the objectivity of mathematics, and of all science in general, is consistent with logic having a psychological basis."⁴³ Although agreeing with Frege that psychology could not provide the "foundations" of mathematics or necessary truth ("science") in general, Husserl also rejected Frege's suggestion that such matters were normative conventions. For Husserl, the laws of mathematics and "science" had to be necessarily true,

ideal principles which could be known with absolute certainty. Any other view, in Husserl's opinion, resulted in the absurd conclusions of skepticism.

It is important to appreciate the central role that the alleged "absurdity" of skepticism played in Husserl's philosophy: it was the conclusion of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument which defined his entire career. If seemingly necessary truths, e.g. the basic postulates of arithmetic, were in fact only psychological (and therefore empirical) generalizations, then they cannot be known with certainty (for no empirical generalization can be known with "certainty" in this very strong sense); it cannot be assumed that the same necessary truths are in fact true for creatures or persons with a different psychological make-up, and indeed these "necessary truths" might not be truths at all.⁴⁴ On the psychologistic account, there need be nothing other than the relevant psychological disposition, nothing to which it corresponds and thus nothing to make it true. Using a tacit "correspondence theory of truth"⁴⁵ as his guide, Husserl sought entities other than empirically ascertainable facts (e.g. the facts of psychology) to which these necessary truths would correspond, and thus be true (necessarily). Those peculiar entities were essences or ideas; they were sharply distinguished from "facts"⁴⁶ and known (or "grasped") by an entirely different form of "intuition." These were those peculiar "third realm" entities that Frege had described as meanings (*Sinne*), to be sharply distinguished from both psychological states (or "acts" and from the objects in the world to which they (usually) referred. Borrowing from Frege the crucial distinctions between meaning and reference, content and object, Husserl fashioned a formidable phenomenological world⁴⁷ of strange eternal entities. He was not the first philosopher of his time to do so⁴⁸ but his ambitions far exceeded the others'. Using these meanings, essences and "evidence" as his constant source of appeal, he revived the old absolutist claim; there was such a thing as The Truth; relativism was false. No matter how varied our perceptions of empirical matters, regarding essences our intuitions were certain.

Then, of course, comes the obvious objection, the thorn in the side of all absolutists: "what if we disagree about our essential intuitions?" Even apart from the more sophisticated objections to Husserl's theory, for example, objections to the tacit correspondence theory of truth, objections to the peculiar status of "essences" and objections to the strong claims of necessity that he invokes, this is a telling criticism, and one which neither Husserl nor any of his followers ever succeeded in refuting. To the contrary, Husserl's own later work shows that he openly surrendered to this simple objection, for he explicitly moves away from individual intuition (and correspondence theory as well), and towards "intersubjectivity," that is, mutual agreement as the criterion (rather than the result) of objectivity.

Because Husserl virtually equated relativism and skepticism (or, at least, saw the latter as an unavoidable and intolerable consequence of the former), he waged a constant war on all forms of "historicism" and "perceptivism." In his early essay ("Philosophy as a Rigorous Science") he blames Hegel and his "Romantic"(!?) philosophy for "its doctrine of the relative justification of every philosophy for its own time."⁴⁹ Husserl is not quite sure what to do with Hegel's claim for the "absolute validity" (ibid) of this same relativism; and so he moves quickly to Dilthey, with whom he had frequent and open correspondence and controversy; "As the result of the transformation of Hegel's metaphysical philosophy of history into a skeptical historicism, the establishment of the new *Weltanschauung* philosophy has now been essentially determined."⁵⁰ It is important to notice how easily Husserl moves from Dilthey's (and Hegel's) relativism to the notion of "historical skepticism," which he (and Hegel) would surely reject out of hand. It is also important to notice how Husserl's confusion with Hegel anticipates a major argument of his overall philosophy; regarding all forms of relativism, "the question is whether it can be justified when taken as universal in principle." "In principle!" But that insistence, which Husserl reads (wrongly) in Hegel, is precisely what Dilthey refuses to allow. Whether ostensibly necessary truths within a system are universally and necessarily necessary in any system is just the question that historicism undermines. For Husserl, "necessity" means *a priori* necessity of (transcendental) constitution. Historicism itself need not be presented as a necessary truth in this sense; it too is an empirical generalization, and no less powerful a claim for that. Even in Hegel, I would argue, the claim cannot be made that his "absolute relativism" is itself a necessary truth in Husserl's strong sense; it is perhaps an inescapable truth, all alternatives to it being indefensible. But Hegel's relativism also allows for and hopes for ultimate agreement nonetheless. What he refuses is just that dogmatic justification of relativism "as universal in principle" that Husserl insists upon. But its very application to relativist philosophy begs the question. If a philosophy denies that principle — including its own methodology — can be shown to be "universal in principle," it is clearly invalid to argue against it that it cannot prove itself to be such.⁵¹

In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl had already carried his objections beyond psychologism to all forms of relativism⁵² and anticipated his later claim⁵³ that "it is easy to see that historicism, if consistently carried through, carries over into extreme skeptical subjectivism." In the *Logical Investigations*, he rejects virtually out of hand what he calls "individual relativism"; "individual skepticism is such an explicit and — I would almost like to say — impudent or 'fresh' skepticism that, if it has ever been seriously advocated, it has certainly not been so in modern times."⁵⁴ Evidently the sage from Göttingen had not

read the nihilist Nietzsche (who had just died that year). But regarding what he calls "Anthropologism," Husserl insists that it too is a "skeptical theory," an extremely tempting one, which asserts that "for any species of judging being, that is true which, in conformity with the being's constitution and laws of thought, has to be regarded as true."⁵⁵ Husserl goes on to say, "Now this view is self-contradictory." Why? "For its meaning is that the same proposition can be true for one being — specifically, a subject of the species *homo* — and false for another being... But the same proposition cannot be both true and false. This follows from the mere meaning of the words 'true' and 'false'."⁵⁶ After playing out this argument, Husserl presents us with the inevitable result; Relativism is self-contradictory. He scares us with the specter that "there would not even be validity to the principle of contradiction."⁵⁷ But the principles that define relativism do not themselves have to be presented in absolutist form. Dilthey, in particular, was always careful to express his theses in terms of "our present limitations". Relativism properly conceived is a form of humility, not hubris. It does not seek to replace the absolutism it dislodges.

This picture of Husserl is one-sided, to be sure. No one can be a complete reactionary, and it has rightly been pointed out⁵⁸ that Husserl, despite his predominant reaction against relativism, also established some of the more modern moves that made contemporary phenomenological relativism possible. Like Nietzsche, for example, he completes the move begun by Kant in eliminating the traditional notion of "the given,"⁵⁹ making "interpretation" (that is, "constitution") virtually everything. And the phenomenological program itself, despite its heavy Husserlian emphasis on "essences," is precisely that "return to subjectivity" that is largely responsible for modern relativism in the first place.⁶⁰ But although Husserl can be so charted as an (unwilling) contributor to the march of modern relativism, his own ambitions and the most evident immediate effects of his philosophy were exactly the opposite, to urge philosophers to find precisely those guarantees of objectivity which would prove relativism to be the absurd position that Husserl was certain it was. This was the driving force behind phenomenology.

Husserl's search for the guarantees of objectivity was not satisfying to him, however, for the transcendental urge always seemed to need a transcendental argument that eluded him — how to warrant the extension of the structures he identified in his own experience to other people, and ultimately, to all other people. Mid-career, an old concern re-emerges with new force, the concern for "inter-subjectivity" as the mark of objectivity. In *Cartesian Meditations*, inter-subjectivity is argued (more or less) to be a necessary consequence of objectivity. Later on, in Husserl's final work, intersubjectivity is further argued to be the mark of objectivity.⁶¹ This last work

betrays other major concessions to relativism, many of which are (given Husserl's explicit antipathy to Hegel) embarrassingly Hegelian. Most strikingly, historicism now makes its appearance within Husserl, not as Dilthey's relativism to be sure, but at least as a clear recognition of the historical reality of alternative conceptions of knowledge and a realization of the difficulties in maintaining one's own conceptions as timelessly true. The overly cognitive restrictions of the earlier works give way to the more existentialist conception of "the lived world" (*Lebenswelt*), another clear concession to Heidegger and Scheler, the "ungrateful" students. Many of Husserl's advocates consider *Crisis* to be a breakthrough in these respects, incorporating within phenomenology the weapons of relativism. I see it rather as a breakdown in his philosophy, a last ditch effort to come to terms with relativism, on its own terms, but without giving up the transcendental pretense. But the effort failed, for Husserl nowhere succeeded, nor could he have succeeded, in turning the relativists' weapons against them. He remained knowingly locked into his own phenomenological-historical-cultural perspective, and his final conception of the *Lebenswelt* was a partial acknowledgment of this, even if he continued to hold up "science" and phenomenology as special opportunities for objectivity. But meanwhile, relativism had come of age. It was no longer the *reductio ad absurdum* villain of philosophy, and it was no longer on the defensive. There were problems, of course, especially the threat of 'vulgar' relativism and mindless subjectivism, but the Hegelian insistence on the 'Absolute' gave way to the more radical Hegelian insistence on humility and change. Even phenomenology charted a new course into unknown waters, and Husserl's best students moved away from both his 'egology' and his emphasis on apodeicticity.

Conclusion: The Diminishing Ego in Germanic Philosophy

It is not within the scope of this essay to follow the fascinating twists and turns of European and, in particular, Germanic philosophy as we moved into the twentieth century with its Great Wars and the breakdown of the old nationalistic boundaries. But the Ego that was so celebrated in Kant and expanded to Spirit in Hegel underwent a series of even more traumatic changes, beginning, perhaps, with Nietzsche (who in many ways is the philosopher who opened up and announced the twentieth century), but then continuing not only through philosophy but in physics—where relativity and uncertainty replaced the supposed certainties of the past centuries, in psychology, where the human psyche was shown to contain all sorts of dark and hidden secrets, and especially in history, where atrocities of the sort never dreamed possible by modern 'civilized' humanity ended the optimistic Hegelian vision of 'the cunning of history' and replaced it with the

despair of an irredeemable irrationalism predicted already by Dostoyevski, decades before.

Santayana charged the Germans with a combination of false humility, skepticism and arrogance, but it would seem that this combination of passions continues throughout the century and not only in Germany. Husserl's student Heidegger rejected not only Husserl's confidence in phenomenological certainty but indeed the whole of Western metaphysics as both a 'falling away from Being' and a transcendental pretension that presumes, without justification, that ego so readily recognized by the philosophers. But whatever else might be said of it — "brilliant," "obscure," etc.— it cannot be said that Heidegger's work is unpretentious or that the conception of the philosopher as savior has no place in it. And yet, Heidegger rejects the science-oriented (or 'scientific') basis of Husserl's philosophy and Western philosophy in general, and he rejects the Cartesian starting point of his illustrious predecessors. He denies the ego, preferring to couch his analysis in the less self-committed terms of "*Dasein*" ("Being-there") and insists that what philosophers call 'the self' is either an 'empty formal indicator' or a philosophical construction that is not warranted by proper phenomenological investigation.⁶² Following his lead, Jean-Paul Sartre goes on to argue— combining (and confusing) Cartesianism and Heidegger— that consciousness is really "nothingness," and the self is indeed a creation that emerges through life and with interaction with other people. Indeed, it is with Sartre that relativism in one sense at least reaches its extreme, in his insistence on "absolute freedom" and the inescapable responsibility of the individual for everything that he or she is or does.⁶³ But where Heidegger increasingly moves away from any form of absolutism in his work, ultimately worrying whether "language can adequately capture Being at all," Sartre retains the transcendental pretense in his insistence on universal freedom as essential to human nature and his insistence on the importance of the individual self. Against this, his French colleague Maurice Merleau-Ponty, his colleague Claude Levi-Strauss and most recently, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have attacked Sartre's residual confidence in the certainty of the self and the unspoken cultural prejudices and presuppositions in philosophy in general and in a broad variety of conceptions in history and in literature too.⁶⁴ By virtually getting rid of the ego, Foucault and Derrida undermine both the traditional claims for subjectivity and the transcendental pretense.

Meanwhile, in Germany, Gadamer has continued the "hermeneutical" tradition initiated by Dilthey and suggested by Heidegger, its primary thrust once again to reject the transcendental pretense and insist on mutual understanding and dialogue rather than the single-handed proof of absolute certainty attempted by Kant and Husserl.⁶⁵ At the same time, Jurgen Habermas has been pursuing a theory of

"communicative action" toward the same end, to undermine the pretensions of "scientism" and come to understand the systematic distortions that make us incapable of understanding one another.⁶⁶ Indeed, one conclusion that might well be drawn from this brief history of the Ego in Germanic philosophy is that the entire problem of absolutism versus relativism arises with philosophers who are so adamant about working *alone*. In dialogue there may be differences but, so long as the conversation continues, neither absolutism nor relativism is possible, and the more pretentious claims of the ego in Germanic philosophy are necessarily tempered by the very unphilosophical and inevitable facticity of interpersonal disagreement. It is such a view, I like to think, that inspired Santayana, and motivated his harsh but sometimes insightful attack on the transcendental pretensions of Germanic philosophy.⁶⁷

Notes

- ¹ George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, New York, 1915, p.168.
- ² For example, see Richard Rorty's now infamous address to the Eleventh Inter-American Congress of Philosophy, in Guadalajara, Mexico, November, 1985 — reprinted in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 1986 (pp. 747-753) with replies by Thomas Auster and Ofelia Schutte (pp. 753-759). More subtle, but no less dismissive of philosophical diversity, is Donald Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in the *Proceedings*, 1974, pp. 5-20.
- ³ "...how transitory all human structures are, nay, how oppressive the best institutions become in the course of a few generations." Herder, *Ideas towards a Philosophy of the History of Man*.
- ⁴ See, for instance, David Carr, *Phenomenology and History* (Evanston, Northwestern 1978).
- ⁵ Kemp-Smith, translation (New York: St. Martin's, 1965).
- ⁶ E.g., Merleau-Ponty's "Everywhere and Nowhere" in *Signs*, (trans. R. McLeary, Northwestern University Press, 1964).
- ⁷ I have worked out this position in some detail in my "Hegel's Epistemology," *Amer. Philos. Quart.* 1974, reprinted in *From Hegel to Existentialism*, Oxford University Press, 1987.
- ⁸ Particularly in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs, Appleton, Century Crofts, 1970.
- ⁹ Nor did it satisfy Kant. In a harsh "Open Letter" he denounced Fichte's "Kantianism" and offered a not immodest evaluation of his own work as the foundation of philosophy for centuries to come.
- ¹⁰ Consider Stace's ill-warranted parody — *Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955) — in which he talks of the post-Kantians, despite Kant's arguments, marching

"banners flying" towards precisely the metaphysics Kant had done away with once and for all.

- 11 *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Baillie; written in 1806, first published in 1807, translation in English 1932 (Macmillan).
- 12 There are serious ontological problems about the meaning of "the same" in these contexts. Since not only beliefs vary but concepts as well, it is not easy to account for such glib claims concerning cross-framework identity. If there is no third inclusive form of consciousness, it can be argued that no such concept of identity could ever be made sense of. A modern version of such an argument is Quine's "radical untranslatability" thesis. Hegel, however, believes that such a third inclusive position is virtually always possible.
- 13 It is not Hegel who invokes the famous "thesis-antithesis - synthesis" but Kant and Fichte. Hegel rarely "schematizes" his arguments this way, and argues against such "schematizing formalism" in Schelling.
- 14 This is the mysterious "we" that haunts us through Hegel's phenomenology, the philosophical overview from which the rehearsal of the dialectic takes place.
- 15 Today, consider the recent success of the Castaneda Don Juan tetralogy and the enormous interest in Eastern philosophy and occultism. It sometimes seems as if strangeness has become the new criterion of truth, but perhaps I've just been spending too much time in California.
- 16 Levi-Strauss (among many others) marks out the contrast between the "primitive" and "civilization" on just such grounds. (Struct. Antro.)
- 17 Findlay, J. N., *Hegel, A Re-examination* (NY: Macmillan, 1962).
- 18 At the extremes, Hegel's philosophy has been considered the reduction to absurdity of the whole of Western rationalist thought. Kierkegaard clearly sees it this way (notably in his *Journals* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*). More recently, such an interpretation has been argued (not yet published) by Kenley Dove.
- 19 Kierkegaard, *Journals*, trans. Dru (Oxford; OUP, 1938).
- 20 *Either/Or*, trans. Swenson and Lowrie; 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1944).
- 21 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Swenson and Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1941).
- 22 Marx, *German Ideology*, trans. R. Pascal, (New York 1938).
- 23 Heidegger, however, interprets Nietzsche as "the last of the great metaphysicians."
- 24 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).
- 25 *Twilight of the Idols*, "Reason in Philosophy" trans. W. Kaufmann, (in *Viking Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954) "Reason in Philosophy", ii.
- 26 *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, 1967)

- ²⁷ Ibid. 507.
- ²⁸ Ibid. 540.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 454.
- ³⁰ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1975).
- ³¹ *Will to Power*, 493.
- ³² Ibid. 410.
- ³³ But winning evidently isn't "absolute"; in *Zarathustra* and elsewhere, Nietzsche ominously portrays the idea of the "tyranny of the weak" and the defeat of the "higher men."
- ³⁴ Dilthey, *The Essence of Philosophy*, trans. S. A. and W. T. Emery, (Chapel Hill, N.C., U. North Carolina Press, 1954).
- ³⁵ For a more detailed examination of this idea, see Peter Krausser's "Dilthey's Revolution..." (*Review of Metaphysics*, Dec., 1968, Vol. XXII, pp. 261-280).
- ³⁶ Quoted in Holborn, "Dilthey and Historical Reason," in Wagar, et al., *Europe in History Since Darwin and Marx*, New York: Har 1966). p. 74.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ I want to specially thank Alex von Schoeborn for his helpful criticism and discussion of this section.
- ³⁹ In "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man", trans. Q. Lauer, *Phenomenology and the Crisis in Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 178.
- ⁴⁰ "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", in Lauer, op. cit. p. 146.
- ⁴¹ *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (Halle; Pfeffer, 1891).
- ⁴² Frege reviewed Husserl's *Philosophie der Arithmetik* in 1894.
- ⁴³ *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities, 1970), Foreword.
- ⁴⁴ It has been well-argued by E. Tugendhat (*Die Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger*) that the seeds of relativism remain at the very basis of Husserl's phenomenology, even in his strongly anti-relativist writings. He argues that because Husserl's theory of the *a priori* is "grounded in the material content of experience" rather than in the structure of the conscious subject (as in Kant), the possibility of alternative modes of experience carries with it the possibility of alternative *a priori* systems as well. Necessary truths, in other words, are always relative to a given mode of experience. But however latent in Husserl's philosophy, this possibility is never explicitly acknowledged or accepted by him. It shows, however, that even the most conscientious Absolutist, beginning from the subjective standpoint, may or perhaps must find himself nurturing the element of the very position he seeks most energetically to refute. (See Tugendhat, p. 163f, 183f. Cf. Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* trans. Cairns (Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), section 90.

- ⁴⁵ The correspondence theory of truth is normally concerned with a theory of "representation" or of "reference." It is important to note that Husserl's appeal to "correspondence," because of his acceptance of the crucial Fregean distinctions below, is far more complex — not a correspondence between "subjective" and "objective" or language and the world but between two different forms of "objective correlates." (See, for example, *Ideas*, Chs. 1 and 9). His late work *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, trans. D. Carr (Northwestern, 1970) adds to this the distinction between the "lived world" of given experience and the "objectified world" of idealized construction on that experience. But Husserl's theory of truth, as he states it, does not appear in either case to be of the correspondence variety; for him, truth is always "original givenness", a return to Descartes' type of "clear and distinct" criterion. But it is important to remember —and it unmask a great deal of obscurity to do so — that what is "given" in this sense is precisely the "correlate" which every "correspondence"-type theory of truth requires.
- ⁴⁶ *Ideas*, trans. W. R. Boyce-Gibson (New York: Macmillan, 1958) esp. Ch. 1.
- ⁴⁷ One would like to say "ontology," except that the ontological status of these entities is, by Husserl's own insistence, exceptionally unclear.
- ⁴⁸ Notably, Alexius Meinong, in his *Theory of Objects*, had invented an ontology of meanings and references so extravagant that Bertrand Russell could launch his career by ridiculing it.
- ⁴⁹ "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", Lauer op cit. p. 77.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Cf. *Logical Investigations*, Vol 1, Ch. 7, sect. 34; *Ideas*, Ch. 2, *Cartesian Meditations*, Med. 1.
- ⁵² Vol. 1, Ch. 7.
- ⁵³ "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", p. 125.
- ⁵⁴ *Logical Investigations*, Vol. 1, Sect. 35.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. 36.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", p. 125.
- ⁵⁸ See Tugendhat, op. cit.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ This is not to say that relativism is necessarily a product of subjectivism. This is half of the story. But the other half is just as important; it was the "objectivity" findings of anthropology and explorations that provided (and still provides) the most powerful incentives to belief in the actual existence of alternative forms of consciousness.
- ⁶¹ *Crisis*, op cit; it has not been established that Husserl ever went so far as to insist, as Merleau-Ponty claims that he did, that "intersubjectivity is objective."

- ⁶² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, Harper & Row, 1962.
- ⁶³ J. P. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. F. Williams, Noonday, 1957. *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes, Philosophical Library, 1956.
- ⁶⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, trans. H. and P. Dreyfus, Northwestern University Press, 1964. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Random House, 1970. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak, Johns Hopkins, 1976.
- ⁶⁵ H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming, Seabury, 1975.
- ⁶⁶ J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Beacon, 1971. *A Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, trans. T. McCarthy, MIT Press, 1984.
- ⁶⁷ The arguments and analyses of this essay have subsequently been developed and expanded in *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).