

Whither the Transcendental?: Hegel, Analytic Philosophy, and the Prospects of a Realist Transcendentalism Today

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Abstract: Recent developments in Continental metaphysics have involved calls to leave behind the transcendental as first forged by Kant. Against such calls, I plead for a gesture of, to paraphrase Marx, extracting the rational kernel of transcendentalism from the mystical shell of transcendental idealism. I lay claim to Hegel as the key forerunner for this maneuver. Moreover, debates about “transcendental arguments” in Analytic philosophical circles from the mid-twentieth century through today likewise explore the option of a de-idealized transcendentalism. For both Kant and Hegel as well as Analytics participating in the just-mentioned debates, the specter of skepticism looms large over the transcendental. Through putting Hegel’s tarrying with ancient and modern skepticisms into conversation with Analytic altercations between transcendentalists and skeptics, I propose a meta-transcendental, genetic-diachronic “error-first ontology” (EFO) as a necessary supplement to any transcendental, static-synchronic epistemology concerned with true knowledge. Prior to the problem of minded subjects coming to know worldly objects, there is the problem of how subjects capable of falling into falsity, illusion, etc. come into being in the first place. This intervention is a prelude to a rapprochement between transcendentalism and a (quasi-)naturalist materialism allied with the natural sciences.

Key Words: Kant, Hegel, Strawson, Stroud, Transcendental, Idealism, Epistemology, Ontology

§1 *Transcendentalism After Idealism: Extracting Kant’s Rational Kernel*

For over a decade now, various returns to systematic metaphysics have been a prominent feature of current European philosophy and its multiple spheres of geographic and intellectual influence. Rebellious against the linguistic turns and social constructivisms of the twentieth century, new species of materialisms and realisms have proliferated. They now crowd the contemporary Continental philosophical scene to the point of rendering such terms as “materialism” and “realism” contested and ambiguous, if not outright meaningless through rampant, unchecked overuse.¹

These present-day materialisms and realisms, many explicitly but some implicitly, share a marked hostility to Immanuel Kant despite their many differences. For Gilles Deleuze and his “new materialist” disciples,

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1 Johnston 2013a; Johnston 2017, p. 197; Johnston 2018a

the critical Kant indeed is an enemy to be feared and loathed.² Kant likewise, along with Aristotle, is one of Alain Badiou's historical arch-nemeses, appearing to require vanquishing if philosophy is to reclaim, heeding Martin Heidegger's call, its fundamental ontological vocation³ (although the Badiou of *Logics of Worlds* and related texts forges a non-Kantian theory of the transcendental dovetailing with some of the efforts I examine below to unshackle transcendentalism from idealism). The so-called "speculative realist" movement in its entirety, partly inspired in its origins by Badiou, sees itself as attempting to undo what it deems the "Kantian catastrophe,"⁴ namely, the imprisonment of philosophical speculation within the tight confines of the epistemological prison of subjectivist transcendental idealism. Slavoj Žižek, although a sharp critic of the speculative realists, echoes them in recently declaring it imperative today to move "beyond the transcendental" not only in the form of Kant's own idealism, but also its myriad later permutations (including phenomenologies, structuralisms, and their combinations and offshoots).⁵

So, has the time come, if it is not already overdue, to leave transcendentalism behind? Should one at long last happily bid Kant and his idealism *adieu*? My intervention here seeks to stay the hands that would promptly throw the transcendental overboard with no second thoughts. I aim to show that certain things well worth saving would be lost in a total and complete break with transcendentalism. The adjective "transcendental" can and should be (re)made to stand for, if nothing else, a cluster of theoretical features/positions involving staunch opposition to unreserved determinisms, eliminativisms, historicisms, reductivisms, and relativisms. For me at least, a key philosophical task is to wed such opposition to a nonetheless uncompromisingly materialist ontological framework not without its historical sensibilities and with a theory of spontaneous, self-determining subjectivity irreducible to both its natural and cultural bases.

Several important questions render my just-indicated marriage of transcendentalism and materialism/(quasi-)naturalism less seemingly oxymoronic. These same questions simultaneously render more debatable cutting-edge Continentalist gestures of jettisoning the Kantian legacy altogether. I ask: What purposes motivated Kant

2 Deleuze 1977, p. 112; Deleuze 1995, p. 6

3 Badiou 2009a, pp. 118-119; Badiou 2005, pp. 1-2; Badiou 1999, pp. 123-124; Badiou 2006, pp. 30, 133, 141, 163; Badiou 2009b, pp. 267-268, 536; Johnston 2013b, pp. 108-128

4 Meillassoux 2008, p. 124

5 Žižek 2014, pp. 16-17, 98, 109, 372-374

initially to introduce the transcendental? Whether for Kant and/or his successors, is transcendentalism a strictly epistemological affair? Or, does it actually or potentially encompass ontological dimensions too? In terms of ontology/metaphysics, is transcendentalism inseparable from the subjectivism of transcendental idealism (whether Kantian, Fichtean, Husserlian, etc.)? Or, can the transcendental be detached from the idealisms with which it frequently is associated in the history of philosophy? Is there a transcendental beyond transcendental idealism? If so, can it be synthesized consistently with a materialist (quasi-)naturalism indebted to historical and dialectical materialisms? My answer to these questions, which I seek to show below is at least defensible, is that there indeed is a worthwhile rendition of the transcendental apart from transcendental idealism and its subjectivism, one compatible with a non-reductive materialist ontology.

Within the Continental philosophical tradition, transcendentalism since Kant, in line with the idealism of its late-eighteenth-century inventor, has remained closely associated with subjectivism as well as antipathy to realism, naturalism, materialism, and the like. In the guises of Fichteanism, neo-Kantianism, Husserlianism, and myriad permutations of phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, those associated with the European Continent of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who either directly or indirectly uphold the consequences of Kant's critical epistemological turn consider the adjective "transcendental" as indissociable from the noun "idealism." Hence, it is no coincidence that recent and contemporary European thinkers urging an abandonment of the transcendental seem to do so largely under the influence of a contestable presumption to the effect that investigations into the necessary conditions of possibility for knowledge are intrinsically idealist in the Kantian subjectivist sense.

By sharp contrast, the Analytic philosophical tradition, from the middle of the twentieth century through today, has interrogated the topic of the transcendental in fashions explicitly questioning whether transcendentalism automatically and unavoidably entails anti-realist idealism too. Starting with P.F. Strawson in the 1950s, Anglo-American philosophers interested in epistemology, philosophy of science, and/or Kant studies have argued about the possibility of a transcendental without Kant's or Kantian-style transcendental idealism. In light of the preceding, it appears that the Analytics already have ventured down a path generally neglected by Continentalists, namely, the route of a non-subjectivist transcendentalism.

Despite the deep-seated and pervasive aversion to G.W.F. Hegel in the Analytic tradition (starting with its early-twentieth-century

founders), Hegel's System stands out amongst the philosophies of the post-Kantian German idealists as a powerful precursor of those Anglo-American philosophers, such as Strawson, who advocate the option of the transcendental *sans* transcendental idealism. Unlike J.G. Fichte's transcendental idealism, Hegel's absolute idealism is anything but an anti-realist subjectivism.⁶ And, unlike F.W.J. Schelling's objective idealism, Hegel's absolute idealism takes seriously the epistemological requirements and rigor of Kantian critique. With Kant and against both Fichte and Schelling, Hegel eschews recourse to epistemologically suspect intellectual intuition (the rhetorical means to purported knowledge favored by the pre-Kantian rationalist substance metaphysicians and problematized by the empiricists and Kant alike—it is Fichte and Schelling, not Hegel, who rebel against Kantian critique's ban on intellectual intuition). Insofar as Hegel strives to establish an epistemologically responsible delineation of the real (rather than ideal) and necessary conditions of possibility for, among other things, knowing subjectivity itself, he prefigures later Analytic efforts along similar lines. And, as I will go on to contend here, Hegel has much to teach Analyticians who advance or attack realist redeployments of transcendental approaches.

Hence, the rest of my intervention below is devoted to a revisitation of transcendentalism via a superficially counterintuitive rapprochement between Hegelian and Analytic philosophies. The immediately subsequent second section ("The Transcendentalist and the Skeptic: Analytic Arguments") examines controversies amongst Analyticians about transcendental arguments from Strawson to the present. Amongst those in this tradition unconvinced by or opposed to transcendentalist philosophical programs, Barry Stroud stands out as having set the agenda for the anti-transcendental camp. Stroud, wielding the doubts of Cartesian-style modern skepticism, makes the case, first and foremost against Strawson, that a realist transcendentalism has little to no chance of success. This is because, for a skeptic doubting whether the rift between thinking and being is ever crossed (or crossed adequately) by a mind actually managing to know the world, Strawsonian-style transcendental arguments look to be permanently plagued by a major difficulty: Even if necessary possibility conditions for knowing on the side of subjects (i.e., the side of thinking/mind) are established by transcendental argumentation, such argumentation still fails to establish such transcendental necessity on the side of objects (i.e., the side of being/world).

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6 Johnston 2018b

As the third section ("Hegel's Doubts: The Self-Sublation of Skepticism") reveals, Hegel has a great deal to say about skepticism in addition to transcendentalism. Indeed, Kant's critical philosophy immediately met with neo-Humean skeptical resistance from some of his contemporaries: in particular, Salomon Maimon and G.E. Schulze. Stroud's skepticism is essentially the same as Schulze's, the latter having doubted the Kantian Copernican revolution as soon as it burst forth on the stage of philosophical history. Thus, Hegel's own responses to Schulze and Schulze's objections to Kant's theoretical philosophy show Hegel to be yet even more relevant to a historically informed assessment of continuing Analytic debates over transcendental arguments.

Hegel also brings into the picture his contextualization of Cartesian and Humean modern skepticisms in relation to ancient varieties of skepticism. Hegel's manners both of playing off ancient against modern skepticism as well as of pressing into the services of a non-skeptical philosophical edifice (i.e., his dialectical-speculative System) the resources of these historical variants of skepticism have two lines of impact with respect to Stroud's brand of (early-)modern skepticism. First, Hegel gives multiple good reasons for doubting what arguably are dogmatic assumptions un-skeptically relied upon by modern skeptics, thereby immanently critiquing and defanging such skepticisms. Second—this is more in the spirit of the side of Kantian critique inspired by the Humean skeptical empiricism likewise inspiring Stroud—Hegel aims to formulate a post-Kantian realist transcendentalism (or, more accurately, meta-transcendentalism) meeting the epistemological imperatives of both modern skepticism and Kantianism by absolutely avoiding any reliance whatsoever upon presuppositions vulnerable to doubts. If either Hegel himself fully succeeds at formulating or at least partly paves the ways towards such a non-subjectivist transcendentalism, then his contributions in this vein are incredibly timely and relevant for both Continental and Analytic philosophical orientations today.

The fourth and final section of my intervention ("Not Transcendental Enough: Too Smart to Ask Stupid Questions") gets underway with a Hegelian return to Strawson as the originator of Analytic controversies about transcendental arguments. Although, as I already have indicated, Hegel sets a precedent for Strawson's later gesture of decoupling the transcendental from Kant's subjectivist transcendental idealism, he would not be comfortable within the confines of the Analytic philosophical context in which Strawson operates. In particular, Hegel (and Schelling along with him) would be dissatisfied with this context, and Strawson along with it, for failing to ask and answer questions about the coming-to-be of transcendental subjectivity itself.

Signaled in advance by an under-appreciated aspect of Schulze's criticisms of Kant's theoretical philosophy, Hegel, along with Friedrich Hölderlin and Schelling, faults the subjectivist idealisms of Kant and Fichte for an unwillingness and/or inability to delineate the genesis of the very subject of their transcendentalisms. Admittedly, it is unclear whether or to what extent Hegel *et al* are aware of their debts to Schulze along these lines. That said, insofar as the genetic dimension missing in both Kantian and Analytic epistemologies traces the pre/non-subjective conditions of possibility for subjective conditions of possibility, the latter being "transcendental" in its standard accepted meaning, this dimension perhaps is best considered meta-transcendental.

This leads me to conclude with some critical supplements to the philosophical sub-discipline of epistemology generally and Analytic epistemology especially. For both early-modern epistemology (up to and including Kant) as well as twentieth-century Anglo-American varieties (as represented by Strawson and Stroud, not to mention Edmund Gettier, among countless others), their pursuits of a satisfactory theory of knowing presuppose as simply given a gap between, on one side, being-world-objectivity and, on another side, thinking-mind-subjectivity. In other words, these epistemologies assume knowledge is a problematic matter of bridging the divide of an unaccounted-for division between the being of worldly objects and the thinking of minded subjects.

But, for Hegelian absolute idealism as well as any non-subjectivist, anti-dualist immanentist or monist philosophical position (including some of the materialisms and/or naturalisms common amongst Analyticians themselves), there is a (meta-)problem prior to early-modern and Analytic renditions of the problem of knowledge: If subjects arise from and remain internal to the same substantial reality to which objects also belong, then how do these subjects become unglued from this reality such that they can and do fall into error, illusion, and so on about it? Before asking how knowledge or truth are possible for human beings, one must ask how ignorance and falsity are possible for them. From the standpoint of Hegel's substance-also-as-subject problematic,⁷ transcendental epistemology's static-synchronic theory of knowledge requires supplementation by meta-transcendental ontology's genetic-diachronic theory of ignorance. I here baptize the latter a Hegelian "error-first ontology" (EFO), playing off the Analytic label "knowledge-first epistemology" (KFE) associated with Timothy Williamson's fashion of responding to Gettier problems about "justified true belief." At the very end of my text, I will gesture at a subterranean current of EFO within

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Johnston 2014, pp. 13-107; Johnston 2018b; Johnston 2018c

recent European intellectual history that includes moments within the reflections of, for instance, Heidegger, Gilbert Simondon, Deleuze, Žižek, and Catherine Malabou, as well as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan too (I deal with Simondon and Malabou along these lines in a companion piece to the present essay⁸).

§2 *The Transcendentalist and the Skeptic: Analytic Arguments*

Ever since the 1959 appearance of Strawson's book *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, the Anglo-American tradition in philosophy has facilitated within itself a number of conversations concerned precisely with the issues I raise in the preceding introductory section of this piece (along with Strawson's *Individuals*, Sydney Shoemaker's 1963 *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* sometimes is mentioned as part of this reactivation of transcendental approaches in Analytic philosophy⁹). These discussions and debates are situated at the intersection of Analytic epistemology, philosophy of science, and Kant scholarship. Starting with Strawson himself, Analyticians tend to employ the adjective "transcendental" primarily as a modifier of the noun "arguments." Strawson stipulates that such arguments answer questions about how already-furnished solutions to corresponding philosophical problems are possible in the first place.¹⁰ Hence, Strawson's construal of transcendentalism ties it tightly to philosophers' techniques of answering how-possible questions about specific varieties of knowledge. This exerts a lasting pull on subsequent Analytic reflections regarding the transcendental in relation to what Kant himself would call "theoretical philosophy" (as distinct from practical philosophy).

Moreover, Strawson's emphasis on epistemological argumentation sets the stage for Stroud's famous intervention, namely, his 1968 article entitled "Transcendental Arguments."¹¹ Therein, Stroud insistently portrays transcendental arguments, starting with Kant himself, as motivated entirely by desires to refute various forms of skepticism. In Kant's case, this makes the David Hume who awoke him from his dogmatic slumber the paramount addressee of his theoretical philosophy (regardless of Stroud's skeptical pushback against Kant and his heirs, the least one can say is that Kant's transcendental idealism raises

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Johnston 2018d

9
Shoemaker1963, pp. 168-169

10
Strawson 1964, p. 40

11
Stroud 1968, pp. 241-256

serious objections to Hume's empiricism and the skepticism Hume ties to it). The skepticism with which Stroud confronts epistemological transcendentalism rests upon the familiar early-modern dichotomy between the thinking of the subjective mind and the being of the objective world.¹²

Stroud's remobilization of this dichotomy leads him to the verdict that transcendental arguments cannot ever succeed as refutations of skepticism. A skeptical anti-realism entertaining radical doubts about the nature or very existence of a subjective external reality (along the lines of the first of René Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*) never will be laid to rest by arguments about what is purportedly *a priori* requisite for subjective cognition and knowing. From Stroud's mid-twentieth-century Analytic perspective, transcendental arguments perhaps can vanquish the relativism of conventionalist accounts of language-dependent knowledge—and this by revealing necessary categorial and conceptual conditions for certain meaningful uses of any and every language. But, Stroud maintains that, even if relativist conventionalism is defeated, the possibility sustaining anti-realist skepticism that mind-independent objective reality still could be completely different from subjects' linguistically-expressed judgments about it is not ruled out by transcendental arguments. This leads to Stroud's conclusion that such arguments ultimately are utter failures insofar as transcendentalism is understood to be at its core an anti-skeptical epistemological endeavor.¹³

At this juncture, a naïve reader might ask regarding Stroud: Is it not the case that Kant is unperturbed by Cartesian-style, "First-Meditation"-type doubts about the relationship (or lack thereof) between thinking and being in light of his distinction between knowable phenomenal objects-as-appearances and unknowable (but thinkable) noumenal things-in-themselves? Does not Kant's transcendental idealism inoculate him against Stroudian skepticism? These questions bring up the importance of bearing in mind Strawson's agenda-setting influence upon Analytic discussions of transcendentalism. In his celebrated 1966 study of Kant, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Strawson seeks to extract the rational kernel of the transcendental from the mystical shell of subjectivist transcendental idealism¹⁴ (to borrow wording from Karl Marx). As Christopher Peacocke succinctly words this Strawsonian endeavor at the end of an article, "Transcendental

12 Kreis 2015, p. 222

13 Stroud 1968, p. 256

14 Strawson 1966, pp. 21-22, 41, 172-174, 197, 235, 242-243, 248-249, 259

investigation need not involve transcendental idealism."¹⁵ Strawsonian transcendental arguments are meant to be capable, at least in some instances, of hitting upon necessary conditions of possibility situated in external reality. That is to say, Strawson, in untying transcendentalism from Kant's transcendental idealism, pushes it to enter into alliance with an outward-looking realism. Therefore, the target of Stroud's skepticism about transcendental arguments is more Strawson than Kant himself.

A number of Stroud's interlocutors have called into question whether he is right to depict transcendentalism as almost entirely preoccupied with the problem of skepticism(s). At a conference in which Stroud was a participant, Günther Patzig observes, "the establishment of an objective world against sceptical doubts is not high up on Kant's philosophical priority list."¹⁶ Of course, this is not to say that Kant was blithely unconcerned about such doubts. Obviously, the "Refutation of Idealism" in the 1787 second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, added in response to unfavorable comparisons of the first edition with the hyper-subjectivist "psychological idealism" of George Berkeley's 1710 *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, seeks to establish the indubitable existence of "an objective world"—albeit within the metaphysical parameters of transcendental idealism.

Yet, this last caveat leaves Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" vulnerable to refutation in turn by Stroud's Cartesian-style skepticism. For Stroud, the most that this Kant can prove at best is an intersubjective necessity for all subjects to experience phenomena as situated within what appears to be an external reality *qua* spatio-temporal expanse of existence. But, this intersubjective necessity proves nothing as to whether there really is, apart from subjects (and the outer and inner senses of their ideal pure forms of intuition), an external reality and, if such a reality actually exists, what it amounts to in truth. On a Stroudian assessment, Kant's foundational idealist contrast between phenomena/objects and noumena/things already concedes and cements in place the skepticism-generating subject-object/mind-world gap.

Quassim Cassam takes issue with Stroud's wholesale equation of transcendentalism with anti-skepticism.¹⁷ He remarks that, "this is not the best or, at any rate, the only way of conceiving of transcendental arguments."¹⁸ Cassam's alternate suggestion is to view such arguments

15 Peacocke 2009a, p. 768

16 Patzig 1979, p. 71

17 Cassam 2007, pp. 54, 56-57

18 Ibid., p. 56

as regressive analyses aiming to reverse-engineer out of a given phenomenon this phenomenon's necessary conditions for occurring/being.

I will not go into Cassam's reasons for considering regressive transcendental arguments unlikely to be informative or successful. These are different from Stroud's objections, and have to do with the alleged over-generality and abstractness of typical identified possibility conditions for knowledge. For what it is worth, I am sympathetic to Peacocke's defenses of the philosophical value of admittedly general and abstract transcendental arguments against Cassam's complaints.¹⁹ I also second Peacocke's praise of Cassam's anti-subjectivist realism.²⁰

That said, two other of Cassam's observations regarding transcendentalism are important to note for my purposes. First, Cassam, like select others and following in Strawson's footsteps, urges decoupling the transcendental from transcendental idealism.²¹ On one occasion, he does so in the context of distinguishing between "world-directed" and "self-directed" transcendental arguments: The former seek *a priori* necessary conditions for knowledge in the *Umwelt* of objectivity and the latter in the *Innenwelt* of subjectivity.²² As Paul Franks notes, this distinction between world-directed and self-directed transcendental arguments opens up the option of conceding to Stroud's skepticism the futility of world-directed transcendental arguments while maintaining the (potential) viability of self-directed ones.²³

Although it might initially seem that self-directed transcendental arguments at least would have to be anchored in transcendental idealism, Cassam severs even these from such subjectivist, anti-realist idealism. He does so utilizing the figure of a "conceptual realist" who proposes that what intrasubjectively make possible the subject's knowledge are metaphysically real categories and concepts enjoying subject-independent existence (with these metaphysical realities thereby being, in Lacanese, "extimacies" in the subject more than the subject itself). For this figure, a successful Cassamian regressive self-directed transcendental argument manages to dig down to the spade-turning bedrock of metaphysically real categorial/conceptual possibility conditions enabling instances of subjective knowing.²⁴

19 Peacocke 2009a, pp. 763-766; Peacocke 2009b, p. 733

20 Peacocke 2009b, p. 737

21 Cassam 1987, pp. 355-378

22 Cassam 1999, p. 87

23 Franks 2005, p. 252

24 Cassam 1999, pp. 89-90, 101, 104-105

Interestingly, when Cassam considers the option of self-directed transcendental arguments divorced from the subjectivism of classical Kantian transcendental idealism, he entertains only the just-glossed conceptual/metaphysical realist possibility. He does not even mention the idea of materialist or naturalist self-directed transcendental arguments. I strongly suspect that Cassam would consider any line of argumentation linking transcendentalism to materialism or naturalism to be world-directed rather than self-directed—and this presumably because, for him, directing attention to anything material or natural is shifting focus onto the "world" as opposed to the "self." On this assumption, materializing or naturalizing the self is reducing it to being a mere part of the world.

However, if Cassam is willing to categorize a conceptual/metaphysical realist transcendental approach as self-directed, it seems it would be difficult for him to exclude the possibility of materialist/naturalist self-directed transcendental arguments (if he indeed would uphold such an exclusion). Why? Conceptual/metaphysical realisms posit categorial forms that, as "real," are at least as much structures of the world as of the self. On such accounts, the self would be a moment of or participant in the objective formal realities constituting and configuring the world. That is to say, a conceptual/metaphysical realist transcendental argument would be no more and no less world-directed than a materialist/naturalist transcendental argument.

If identifying objective conceptual/metaphysical realities as conditions of possibility for subjects' knowings is self-directed, why would identifying objective material/natural realities as the same not count as equally self-directed? Assuming Cassam in fact would rule out the option of materialist/naturalist self-directed transcendental arguments, he appears to be in the grip of an unacknowledged Cartesian hangover (just as Stroud avowedly remains in the grip of Descartes's "First Meditation"²⁵). To be more precise, only if one presupposes that selfhood/subjectivity is a mental *Innenwelt* as essentially different-in-kind from a physical *Umwelt*—this would be to endorse some version of Descartes's ontological dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*—is one justified in simultaneously affirming conceptual/metaphysical realist approaches and denying materialist/naturalist ones as possible options for self-directed transcendental arguments (with there being a perceived kinship between mindedness and metaphysically real concepts ostensibly lacking between mindedness and the physical universe). Correlatively but conversely, if one allows for some link or links (however specified)

25 Stroud 1968, pp. 277-278, 293-294

between the material/natural and selfhood/subjectivity, then the project of materialist/naturalist self-directed transcendental arguments is at least a potentially promising program not to be preemptively shut down in the absence of explicit and precise reasons.

Regardless of whether Cassam would grant the coherence and feasibility of materialist/naturalist self-directed transcendental arguments, he still separates transcendentalism from transcendental idealism by allowing for materialist/naturalist transcendental arguments—if only as world-directed and hypothetically. I will return momentarily to Analytic reflections upon the relationship (or lack thereof) between the transcendental and transcendental idealism. As I already indicated, Cassam is not alone amongst Analytic epistemologists, philosophers of science, and Kant scholars in raising doubts about transcendentalism being inseparable from subjective idealism.

Before turning from Cassam to other Analytics, there is a second move of Cassam's crucial to my agenda. In a bit of unwitting Hegelianism,²⁶ Cassam insists, against Kant, upon the underlying contingency of transcendental necessity.²⁷ He objects to Kant's tendency to treat what is transcendentially *apriori* as always and automatically necessary too.²⁸ Whether there are valid and good transcendental arguments apropos human knowing, through which *apriori* necessities for such knowing are brought to light, depends upon there being human knowers. But, the fact of there being human knowers at all, and, hence, *apriori* necessities for human knowing, is itself ultimately contingent (unless one falls back upon some sort of religious-style teleological narrative about the preordained, inevitable genesis of humanity).

Drawing on Hegel's treatment of modalities,²⁹ I should add that it might be helpful to reconceive at least some instances of the transcendental as retroactively necessary. These would be instances of what will have been a necessary condition of possibility if certain possibilities subsequently are realized as actualities. In other words, rather than transcendental necessity being a present and/or permanent status inherent to a given "x" in and of itself, it might be a temporal and transient modal determination conferred upon an "x" in an *après-coup*, future-anterior relationship with other variables. Such transcendentals would be initially non-transcendental-*qua*-contingent factual actualities

26 Johnston 2018b

27 Cassam 1999, p. 99

28 Ibid., p. 100

29 Johnston 2018b

that become properly transcendental-*qua*-necessary conditions of possibility only if and when specific subsequent actualities come to depend upon them in specific manners. Indeed, it does not seem to be much of a stretch to apply Hegel's motif of the becoming-necessary of the contingent to considerations of the transcendental. Maybe there are transient transcendentals.

Cassam's manner of insisting upon the contingency of necessity implicitly (and reasonably) presumes as well-established the historicization of nature such that human beings are relatively recent products of evolutionary processes operative on planet earth. Rendering the transcendental contingent as Cassam does amounts to pointing out its boundedness to humans who are themselves accidental, temporary outgrowths of natural history. Ross Harrison, who, like Cassam, suggests separating the transcendental from transcendental idealism,³⁰ appeals to evolution (incidentally, both Harrison and Peacocke contend that the inconsistencies and implausibilities plaguing Kant's transcendental idealism compromise the cogency and effectiveness of his own transcendental arguments, with the latter rendered stronger by ditching subjectivist anti-realism³¹). Cassam overtly associates transcendentalism with contingency and covertly embeds transcendental subjects within a historicized nature. Harrison presents a complementary inversion, overtly situating transcendental subjectivity within evolutionary history and covertly indicating the ultimately contingent status of anything transcendental.³²

Curiously, Stroud too gestures in the direction of a historicized nature. His seminal article on "Transcendental Arguments," intervening specifically within mid-twentieth-century Analytic debates about transcendentalism, is colored by the "linguistic turn" sensibilities of his philosophical fellow travelers. As such, Stroud is primarily concerned with transcendental argumentative strategies proceeding by way of analyses of language. The *apriori* necessities put forward by these types of Analytic transcendental arguments would be compulsions and constraints bearing upon all languages in their articulations of knowledge claims.³³

In this context, Stroud observes in passing that language *tout court* has not always existed and will, at some point in the future,

30 Harrison 1982, pp. 211-224

31 Harrison 1982, pp. 218-219; Peacocke 2009a, p. 767

32 Harrison 1982, pp. 223-224

33 Stroud 1968, pp. 243-244

cease to exist altogether.³⁴ Such an observation is in the same vein as Cassam's implicit and Harrison's explicit invocations of accident-ridden, non-teleological evolutionary sequences. Like Cassam and Harrison, Stroud acknowledges that such structures as knowledges and languages are linked to human beings, who themselves have arisen from and will dissipate back into an expanse of natural history exceeding them in the directions of both the past and the future. For Cassam and Harrison, such an acknowledgment is unproblematic, being of a piece with their opting for realist against (transcendental) idealist positions. But, for Stroud, this same acknowledgement is in tension with his anti-realist skepticism. Although Stroud considers the skeptical scenarios of Descartes's "First Meditation" to remain grave difficulties for all philosophers, he looks to be momentarily (and inconsistently) untroubled by them in his casual recourse to the realist outlook of the modern natural scientific *Weltanschauung*.

David Bell is an author who takes a step back from Analytic disputes about transcendental arguments to call into question whether the transcendental ought to be limited to serving as an adjective for the noun "arguments." Bell comments:

Another widespread belief... is that it is permissible, perhaps even mandatory, to construe the adjective 'transcendental' as though its primary function were to modify the term 'argument.' This is to be regretted; for, construed in this way, a number of conceptual (and historically significant) connections are either severed or, at best, marginalized. And so on the one hand, for instance, there is a tendency to treat an argument that is deemed to be 'transcendental' in a way which leaves its nature and purpose quite unconnected with the nature and purpose of, say, a transcendental theory, a transcendental explanation, a transcendental concept, or a transcendental point of view. And on the other hand, the concept *transcendental* is typically employed in isolation from the complex web of connections and contrasts in which it stands to such other concepts as *immanent*, *transcendent*, *empirical*, *naturalistic*, *dogmatic*, and so forth.³⁵

Bell's remarks suggest that Analyticians too quickly and presumptively restrict the sense of the transcendental to epistemological issues within the relatively narrow parameters of the Anglo-American version of the linguistic turn. In so doing, they neglect, without explicit argumentative

34 Ibid., p. 254

35 Bell 1987, pp. 193-194

justifications, numerous other senses of "transcendental" in the history of philosophy from Kant onwards. In particular, some of the words and phrases employed by Bell signal that various metaphysical and ontological dimensions of transcendentalism quietly are excluded from the conversations about "transcendental arguments" in an unexplained and, perhaps, unjustifiable fashion.

It would be inaccurate simply to map the difference gestured at by Bell between epistemological and ontological dimensions of transcendentalism onto the divide between Analytic and Continental philosophical traditions—with the former focused on epistemology and the latter devoted to ontology. This is primarily because there is plenty of emphasis upon transcendental epistemology and methodology on the European Continent over the course of the past two centuries. However, such emphasis monopolizes the past half-century of Anglo-American discussions of transcendentalism (as transcendental arguments) in a way it does not within mainly German and French developments unfolding under Kant's long shadow.

Michael Rosen, like Bell, challenges the Analytic habit of soldering the adjective "transcendental" to the noun "argument."³⁶ In dialogue with the work of Franks, he contends that, at least for Kant's immediate German idealist successors, transcendentalism has more to do with matters of ontological genesis (first and foremost, how substance becomes subject, to put it in Hegel's phrasing) than epistemological structure.³⁷ Rosen similarly divorces post-Kantian German idealist transcendentalism from Stroud's early-modern problematic of veil-of-appearances skepticism.³⁸

Bell's and Rosen's dovetailing assertions are brought into even more direct and precise connection with the post-Kantian German idealists by Jonathan Vogel. The degree of Vogel's awareness of the connection I have in mind is unclear. Nonetheless, however intentionally or not, some of his observations echo a pivotal text in the emergence of a post-Kantian idealism leaving behind the subjectivism of Kant's and Fichte's transcendental idealisms, namely, the 1796 fragment "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" (a piece of contested authorship, with Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin, and Isaac von Sinclair all hypothesized as possible authors, although the fragment is in Hegel's handwriting). These resonances are audible when Vogel writes:

36 Rosen 1987, pp. 152-153

37 Ibid., pp. 152-153

38 Ibid., p. 153

Idealism closes the gap between thought and the world by dissolving the latter into the former. Naturalism, too, refuses to see thought and the world as fundamentally distinct; the naturalist seeks to locate thought within the material realm. This project gives rise to the question, 'What must the metaphysics of the natural world be, so that thought can be accommodated within it?' And this question may have some interesting, non-trivial answers.³⁹

What Vogel says about "idealism" in the first sentence of this quotation holds for Kantian transcendental idealism, but not, as he fails to note, for the "objective" and "absolute" idealisms of Schelling and Hegel in particular (both of which reject the anti-realist and anti-naturalist subjectivism of Kant's and Fichte's idealisms). In fact, with Schelling's and Hegel's system-building approaches both mobilizing their differing versions of *Naturphilosophie*, their objective/absolute idealisms involve not only naturalism, but also a naturalism oriented by Vogel's very question (i.e., "What must the metaphysics of the natural world be, so that thought can be accommodated within it?"). The Schellingian and Hegelian *oeuvres* monumentally testify to the "interesting" and "non-trivial" responses generated by attempts to wrestle with this line of inquiry. Vogel's question should be heard as a rewording (however witting or unwitting) of the central query of "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism": "how must a world be constituted for a moral entity?"⁴⁰ Regardless of the actual original authorship of this 1796 fragment, the subsequent philosophical trajectories of Schelling and Hegel are both profoundly shaped by efforts to answer this.⁴¹

Having discussed at length "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" and its resonances with Schelling's and Hegel's ensuing intellectual itineraries elsewhere,⁴² I will not go into detail about this topic here. Suffice it in the current context to appreciate how and why Bell, Rosen, and Vogel, intervening directly into Analytic conversations about the transcendental, all varyingly invoke the post-Kantian aftermath as of enduring philosophical relevance (rather than merely historical/antiquarian interest) apropos the topic of transcendentalism as still a live option. In line with Bell's, Rosen's, and Vogel's interventions, the next

39 Vogel 1987, p. 226

40 Hegel 2002, p. 110

41 Kimmerle 1970, p. 18; Düsing 1976, pp. 53-54, 214; Henrich 1982, p. 188; Pöggeler 1984, pp. 132-133; Bienenstock 1992, p. 147; Vaysse 1994, pp. 126-127; Bonsiepen 1997, pp. 272-273, 281; Bowman 2013, pp. 38, 227, 229-230, 247-248, 257-258

42 Johnston 2014, pp. 13-49, 308-312; Johnson 2018b; Johnston 2018c

section of my essay will extract from Hegel resources for reconfiguring recent and contemporary controversies about the transcendental.

Specifically, I will utilize Hegel's reflections on the ontological implications of the epistemological problems of skepticism and fallibility to undermine both of the two main sides (although not the only ones) of the Analytic debate about the transcendental as I have outlined it in the present section. These two factions are well-represented by the proper names "Strawson" and "Stroud." The Strawsonian side upholds the viability of world-directed transcendental arguments free of the subjectivist anti-realism of Kantian transcendental idealism. Against this, the Stroudian side brandishes an early-modern, pre-Kantian skepticism insisting upon a strict subject-object opposition (i.e., mind-versus-world, thinking-versus-being) and maintaining that this opposition renders insurmountably dubitable realist transcendental arguments (such as those of Strawson).

As I will go on to show below, a Hegelian approach to these Analytic disagreements about transcendentals permits problematizing both the Strawsonian and Stroudian positions. As regards Strawson and his descendants (such as, for example, Peacocke⁴³), I should begin by avowing that I interpret Hegel as likewise invested in the project of preserving some sense (or senses) of the transcendental after discarding the husk of Kant's transcendental idealism. In this vein, I agree with Kenneth Westphal both that Hegel anticipates Strawson's transcendental-without-transcendental-idealism as well as that a difference between Hegel and Strawson is that the latter strictly limits this desubjectivized transcendental to the linguistic alone⁴⁴ (I delve into other important differences between Hegel and Strawson in the fourth section below). Without the space to explain and defend this interpretation at the moment, I will limit myself to claiming for now that Hegel's interlinked *Logik* and *Realphilosophie* (i.e., the framework of his encyclopedic System) involve an anti-subjectivist transcendentalism anticipating such things as Strawson's transcendental-*sans*-transcendental-idealism.

But, the critical twist comes with Hegelianism's not entirely friendly supplementation of Strawson's static-synchronic perspective with a genetic-diachronic angle. A Hegelian would insistently inquire after and pursue, behind or beneath Strawson's non-transcendental-idealist possibility conditions for the subject's thinking and knowing, the real possibility conditions for the being/existence of this very subjectivity

43 Peacocke 2009a, pp. 739-769

44 Westphal 2003, p. 60

itself. This would amount to Strawson's epistemological transcendentals being supplemented by Hegel's ontological meta-transcendentals. Moreover, insofar as the Hegelian Real of *Realphilosophie* brings with it natural strata, the above-glossed, cross-resonating questions raised by both "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" and Vogel would have to be asked and answered by any such meta-transcendental ontology. I will return to these matters in the fourth and final section of this intervention.

However, the following third section will get underway momentarily with the significant problems Hegel's philosophy poses for the Stroudian side of the Analytic debate about transcendental arguments. As various scholars already have appreciated, Hegel has quite a lot to say about skepticism. He directly tackles the modern forms of skepticism from Descartes through the British empiricists and their German offspring (such as F.H. Jacobi and Schulze). These forms are the ones redeployed by Stroud himself. In parallel, Hegel contrasts modern with ancient skepticism to the detriment of the former. As I will now proceed to argue, Hegel's characteristically immanent-critical handling of skepticisms is directly relevant to Analytic skeptics such as Stroud—and this despite these Analytics evidently being unaware of and unresponsive to such Hegelian contributions as well as to post-Kantian German idealism in general.

§3 *Hegel's Doubts: The Self-Sublation of Skepticism*

Franks, at several points in his excellent 2005 study *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, appropriately relates the mid-twentieth-century-through-present Analytic epistemological tussles about transcendental arguments and skepticism back to the original rise of Kantian transcendentalism and its immediate post-Kantian reverberations. In so doing, he compares Stroud in particular to two figures shaping the transition from Kant to his German idealist successors: Jacobi⁴⁵ and Schulze.⁴⁶ Like Jacobi,⁴⁷ Stroud has recourse to early-modern skepticism generally, and Humean skepticism specifically, in pushing back against anything transcendental *à la* Kant. And, like the neo-Humean Schulze,⁴⁸

45 Franks 2005, p. 156

46 Ibid., pp. 246-248, 290

47 Jacobi 1994, p. 292

48 Schulze 1911, pp. 15, 18, 21-22, 77-79

Stroud denies that Kantian-style transcendental arguments succeed at vanquishing the specter of a curtain of inaccurate or false appearances draped between subjective mind and objective world. Moreover, Stroud's insistence that vanquishing Humean skepticism is the overriding top priority of the *Critique of Pure Reason* already is to be found in Schulze's 1792 *Aenesidemus*.⁴⁹

Franks is right to see little difference between Jacobi and Schulze at the end of the eighteenth century and Stroud in the middle of the twentieth century. This looks an awful lot like a straightforward case of those not knowing history being doomed to repeat it. Even Strawson, in *The Bounds of Sense*, observes with respect to Kant's epistemological insights that, "These are very great and novel gains in epistemology, so great and so novel that, nearly two hundred years after they were made, they have still not been fully absorbed into the philosophical consciousness."⁵⁰ Strawson reaffirms this damning 1966 verdict apropos Analytic epistemology in a 1999 exchange with Westphal.⁵¹ The latter, a specialist in German idealism who is himself no stranger to the sub-discipline of Analytic epistemology, agrees with Strawson and portrays the sequence of Anglo-American theories of knowledge as "a century-long anachronistic detour" regressing back behind both Hegel and Kant.⁵² Forster similarly alleges that Analytics ignore both ancient skepticism and Hegelian epistemology, relying instead almost exclusively on the early-modern veil of perception generally and its Humean unfurling specifically.⁵³

If what Strawson and Westphal concur regarding the Analytic uptake (or lack thereof) of Kant is in fact true, the failure of the Anglo-American tradition to absorb the many significant lessons from Hegel's philosophy is even more total and complete. With a few notable exceptions, such as the leading representatives of the Pittsburgh and Chicago camps of Analytic neo-Hegelianism, the early-twentieth-century rubbishing of Hegel by Bertrand Russell and company in their break with nineteenth-century British Hegelianism made non-engagement with Hegel's philosophy the enduring norm amongst Analytics. As I hope to show in what follows, Analytic types suffer greatly, without really knowing it, from their congenital Hegel allergy.

49 Ibid., pp. 73-74

50 Strawson 1996, p. 29

51 Westphal 2003, p. 88

52 Ibid., p. 88

53 Forster 1998, pp. 189, 192

The controversies about transcendental arguments and skepticism drawing in Analytic epistemologists, Kant scholars, and philosophers of science powerfully show the prices paid and problems perpetuated by disdain for and ignorance of Hegel's various contributions. As already documented by several scholars—I will be citing these scholars below—Hegel has quite a bit to say about skepticism, including the varieties featuring centrally in Analytic debates about transcendentalism. Of course, Hegel also obviously has an enormous amount to offer anyone concerned with Kant, the transcendental, and idealism. The utter neglect of Hegelian ideas and arguments in the past half-century-plus of Analytic clashes over transcendentalism *vis-à-vis* skepticism is simply indefensible.

I will not reconstruct here in painstaking detail everything Hegel has to say across the arc of his intellectual itinerary about the topic of skepticism. Others already have performed this exegetical labor more or less thoroughly (especially, in the English-language literature, Michael Forster). After merely sketching Hegel's various responses to things skeptical, I will focus on those of his responses most relevant to reconsiderations of the transcendental, particularly in light of tensions along the above-delineated fault line between Strawsonian- and Stroudian-style stances. I will elaborate Hegelian problematizations of Stroudian skepticism in the present section and then of Strawsonian transcendentalism in the subsequent section.

Undoubtedly, the place to begin in any assessment of Hegel in relation to skepticisms, both chronologically and philosophically, is his Jena-period 1802 essay "On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of Its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One." This lengthy rebuttal of Schulze's *Aenesidemus*—as Forster rightly asserts, Schulze here stands in for modern skepticism as a whole from Descartes through the eighteenth-century British empiricists⁵⁴—was published in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* Hegel was co-editing with Schelling at the time. The tail end of this essay's lengthy title already announces a key feature of Hegel's approach to skepticisms: his historical appreciation and philosophical redeployment of the differences between ancient and modern forms of skepticism (with Schulze's neo-Humeanism as "the latest form" of modern skepticism).⁵⁵ Schulze will resurface in the subsequent fourth section of my intervention in terms of a neglected contribution his *Aenesidemus* makes to Hegel's own philosophical development.

54 Forster 1989, pp. 188-189

55 Pippin 1989, p. 96

Hegel's main move is to play off ancient against modern skepticism to the disadvantage of the latter.⁵⁶ In terms of the ancients, Hegel has in mind not only the skeptics themselves, but also such figures as the Plato of the *Parmenides* dialogue. What the Pyrrhonists and this Plato share in common, on the Hegelian account, is the exercise of the art of dialectic, namely, the pitting of competing propositions against each other so as to undermine commitment to any one or several of these propositions. In Plato's *Parmenides*, core categories grounding all thinking and knowing are destabilized without the closure of restabilization. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel, with an eye to his own *Logik* as centrally involving a dialecticization of all categories, points out that the ancient variety of dialectics assaults the very roots of propositions, rather than getting bogged down in the infinite task of attacking particular individual propositions taken one-by-one⁵⁷ (in his later Berlin-era *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel further reinforces the link between his and Plato's dialectics by highlighting the kinetic negativity the latter introduces into categories and concepts⁵⁸). And, Pyrrhonism relies upon confronting all claims with equally powerful counter-claims so as to arrive at *ataraxia* through this equipollence giving rise to the liberating suspension of belief *tout court* (i.e., *epochē*). This ancient art of dialectics is precisely what Hegel credits the Kant of "The Antinomies of Pure Reason" with redeploying at the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁹

Already in 1802, Hegel envisions a philosophy moving both beyond the conflict between more recent skepticism (to be found mainly, but not exclusively, on the side of the early-modern empiricists) and outright dogmatism (epitomized by the rationalist substance metaphysics of such figures as Nicolas Malebranche, Baruch Spinoza, and G.W. Leibniz) as well as beyond the Kantian critical adjudication of this same conflict (an adjudication bound up with Kant's subjectivist transcendental idealism).⁶⁰ This philosophy, which becomes Hegel's own scientific, encyclopedic System with its speculative dialectics, would integrate skepticism without itself becoming fully skeptical as a result.⁶¹ The mature Hegel, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, echoes this relatively youthful

56 Hegel 2000, pp. 322-323, 330, 332; Hegel 1991, §39 p. 80; Hyppolite 1974, pp. 185-186; Inwood 1992, p. 264

57 Hegel 1969, p. 191; Forster 1989, pp. 127-129, 155, 173

58 Hegel 1955a, pg. 49

59 Hegel 1969, pp. 190-192; Hegel 1991, §81 p. 129-130; Hegel 1955b, p. 450; Hegel 1984, p. 281

60 Hegel 2000, pp. 322-323

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323

vision.⁶² In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he specifies that ancient skepticism specifically is the sort representing an essential moment of true philosophy.⁶³

The systematic Hegel of maturity, from the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* onward, unwaveringly insists that the thoroughgoing skepticism of the ancients embodies an indispensable dimension of proper philosophizing. In Hegel's own post-Kantian manner, he differentiates between reason (*Vernunft*) and the understanding (*Verstand*). The latter is reflected in all exercises of sapience (whether common-sensical, philosophical, etc.) treating as absolute the dichotomizing laws of classical, bivalent logic. Relatedly, Hegel is aware that ancient skepticism, by contrast with the modern sort, does not stop short of calling into question even the fundamental laws (identity, contradiction, excluded middle) of (this) logic.⁶⁴

According to Hegel, the binary, black-and-white understanding is always prone to undermining itself, vulnerable to seeing its own distinctions and oppositions becoming problematic by its own lights if and when it is made to look at them closely enough. Hence, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel asserts that *Verstand* can and does give rise out of itself to skepticism, namely, profound doubts about even its most foundational categories, concepts, and inferential procedures.⁶⁵ Ancient skepticism is portrayed in this same context as epitomizing these doubts immanently produced in and by the understanding.

In the mature Hegelian System, the understanding gets inseparably linked with reason. The latter exhibits two sides: one being the negativity of dialectics and the other being the positivity of speculation. *Verstand* sublates itself into the negative side of *Vernunft* through its auto-dialecticization, via its self-subversion of its own commitments, principles, and rules. The positive side of reason brings about speculative resolutions (however ambiguous and contested these might look to various of Hegel's readers) of the dialectical difficulties generated at the intersections of the understanding and the negative side of reason. Hegel is adamant that all three of these dimensions (i.e., *Verstand* and the two aspects of *Vernunft*) are equiprimordial moments of genuinely philosophical thinking, namely, the speculative dialectics of absolute

62 Hegel 1955a, pp. 330, 358, 363-364, 366

63 Hegel 1991, §81 pp. 130-131

64 Forster 1989, pp. 193-197; Inwood 1992, p. 264

65 Hegel 1955a, p. 365

idealism as per Hegel's *System als Wissenschaft*.⁶⁶

Therefore, if ancient skepticism amounts to dialectical reason confronting the understanding with the latter's own contradictions and inconsistencies, then this skepticism, as equivalent to *Verstand*-generated negative *Vernunft*,⁶⁷ is indeed, for Hegel, inherent to authentically philosophical cognition. Correlatively, and starting in 1802, he maintains that dialectical-speculative philosophy, as rational, has nothing to fear from such skepticism insofar as skepticism's doubts bear upon only the claims and arguments of the understanding and not upon reason too.⁶⁸ Relatedly, in his post-Jena *Logik*, he contends that his logical dialectic of negative reason renders skepticisms put forward as independent philosophical positions unto themselves superfluous.⁶⁹

But, what about Hegel's fundamental contrast between ancient and modern skepticism? What does this involve and how is it relevant to more recent epistemological disputes between transcendentalists and skeptics (such as Stroud) as I already have sketched these above? I now will proceed to answer these questions.

Hegel considers modern skepticism to be epitomized by Descartes's "First Meditation." These Cartesian doubts presuppose a split between, on one side, the thinking of minded subjectivity and, on another side, the being of worldly objectivity. On the basis of this presupposed divide, such skepticism sets about raising doubts about whether there is any correspondence between the two separated sides and, if so, whether such correspondence is sufficiently accurate to constitute true knowledge.

The core skeptical worry here is that the thinking of minded subjectivity is entirely, hopelessly mired in mental contents that are wholly fictitious, devoid of any ties to real entities and events in the being of worldly objectivity. Maybe all mental content forms nothing more than a web of illusory appearances woven of unreal dreams and delusions. Although Descartes is a Continental rationalist, the means of his method of radical skepticism are taken up after him as symptomatic of major metaphysical issues primarily by such British empiricists as John Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Mainly due to Hume's influence, Kant,

66 Hegel 1977, pp. 18-19; Hegel 1969, pp. 28, 610-612; Hegel 1991, §79 p. 125, §80 pp. 126-128; Hegel 1971, §467 pp. 226; Hegel 2008, §79 p. 72, §81 p. 73; Harris 1972, p. 176; Harris 1997, pp. 49, 265; Düsing 1976, pp. 210, 246; Elder1980, p. 39; Bourgeois 2000, pp. 119-120; Beiser 2005, p. 164; Johnston 2018b

67 Hyppolite 1974, p. 188; Hyppolite 1977, p. 70; Fulda 1965, pp. 36, 43

68 Hegel 2000, p. 332; Hegel 1955a, pp. 330-331, 344, 367-369; Forster 1989, pp. 107-108

69 Hegel 1969, pp. 831-833; Hegel 1991, §78 pg. 124, §81 pg. 128

as Hegel views him, also is affected to his detriment by such Cartesian veil-of-appearances skepticism (on display first and foremost in the guise of Kant's subjectivist transcendental idealism as structured around the empiricist-type purported limits of possible experience partitioning objects-as-appearances from things-in-themselves).⁷⁰

In terms of Hegel's contrast between ancient and modern skepticism, the latter, in light of the former, is insufficiently skeptical.⁷¹ As I hint in the preceding paragraph, Cartesian-style skepticism is not skeptical about its presupposition of certain versions of thinking-being, mind-world, subject-object dichotomies. On a Hegelian interpretation of the history of philosophy, ancient skeptics would not have hesitated to deploy doubt-inducing equipollence tactics against this (dogmatic) assumption of modern skepticism.

Furthermore, Hegel emphasizes that modern skeptics, unlike ancient ones, fail to call into question how things appear to them.⁷² In other words, they presume that, even if the appearances they experience are inaccurate *vis-à-vis* mind-independent objective reality, this experience itself is accurate *vis-à-vis* these same appearances. Although thinking is fallible with respect to the extra-mental/subjective, it is infallible with respect to the intra-mental/subjective.

For both Hegel and the ancient skeptics on his construal of them, even the experience of appearances cannot be assumed really to be what it superficially seems and is taken to be by the experiencing subject. At one point in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel observes, "What Scepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such (*das Gegenständliche als solches*), but its own relationship to it (*sein eigenes Verhalten zu ihm*)."⁷³ Modern skepticism makes "objective reality as such" disappear behind the other side of its veil, but not how this supposed reality manifests to it on this side of its veil (i.e., "its own relationship to it"). In the mature *Logic*, Hegel likewise stresses that modern skepticism *à la* the empiricists fails to be consistently and consequently skeptical in refraining, by contrast with ancient skepticism, from going so far as to question how things appear to conscious experience.⁷⁴

The entire main body of the 1807 *Phenomenology* can be taken as centrally involving a calling-into-question even of whether things

70 Hegel 1969, pp. 396, 777; Pippin 1989, p. 168

71 Hegel 2000, p. 339; Pippin 1989, p. 96; Forster 1989, p. 11-13, 200; Forster 1998, pp. 132-134, 149

72 Forster 1989, p. 189, 221; Inwood 1992, p. 264

73 Hegel 1970a, p. 160; Hegel 1977, p. 124

74 Hegel 1969, p. 396; Hegel 2008, §32 pg. 25, §38[pg. 28

really appear to experiencing subjects as these subjects initially and spontaneously register and interpret these very appearances. On this phenomenological-dialectical "pathway of doubt" (*der Weg des Zweifels*) or "way of despair" (*der Weg des Verzweiflung*),⁷⁵ each figure/shape (*Gestalt*) of consciousness undoes itself by discovering that what it habitually took its experiences to be and be about (i.e., what this consciousness seemed to be "for itself" [*für sich*]) turns out not to be what these experiences truly are and are about (i.e., what this consciousness actually is "in itself" [*an sich*]). An idea at the very core of the dialectics unfurled in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one Hegel credits the ancient skeptics (unlike modern ones) with foreshadowing, is that subjects can be mistaken even about what they consciously experience and how their appearances truly appear to them. Of course, this key Hegelian thesis paves the way for and is retroactively reinforced by the suspicions associated with such subsequent figures as Friedrich Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (with these post-Hegelian "masters of suspicion" arguably being locatable within the skeptical traditions of interest to Hegel himself). From the nineteenth century onward, history, ideology, and the unconscious add to ancient-skeptical and Hegelian-dialectical reasons for doubting that various forms of conscious mindedness and like-mindedness reliably can know in truth even what and how they experience.

At this juncture, it should be self-evident that Hegel would treat Stroudian skepticism as no different-in-kind from the modern varieties upon which Stroud himself avowedly relies. Therefore, Hegel's reaction to Stroud's skepticism would be the same. He would charge that it is not skeptical enough in two respects. First, it dogmatically presupposes as unquestionable the highly questionable picture of reality as neatly partitioned into subjective and objective dimensions, with mind on one side and world on another. Second, it uncritically assumes an unproblematic relationship between the experiencer and his/her experiences. Yet, how might a Stroudian push back against these Hegelian objections to Cartesian-style skepticism? And, does Hegel offer any additional considerations relevant to ancient, modern, and/or Stroudian skepticism?

There indeed is more Hegel has to say about various permutations of skepticism. To begin with, Hegel's Jena-period "Aphorisms from the Wastebook" (1803-1806) contain some remarks warranting attention in the present context. One aphorism has it that, "The questions which philosophy does not answer are answered in that they should not be so

75 Hegel 1970a, p. 72; Hegel 1977, p. 49

posed.”⁷⁶ Soon after this observation, Hegel alleges that:

Universal doubt is easily conceived and asserted, but the question is whether it is true. The empty word, unless the whole nature of things be denied, is a lie; and it is terrible what men want to deceive and persuade themselves and others of (*Zweifeln an allem ist leicht gedacht und gesagt, aber die Frage ist, ob es wahr ist? Das leere Wort, wenn nicht die ganze Natur des Wesens sich verleugnet, ist eine Lüge, und es ist entsetzlich, was die Menschen sich selbst und andere belügen und überreden wollen*).⁷⁷

To these two aphorisms, taken together, should be added a subsequent observation made by Hegel in his Berlin *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: Radical (modern) skepticism is, strictly speaking, irrefutable.⁷⁸ But, rather than being a virtue, irrefutability is a vice.

What all of the immediately preceding signifies is that, on Hegel’s assessment, a Berkeley or a Stroud always effortlessly can “conceive and assert” an extreme, solipsism-style skepticism. A Berkeleyan can verbally conjure away any and every material real(ity) again and again. A Stroudian repeatedly can posit *ad nauseam* an unbridgeable chasm separating thinking from being, mind from world. However, as the saying goes, talk is cheap.

Following a procedure of prudent weighing-up of reasons for and against employed by, for instance, Hume himself in his assault on the very notion of religious miracles,⁷⁹ the Jena-era Hegel indicates that modern-skeptic verbiage (as “empty words”),⁸⁰ when set against the overwhelmingly massive body of evidence testifying against it (i.e., “the whole nature of things”), looks to be a nest of misleading falsehoods (i.e., “a lie”). What is more, this same Hegel subtly gestures at Descartes’s “First Meditation,” specifically, its famous skeptical scenario in which an all-powerful evil deceiver makes it such that even the most certain-seeming non-empirical, purely conceptual judgments (of an analytic and/or *a priori* sort), along the lines of “2 + 2 = 4,” are really false. Hegel insinuates that the only evil deceivers to be worried about are those persons who seek to cast themselves and/or others into abysses of

76 Hegel 2002, p. 248

77 Hegel 1970b, pg. 549; Hegel 2002, pp. 248-249

78 Hegel 1955a, pp. 328-330

79 Hume 1993 pp. 77-79, 81, 87-88

80 Hegel 1977, pp. 50-52, 56

hyperbolic doubts (“it is terrible what men want to deceive and persuade themselves and others of”).

Additionally, Hegel takes irrefutable insistences upon impossible-to-solve problems, such as modern skepticism’s radical doubts trading upon an absolutized, uncrossable divide between subjectivity and objectivity, as symptomatic of barren cul-de-sacs arrived at via wrong turns, rather than philosophically productive and decisive conclusions. More precisely, Hegel sees skeptical scenarios such as Descartes’s omnipotent malicious genius—he would perceive twentieth-century versions of this scenario (i.e., brains in vats or matrices) in the same way—as reductions-to-the-absurd of the one or more premises responsible for absolutizing modern variations of the distinction between, on one side, thinking-mind-subject and, on another side, being-world-object. If anything, Cartesian, empiricist, and Stroudian skepticisms are, in truth, red flags signaling that one has taken prior missteps somewhere along the way dead-ending in these bogs of uncertainties. It appears that what holds for the natural sciences, which take a dim view of the permanently irrefutable and the forever unsolvable, holds too for Hegelian philosophical *Wissenschaft*.

Elsewhere, I have reconstructed in detail Hegel’s doctrine of modal categories.⁸¹ On the basis of this reconstruction, I can state here that Hegel is adamant about distinguishing between, on the one hand, concretely potential possibilities arising from something already given and, on the other hand, the empty unreality of merely logical possibilities with no links to established actuality.⁸² In relation to this distinction, Cartesian-style skeptical scenarios involving deceitful, manipulative demons, scientists, robots, or whatever else would amount to nothing more than the trivial products of playing with permutations of purely logical possibilities (what Robert Pippin, in *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, characterizes as “epistemically idle” doubts⁸³). Within recent Analytic debates, Peacocke similarly resists the sorts of doubts exemplified by the hypothesis of a “permanently envatted brain.”⁸⁴ He suggests that Stroudian-style skeptical objections to transcendental arguments can be sidelined by situating them on the former side of a distinction between metaphysical (i.e., merely logical)

81 Johnston 2018b

82 Hegel 1991, §143 pg. 216

83 Pippin 1989, pp. 98, 250

84 Peacocke 2009a, p. 760

possibilities and real (i.e., actually potential) possibilities.⁸⁵

The entire preceding discussion of Hegel on skepticism pushed off from his 1802 essay “On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of Its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One.” Prior to the 1807 *Phenomenology*, Hegel shares with many of his fellow German-speaking intellectuals a nostalgic, romanticizing view of ancient Greece. Accordingly, the early Hegel’s attacks on Schulze and similar Cartesian- and empiricist-type skeptics tend to convey the impression that Hegel wholeheartedly embraces ancient skepticism and unreservedly repudiates modern skepticism.

However, starting in the *Phenomenology* (particularly its renowned interpretation of Sophocles’s *Antigone*), Hegel breaks with romantic nostalgia for the supposed “paradise lost” of the Greek *polis* of antiquity. Relatedly, he sees history generally as a one-way street and the historical advent of modernity specifically as irreversible. Hence, the post-1807 Hegel, as regards skepticism, does not simply laud the ancient and condemn the modern sort. Indeed, the later Hegel, beginning in 1807, poses objections against the skepticism of antiquity. Correlatively but conversely, aspects of modern Cartesian and post-Cartesian skepticism, up to and including their integration into Kantian critical philosophy, play crucial roles in the methodology and metaphysics of the mature Hegelian System.

In Hegel’s Berlin *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he criticizes ancient skepticism for its allegedly contingent deployment of dialectics.⁸⁶ On his assessment, skeptics like the Pyrrhonists and their ilk, in exercising their equipollence method, are doubly arbitrary. First, they are inclined to render dubitable only those particular claims they happen to come across as espoused by others (thereby also getting mired in the impossible-to-complete task of refuting the potentially infinite number of particular claims⁸⁷). Second, they unsystematically select counter-claims to play off against the particular claims they encounter.

I might additionally mention that, from a Hegelian perspective, there is a dogmatic element to the equipollence skepticism of certain of the ancients. It arguably is a matter of dogmatic belief to be completely convinced that every thesis can and should be perfectly counterbalanced by a corresponding antithesis. Why would it be the case that a fifty-fifty equilibrium always holds between all given claims and their (however

85 Ibid., pp. 760-762, 766

86 Hegel 1955a, p. 331

87 Forster 1989, pp. 133-134

selected) specific counter-claims? What, if anything, licenses confidence in the assumed or purported universality and invariability of equipollence itself?

When Hegel depicts ancient skepticism in the *Phenomenology* as frenzied and self-devouring,⁸⁸ as bringing about the opposite of the *ataraxia* it desires, I suspect that what I have just said about dogmatism regarding equipollence is part of what he has in mind. This is because, if ancient skepticism is truly skeptical to the very end, becoming skeptical about the dogma of its own defining equipollence procedure,⁸⁹ then it becomes skeptical about its very skepticism. Incidentally, I here disagree with Forster, who contends that Hegel concurs with the ancient skeptics about the ubiquity of equipollent balance between all claims and counter-claims under the sun.⁹⁰ Forster’s contention risks rendering the dialectically self-destructive character of the ancient skeptical figure/shape of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* unintelligible.

Hegel, beginning in the *Phenomenology*, portrays his own “skepticism” (i.e., Hegelian dialectics) as necessary, non-arbitrary, systematic, and methodical. When he refers to his philosophy as a thoroughgoing, self-completing skepticism,⁹¹ he means precisely this. To be more exact, in his immanent critiques of phenomenological figures/shapes of consciousness and logical categories as self-dialecticizing *qua* auto-undermining, he seeks to demonstrate that these *Gestalten* and *Kategorien*, themselves the roots of all particular claims and counter-claims, internally spawn out of themselves doubts about themselves.

This self-portrayal by Hegel of his dialectics brings into play and depends upon another component of his critique of skepticism (in this case, of ancient and modern variants alike). What lends the subversive negativity of dialectics its necessity, non-arbitrariness, systematicity, and methodicalness is the fact that the self-dialecticizing *qua* auto-undermining phenomenological *Gestalten* and logical *Kategorien* flow into each other. In other words, when these figures/shapes and categories get negated by their immanently produced (self-)contradictions, it is not as though the resulting impasses between theses and antitheses bring the process to a halt at the sheer nothingness of utter nullity.

Instead, the auto-negation of a given *Gestalt* or *Kategorie* gives rise to a particular successor figure/shape or category overcoming the

88 Hegel 1977, p. 124-126; Hyppolite 1974, p. 188

89 Forster 1998, p. 129

90 Forster 1989, p. 133

91 Hegel 1977, p. 50-52, 56; Habermas 1971, p. 13; Forster 1998, p. 114

self-contradiction(s) plaguing its immediate predecessor. In Hegel's eyes, both ancient and modern skepticisms limit dialectical phenomena to the sterile impasses of unproductive indeterminate negation whose indeterminacy is simple nothingness. By contrast, his dialectics essentially entail the generative processes of productive determinate negation whose determinacy is a specific result with a precise content responding to the contradictions giving rise to this very result.⁹²

Determinate negation is what enchains together the self-undermining series of *Gestalten* and *Kategorien* into the exhaustive organization of a "self-completing skepticism." Jean Hyppolite, Jürgen Habermas, and Westphal all appropriately highlight the importance of the Hegelian distinction between determinate and indeterminate negation for Hegel's treatments of skepticism.⁹³

Anticipating my Hegel-inspired response to Strawson's transcendental-without-transcendental-idealism (as well as, relatedly, to Analytic epistemology in general) to be articulated in the next section, the Hegelian dialectic's replacement of indeterminate with determinate negation entails, against indeterminate negation, that contradiction does not neatly and cleanly separate the mind from the world by depositing the former in the void of total indeterminacy. Determinate negation implies that there is a sort of stickiness to the world, that the contradictory elements and their residues cling to the contradiction itself and its (speculative) sublation/resolution. Matters having to do with the (degrees of) separation (or lack thereof) between mind and world will be central to my staging of Hegel *contra* Strawson below.

I will bring this section's staging of Hegel *contra* Stroud to a close by reconsidering Hegel's positioning *vis-à-vis* both ancient and modern skepticism. Throughout much of the preceding, it likely has seemed as though Hegel is overwhelmingly positive about ancient skepticism and overwhelmingly negative about modern skepticism. For instance, Pippin indicates that Hegel is utterly uninterested in Cartesian-type doubts.⁹⁴

Forster goes much further in this vein. He depicts Hegel as leaving modern skepticism to be thoroughly refuted by a philosophically superior ancient skepticism.⁹⁵ If this depiction is accurate, then, assuming Kant's transcendentalism to be motivated in part by the desire to lay to rest Humean doubts, Forster's Hegel would judge the Kantian transcendental

92 Hegel 1977, pp. 51, 56; Hegel 1955a, pp. 330-331

93 Hyppolite 1997, pp. 12, 79, 117-118, 186; Habermas 1971, p. 18; Westphal 1989, p.163

94 Pippin 1989, p. 95

95 Forster 1989, p. 103; Forster 1998, p. 5

to be superfluous for this purpose (since the already-accomplished labors of the ancient skeptics would by themselves suffice). What is more, Forster relies upon there being a continuity in Hegel's views about skepticism from 1802's "On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy" onward. Starting in 1802, according to Forster, Hegel consistently lavishes attention on "philosophically compelling" ancient skepticism and proportionally neglects with disdain "philosophically worthless" modern skepticism.⁹⁶

Yet, insistence upon Hegel's 1802 attitudes towards skepticism ancient and modern as decisive for his later, mature philosophy runs up against the fact of his shift of attitude with respect to the ancients occurring at the end of his time in Jena. As I noted a short while ago, the 1807 *Phenomenology*, with its famous philosophical reading of Sophocles's *Antigone*, announces Hegel's break with his surrounding intellectual culture's tendency to fetishize and idealize the ancients. The golden age was not so golden after all. Paradise had to be lost—and this because it always-already was lost, never actually having been the paradise existing solely in the backward-cast gaze of the nostalgic beholder.

Of course, Forster or someone else committed to similar interpretations of Hegel's rapport with skepticism could retort that the general de-romanticization of antiquity as a whole initiated within the pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has no bearing upon the special status of ancient skepticism specifically within the Hegelian philosophical apparatus. Greek tragic theater and the dialectical practice of equipollence arguments, the former artistic and the latter philosophical, are, after all, two distinct (albeit closely related) cultural phenomena. But, I would counter that Hegel, at least in the works of his maturity, evinces his characteristic ambivalence toward both ancient and modern skepticism. Such ambivalence is almost a matter of principle given the nature of the Hegelian dialectic and its omnipresence affecting Hegel's interpretations and appropriations of each and every component of the history of philosophy.

Therefore, it is not the case that Hegel, at least from 1807 onward, is unambivalently approving of ancient skepticism and, with equal unambivalence, disapproving of modern skepticism. He raises serious critical objections against ancient skepticism. As I already signaled above, the critical lesson of the *Phenomenology's* portrayal of the ancient-skeptical figure/shape of consciousness is that its equipollence procedures, while intentionally aiming at *ataraxia via epochē*,

96 Forster 1998, p. 128-129, 188-189

unintentionally bring about the opposite, namely, the infinite unrest and anguish of forever-multiplying doubts and uncertainties. This is because it fails to get at the categorial sources capable of generating indefinitely proliferating multitudes of particular claims and counter-claims.

Forster and Michael Inwood align the difference between the calm of *ataraxia* and the agitation of doubt with ancient and modern skepticisms respectively.⁹⁷ However, this alignment threatens to obscure Hegel's contention that ancient skepticism fuels an unsettling vortex of uncertainties at least as much as does modern skepticism. The ancient skeptic differs from the modern one in aiming to achieve the end of *ataraxia* through the means of equipollence-induced doubt, rather than doubt being the end. But, when all is said and done, antiquity's skepticism actually brings about—what any *Gestalt* of consciousness really accomplishes, instead of what it intends or imagines itself to accomplish, is what truly matters to Hegel—an amount of the anxiety of uncertainty comparable to that generated by modernity's skepticism.

Indeed, Hegel's rhetoric, especially in the *Phenomenology*, announces the avowed modernness of his self-completing skepticism, namely, his speculative dialectics. The art of “tarrying with the negative,”⁹⁸ of enduring the ceaseless agitation of kinetic negativity and the doubt and despair to which it gives rise,⁹⁹ bears little resemblance to the placid balance of *epochē*'s equipollence. As a famous passage in the *Phenomenology*'s justifiably celebrated preface has it:

The True is... the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose (*Das Wahre ist... der bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist; und weil jedes, indem es sich absondert, ebenso unmittelbar [sich] auflöst, ist er ebenso die durchsichtige und einfache Ruhe*).¹⁰⁰

It would be very difficult to find something further removed from *ataraxia* than “the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk.” If the intoxicated perpetual motion of the Hegelian System (i.e., “the True” [*das Wahre*]) involves *ataraxia* (i.e., “transparent and simple repose” [*die durchsichtige und einfache Ruhe*]), it is a highly peculiar kind quite

97 Forster 1989, p. 187; Inwood 1992, p. 265

98 Hegel 1977, p. 19

99 Ibid., pp. 49, 130, 332

100 (Hegel 1970a, p. 46; Hegel 1977, p. 27

different from the ancient strain.

Hegel here indicates that his “*ataraxia*” amounts to a dialectical convergence of the opposites of repose (i.e., the cool serenity sought by ancient skepticism) and drunkenness (i.e., the reeling disorientation bound up with modern skepticism). Considering the preponderance of language associated with restlessness and negativity in Hegel's discourse, I would venture that the sublating coincidence of drunkenness and repose occurs under the heading of the former and not the latter. In other words, the distinction between repose and drunkenness is a distinction internal to drunkenness (rather than internal to repose). That is to say, within the Hegelian edifice, things are unevenly weighted in favor of modernity's agitation over antiquity's calm. The fact that Hegel first equates “the True” with “the Bacchanalian revel” (instead of with “transparent and simple repose”) signals as much.

In the *Phenomenology* and thereafter, Hegel is a decidedly modern thinker. He no longer romanticizes the ancients, including the ancient skeptics. He explicitly criticizes ancient skepticism. Likewise, Hegel makes a philosophical virtue out of the agitation it unintentionally (and modern skepticism intentionally) secretes in place of *ataraxia*.

Furthermore, Hegel, *pace* Forster in particular, integrates aspects of modern skepticism (especially as featuring in the work of Descartes and Kant) into the very foundations of his philosophy *qua* encyclopedic, systematic *Wissenschaft* (something Hans Friedrich Fulda, among others, underscores¹⁰¹). Habermas is right to depict Hegel's mature thinking as involving a radicalization of modern skepticism¹⁰² (rather than a substitution of ancient for modern skepticism). Moreover, I am sympathetic to Stephen Houlgate's situating of the all-important beginning of Hegel's System (i.e., the start of *Logik* as led into by *Phänomenologie*) in a specifically modern epistemological tradition running from the Cartesian sweeping away of all presuppositions via hyperbolic doubts to the anti-dogmatism of Kantian critical demands placed on all knowledge-claims.¹⁰³ Incidentally, Forster, despite my differences with him that I am emphasizing at this juncture, helpfully observes that Hegel (unlike Schelling) is deeply concerned with epistemology despite his undeserved reputation as a dogmatic metaphysician thumbing his nose at the sorts of epistemological concerns epitomized by Kantian critique. As Forster notes, Hegel's criticisms of Kant's epistemology are not to be taken as indicating a

101 Fulda 1965, p. 25-26

102 Habermas 1971, pp. 9, 13, 15

103 Houlgate 2006, pp. 26-28, 37, 158-159, 162-163

disregard for epistemology *überhaupt*.¹⁰⁴

For Hegel, modern skepticism is an essential moment, although still only a moment, of properly scientific (*als wissenschaftliche*) philosophy. Despite this skepticism's severe flaws and shortcomings, it represents philosophical modernity's (attempted) liquidation of all dogmatism. Faced with the sorts of doubts mobilizing by the likes of Descartes and Stroud, and under the shadow of Kant's critical-epistemological strictures, the Hegelian System, in its thoroughgoing modernness, gets itself well and truly underway by radicalizing skepticism to such an extent that it sweeps away all conceivable worldviews with their assumptions (i.e., the figures/shapes of consciousness sublated in the *Phenomenology*) and starts instead with the minimal absolute necessity of an impossible-not-to-presuppose/posit initial condition (i.e., the *Ur*-category of mere, sheer indeterminate Being at the beginning of the *Logic*).

Hegel seeks a (late-)modern way beyond (early-)modern skepticism (such as its Cartesian and Humean variants redeployed by Stroud). This way involves a new post-Kantian, dialectical-speculative logic as a transcendental without the subjectivist anti-realism of transcendental idealism. As will be seen momentarily in the following section, Hegel's realist (meta-)transcendentalism, although foreshadowing Strawson,¹⁰⁵ problematizes and critically supplements the Analytic epistemological milieu to which Strawson belongs.

§4 *Not Transcendental Enough: Too Smart to Ask Stupid Questions*

As I have suggested at earlier points above, Analytic philosophical debates about transcendental arguments, debates tied to the names "Strawson" and "Stroud," largely replay the tensions between Kant and certain of his early-modern predecessors (particularly Hume). Strawson defends Kantian transcendentalism (albeit without transcendental idealism) and Stroud advocates Humean (and, behind it, Cartesian) skepticism. In relation to the histories of both modern and Analytic philosophy, Pippin and Westphal each maintain that Hegel adopts a transcendental approach to rebutting early-modern forms of skepticism.¹⁰⁶ In an endnote, Pippin explicitly refers to Stroud as repeating Schulze's

104 Forster 1989, pp. 101-102, 111

105 Stekeler-Weithofer 1992, p. 25)

106 Pippin 1989, pp. 94-97, 99; Westphal 2003, p. 57

neo-Humean critique of Kant,¹⁰⁷ thereby indirectly hinting at a possible affinity between Hegelian and Strawsonian positions.

I very much agree with Pippin and Westphal that Hegel intends to preserve aspects of Kant's transcendental and redeploys it, both implicitly and explicitly, against modern skepticisms especially. But, like Westphal,¹⁰⁸ I disagree with Pippin about just how Kantian (or not) Hegel remains in his redeployment of transcendentalism (a disagreement I spell out in detail elsewhere¹⁰⁹). By contrast with Pippin's Kantianizing deflationary interpretation of Hegel, I stress the significant differences between, on the one hand, Kant's transcendental idealism in its anti-realist subjectivism and, on the other hand, Hegel's absolute idealism in its realist anti-subjectivism. Most importantly, the categories of Hegelian *Logik* are, in relation to the natural and cultural Reals of *Realphilosophie*, ontological as well as epistemological possibility conditions, being objectively real in addition to, as with Kant's categories and the like, subjectively ideal.¹¹⁰ Additionally, Hegel's System is put forward as truly beginning without presuppositions and with the logical category of indeterminate Being—a (transcendental) category no skeptic, no matter how radical, can doubt, deny, avoid, etc. as necessary to both thinking and being.

With Strawson and against Pippin, Hegel severs the link between the transcendental and idealism. I will not rehearse on this occasion Hegel's complex critique of Kant or, reflecting this, my critique of Pippin. For now, suffice it to say that the many-pronged Hegelian attack on Kant's theoretical philosophy—I particularly have in mind Hegel's objections to the interrelated Kantian notions of the thing-in-itself, the noumenal-phenomenal distinction, and the limits of possible experience—contains additional lines of response to early-modern/Stroudian skepticism complementing the rebuttals I already sketched in the prior section of this intervention. Countless others, as well as me,¹¹¹ have covered these facets of the multifaceted Kant-Hegel rapport.

At this juncture, I want to return to Schulze, the neo-Humean skeptic whose doubts about Kantian transcendentalism in his 1792 *Aenesidemus* prompt the young Hegel to pen his 1802 essay "On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of Its Different

107 Pippin 1989, p. 279

108 Westphal 1993, pp. 263-272

109 Johnston 2018b,

110 *Ibid.*; Johnston 2013b

111 Johnston 2018b

Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One.” Prior to 1802, Schulze’s text influenced the development of post-Kantian German idealism almost as soon as it appeared. The early Fichte already was affected by the critiques of K.L. Reinhold as well as Kant in the *Aenesidemus*. In particular, Fichte’s own early efforts took to heart Schulze’s skeptical assaults undermining the soundness of Reinhold’s *Grundsatz* (i.e., his elementary “first principle” functioning like Descartes’s axiomatic “*Cogito, ergo sum*” in an attempt at a deductive, systematized reconstruction of Kant’s theoretical philosophy). Schulze inspires Fichte, as reflected in the latter’s review of *Aenesidemus*, to try to get back behind Reinhold’s *Grundsatz* so as to identify an even more fundamental, indubitable first principle on the basis of which to ground and derive critical transcendental idealism.¹¹² This leads straight into the canonical first version (1794) of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

To cut a long story short, Fichte’s own *Grundsatz*, replacing that of Reinhold’s “Principle of Consciousness” in response to Schulze’s skeptical criticisms of Reinhold, itself relies upon appeal to the epistemological power of intellectual intuition. For both Kant and Hegel, such a power is to be shunned as epistemologically suspect. Schulze specifically inspires Fichte to double-down on the Reinholdian strategy of intellectual-intuition-driven deduction from a first principle. By contrast, modern skepticism generally, of which Schulze is merely the “latest” representative—by Hegel’s lights, this orientation includes the Descartes of the “First Meditation,” the British empiricists, and aspects of Kant’s theoretical philosophy—helps inspire Hegel to replace intellectual intuition with dialectics as a means of moving beyond the confines of Kantian (and Fichtean) subjectivism while simultaneously respecting the epistemological constraints of Kantian critique (including its prohibition of recourse to intellectual intuition).¹¹³

Yet, in addition to this well-known story of Schulze’s impact on the initial phases of post-Kantian idealism in the 1790s, there is another, less appreciated feature of *Aenesidemus* that, I believe, prefigures the later stages of German idealism as represented mainly by Schelling and Hegel. This feature will bring me back to considering the implications of Hegelianism for the Strawsonian position in Analytic controversies regarding transcendentalism. Schulze makes a demand of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, albeit one he is skeptical can ever be met, that transcendental philosophy provide an account of the very genesis

112 Fichte 1988, p. 77

113 Schulze 1991, p. 17

(*Entstehung*) of its cognizing subjectivity.¹¹⁴

This Schulzean stress on the genetic simply gets folded by Fichte into the formal, logical movement of deduction. But, Schulze’s *Entstehung* arguably reappears in more temporal and historical guises both in Hölderlin’s 1795 “On Judgment and Being” and in Schelling’s and Hegel’s Hölderlin-inspired philosophical programs starting in 1796 (with the above-mentioned “Earliest System-Program of German Idealism”). I hypothesize this even though Schelling’s and Hegel’s writings leave it unclear how (un)aware they were of their debts to this aspect of *Aenesidemus*. Relatedly, Forster, in his *Hegel and Skepticism*, refers to “*Über Urtheil und Seyn*” and contends that Hegel’s dialectical and historical extrapolations from Hölderlin’s fragment are more philosophically satisfying than Schelling’s epistemologically cavalier flights of intuitive fancy. But, Forster, at odds with Hegel’s 1807 rupture with romanticizations of ancient Greece, here misattributes to Hegel a steadfast view of the Greek *polis* of antiquity as having been an original harmonious One or Whole (akin to Hölderlin’s Being) divided and broken exclusively in and through subsequent historical developments.¹¹⁵

Schelling and Hegel, starting in the mid-1790s, both set themselves philosophical agendas, ones they remain faithful to for the rest of their lives, that centrally involve rising to the challenge Schulze, doubting it ever can be overcome, raises against the Kantian legacy (just as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all strive to defy Jacobi’s anti-Kantian contention according to which a philosophy cannot simultaneously be rigorously systematic and affirming of human freedom). Insofar as the Schellingian and Hegelian permutations of this project are partly conducted at more-than-empirical levels, they fairly can be portrayed as genetic meta-transcendental supplements to the static transcendental of Kant’s critical philosophy. Schelling delineates the relevant genetic processes in the terms of *Naturphilosophie* and/or theosophy. Hegel elaborates such pathways for the emergence of (transcendental) subject out of (meta-transcendental) substance in relation to both *Natur und Geist*.

But, before I go any further along these lines, what relevance does the preceding have for Analytic epistemology in general and Strawson in particular? There are two interlinked consequences crucial for my purposes. First, Strawson’s de-idealized, realist transcendental neglects the genetic problematic arising in the immediate Kantian aftermath with Schulze, Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel. Second, the entire twentieth-century array of Anglo-American approaches to knowledge within which

114 Ibid., pp. 43, 127

115 Forster 1989, pp. 48-50, 53-54

Strawson is situated, minus such a genetic dimension, take for granted that there is something self-sufficient and rock-bottom about knowledge itself as a problem. They fail to inquire about how it is that knowing comes to be a fundamental difficulty in the first place. What do I mean by this?

If one does not accept the notion that transcendental subjectivity *à la* transcendental idealism always-already exists as an eternal formal reality, then one is under the obligation to ask and answer questions about its preconditions and emergence. Similarly, if one is committed to any non-dualist, anti-subjective form of immanentism/monism also rejecting metaphysical realism—I consider this to include any authentic version of materialism and/or naturalism—then there is an ontological enigma to be confronted prior to the epistemological puzzle of if or how mind comes to know world. Assuming, in line with a genetic non-subjectivism, thinking to arise from being, subjects to surface out of substances, what makes possible the very coming into existence of a separation between subjectivity and substantiality/objectivity such that spanning this divide becomes a problem, namely, the problem of epistemology as such?

Philosophically prior to a modern epistemology hosting disputes between transcendentalists and skeptics, there must be an ontology delineating the possibility conditions for this very epistemology *tout court*. With the adjective “transcendental” traditionally designating epistemological conditions of possibility, these ontological conditions of possibility would have to be qualified as meta-transcendental. Insofar as modern epistemology is predicated upon there being a mind-world, subject-object gulf to span if knowledge is to be attained, this field of problems is itself made possible by the real genesis of this gulf itself. Cassam, one of the leading participants in contemporary Analytic discussions concerning the transcendental, observes:

An epistemological how-possible question asks how knowledge of some specific kind is possible. Such questions are obstacle-dependent since they are motivated by the thought that there are actual or apparent obstacles to the existence of whatever kind of knowledge is in question.¹¹⁶

What Cassam has to say here about particular instances of specific “how-possible” questions in epistemology also holds for the question of how epistemology itself is possible in the first place. How

.....
116 Cassam 2007, p. 51

are these epistemological how-possible questions themselves possible? To the extent that epistemology depends upon the “obstacle” of the division between thinking and being or subjectivity and objectivity, the ontological question of how this obstacle itself is possible enjoys a certain philosophical priority. In short, the ontology of anthropogenesis (both phylogenetic and ontogenetic) comes before and paves the way for epistemology. Prior to a transcendental theory of knowledge as the overcoming of the subject-object gap, there has to be a meta-transcendental theory of being as generating this very gap within itself.

Pace most partisans of epistemology as first philosophy, the fundamental miracle to be explained is not the arrival at some correspondence-version of knowledge (whether characterized as “justified true belief” or otherwise). The real mystery is not that subject can (re)connect with substance, but that subject separated off from substance to begin with—thus creating the very obstacle of separation making possible knowledge as the overcoming of this same separation. A Hegel-inspired meta-transcendental, genetic-diachronic “error-first ontology” (EFO) is a necessary accompaniment to any transcendental, static-synchronic epistemology (whether that of Kant, Strawson, or whoever else) obsessed with verifying the credentials of true knowledge.

With the phrase “error-first,” I have in mind the amazing fact that there come to be beings (i.e., human beings) who could be said somehow or other to fall out of being itself, becoming disconnected from or untethered to what is such that these peculiar beings can and do wander about in dreams, fantasies, fictions, hallucinations, illusions, and the like. For any immanentist/monist of a materialist/naturalist type, this is (or should be) the most incredible thing of all. What is more, there admittedly is a cross-resonance between my use of the word “error” here and what Heidegger means when he speaks of ontological (not just ontic) “errancy” (*die Irre*). In Heidegger’s essay “On the Essence of Truth,” he states:

Man errs (*Der Mensch irrt*). Man does not merely stray into errancy (*Der Mensch geht nicht erst in die Irre*). He is always astray in errancy, because as ek-sistent he in-sists and so already is caught in errancy. The errancy through which man strays is not something which, as it were, extends alongside man like a ditch into which he occasionally stumbles; rather, errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the *Da-sein* (*inneren Verfassung des Da-seins*) into which historical man is admitted.¹¹⁷

.....
117 Heidegger 1967, p. 92; Heidegger 1993, p. 133

On combined Hegelian and dialectical materialist grounds, I eschew the notion of ontological difference to which Heidegger ties this thesis about *Dasein's* essential errancy—with erring, for him, amounting to an inherent tendency towards preoccupation with ontic beings at the expense of ontological Being. That said, the “error” of which I speak apropos “error-first ontology” is, like Heidegger’s inherent *Irre*, not one or more isolated falsities or mistakes but, instead, part of the basic structure or nature of human being.

Before pivoting from Heidegger to Deleuze in following the thread of EFO, *Being and Time* contains a reference to a noteworthy passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the preface to the B-edition, Kant comments regarding his “new refutation of psychological idealism”:

No matter how innocent idealism may be held to be as regards the essential ends of metaphysics (though in fact it is not so innocent), it always remains a scandal of philosophy and universal human reason that the existence of things outside us (*das Dasein der Dinge außer uns*) (from which we after all get the whole matter of our cognitions, even for our inner sense) should have to be assumed merely on faith (*Glauben*), and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof.¹¹⁸

In 1785, two years prior to the B-edition of the first *Critique*, Jacobi invokes belief/faith (*Glaube*) as the sole basis for affirming “the existence of things outside us.”¹¹⁹ In 1787, the same year as the second edition of Kant’s crowning theoretical achievement, Jacobi indeed maintains in print that, “my conviction (*Überzeugung*) about the existence of real things outside me (*wirkliche Dinge außer mir*) is only a matter of *faith* (*Glaube*)” and that, “as a realist I am forced to say that all knowledge derives exclusively from faith (*aus dem Glaube komme*).”¹²⁰

From Jacobi’s perspective, Kant is responsible for scandalizing himself, since his idealist-*qua*-anti-realist “denying of knowledge to make room for faith”¹²¹ places the being of things-in-themselves (i.e., “*das Dasein der Dinge außer uns*”) outside the limits of the knowable. Jacobi advocates the “*salto mortale*”¹²² of belief/faith as the lone realist way

118 Kant 1968, Bxxxix pg. 38; Kant 1998, Bxxxix pg. 121

119 Jacobi 1994, p. 234

120 Jacobi 1994, p. 256

121 Kant 1998, Bxxx pg. 117

122 Jacobi 1994, p. 189

beyond the conflict between idealism (including Kant’s transcendental sort) and (modern) skepticism (whether Cartesian, Lockean, Berkeleyan, or Humean). As would a Stroudian, a Jacobian finds Kant’s ostensible “proof of realism” via his 1787 “new refutation of psychological idealism” (attempting to fend off impressions of the first, 1781 edition as rehashing Berkeley’s Descartes-indebted [psychological] idealism) unconvincing given its containment within the parameters of subjectivist, anti-realist transcendental idealism. Whatever it proves about objects (*als Objekte oder Gegenstände*) of outer sense, these objects and this sense still are, as per transcendental idealism, “in us” on this side of the limits of possible experience—and, hence, different-in-kind from “the existence of things outside us (*das Dasein der Dinge außer uns*)” in any realist sense. Of course, even for Kant himself as a transcendental idealist, objects (*Objekte/Gegenstände*) are not things (*Dinge*).

The Kant-Jacobi connection noted, Heidegger, apropos the above-quoted passage from the first *Critique*, succinctly remarks that, “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.*”¹²³ Rosen cites this Heideggerian remark while calling into question the Analytic tying of the transcendental to arguments against veil-of-perception skepticism. I mention Rosen’s maneuvers near the end of the second part of my text above.

Departing from a combination of *Being and Time* with “On the Essence of Truth,” I would say that Kant’s epistemological scandal is not the primary or real scandal. The ultimate scandal is the ontological one of philosophy still awaiting an account of *Ur*-errancy as such (or, in a Heideggerian-style complementary inversion, of the erring of the *Ur*). It is yet even more scandalizing that this ontological scandal continues to remain eclipsed by epistemological scandals, with the latter as (unacknowledged) secondary effects of the former. If consequently followed out to the roots of the matter, thinking the unthought of epistemology, as Heidegger would phrase it, ultimately leads to an ontology of errancy. This *Irre* makes possible knowledge in general, knowledge as a problem, and specific problems of knowledge.

I come now to Deleuze before concluding my intervention. Despite Heidegger’s ambivalence and Deleuze’s hostility towards Hegel’s philosophy, both thinkers have moments that permit me to situate them in a subterranean lineage of EFO that starts with Hegel. That said, *Difference and Repetition* contains a fascinating stretch of just a few

123 Heidegger 1962, p. 249

pages on the subject of “stupidity” (*bêtise*).¹²⁴

As with Heidegger’s ontological errancy irreducible to mere ontic misjudgments, Deleuze’s “transcendental stupidity” is not to be equated with straightforward empirical errors as per a correspondence theory of truth. As Deleuze rightly observes, “the image of thought” tacitly but powerfully holding sway over philosophy screens out in advance taking seriously anything associated with stupidity. Is not philosophy, the “love of wisdom,” about smartly pondering truth, knowledge, and intelligence, rather than falsity, ignorance, and imbecility? From the perspective of *Difference and Repetition*, philosophers here risk being, as the saying goes, too smart for their own good. They cannot really get to grips with truth, knowledge, and intelligence without confronting a more-than-empirical stupidity that itself is not the diametrical opposite of smartness. Instead, this *bêtise*, with its un-attuned dampening of and wandering from the Real, is a precondition for the artful abstractions of the keen, discerning mind.

For Deleuze in 1968, there is “a properly transcendental question: how is stupidity (not error) possible?”¹²⁵ On this precise Deleuzian point, I wholeheartedly concur as to the significance of this question. And, EFO not only elevates this question to the status of the meta-transcendental—it also goes on to posit such non-empirical *bêtise* as the possibility condition for everything that is not (so) stupid in thinking, including what human beings count as successful (or, at least, good enough) cases of truly knowing.

Yet, *contra* the Spinoza so dear to Deleuze, EFO, in line with Hegel’s Spinoza critique,¹²⁶ entails an inversion of Spinoza’s famous “truth reveals both itself and the false.”¹²⁷ For EFO, falsity is the index of itself and the true. Put with greater exactitude, the true knowledge of epistemology, as by its very nature dependent upon ignorance insofar as it is a surpassing of barriers to knowing, comes after and is secondary to the false non-knowledge of error à la Heideggerian ontological errancy or Deleuzian transcendental stupidity.

I would like to conclude by invoking Freud and Lacan, taking psychoanalysis as another major ally of EFO. According to Freudian metapsychology, the psyche ontogenetically begins, like Descartes-the-meditative-dreamer, in hallucinations and lies, namely, recoilings

124 Deleuze 1968, pp. 194-198; Deleuze1994, pp. 149-153

125 Deleuze 1994, p. 151

126 Johnston 2014, pp. 13-107

127 Spinoza 2002, p. 949

and deviations from what merely is. Humans become what they are in and through the mysterious miracle of separation and withdrawal, through embodying, as Lacan might baptize it, a “passion for ignorance.” According to an error-first ontology of anthropogenesis inspired by psychoanalysis as well as Hegelianism, there is something still more truthful to be extracted from the cliché “to err is human.” Specifically, no proper subject even emerges at all without there being the *proton pseudos* of the (meta-)transcendental errancy of and from substance. But, against the cliché, there is not first the human and then the erring. There simply is no human, and no peculiarly human problems such as epistemology, without the erring.

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