Speculari Aude: Self-Consciousness and Post-Kantian Metaphysics in Dieter Henrich
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Draft – Not For Circulation

The image, popularized by Heine, of Kant the "all-Destroyer", hammer of the deists and metaphysicians, has always been an over-simplification. For it was Kant himself who insisted that the metaphysical search for unconditioned grounds remains a fundamental interest which reason cannot deny, though that interest must be fulfilled in a new way in the realm of praxis rather than theoria.[1] But what form *can* a metaphysics take which will be in conformity with the contemporary philosophical consciousness shaped in decisive ways by Kant's impact? This question has exercised one of Kant's greatest living interpreters, Dieter Henrich. Henrich is justly renowned for his massive project of achieving a new, more philosophically rigorous and systematic interpretation of Kant's philosophy and the development which lead from it to Hegel. Our interest here, however, is with another aspect of his thinking less well-known to Anglophone readers: it is one of the most thorough attempts to reestablish the legitimacy of metaphysical thought on a radically new, post-Kantian basis.

For Henrich, both the necessity and the task of a new kind of metaphysical (or "speculative") thinking emerge from the very characteristic which defined philosophical modernity against its Greek and scholastic predecessors: the primacy of self-consciousness. This does not mean that the task of modern metaphysics is to make self-consciousness entirely transparent to itself. As we will see, such transparency is in any case impossible. Rather, Henrich seeks an interpretative framework which will justify and preserve what he sees as

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[1] "For these questions are so interwoven in the nature of reason that no one can be free of them. Even all the despisers of metaphysics, who wish to appear to have clearer heads – even Voltaire – have their own metaphysics. For everyone will think in some way about his soul." From Mrongovius' transcriptions of Kant's lectures on Metaphysics, *Gesammelte Scriften,* 29:765. Cf. Kant's letter to Mendelsohn (8 April 1766). *KRV,* A396/B362 and A307/B364 on the demand of reason for unity of principles and the requirement to reach for an Unconditioned. Cf. also B672-676.

modernity's greatest philosophical achievement: a conception of humanity as free and self-determining, able to understand itself entirely "based on itself", rather than by recourse to natural or transcendent sources of normative value.[2]

Despite his own insistence that modern subjectivity represents a break with Greek philosophy, a "cut that…reached down to the roots",[3] Henrich's thinking about what metaphysics reveals certain Platonic affinities on which he himself has remarked.[4] In what follows, I aim to elaborate on those affinities. They will serve to critically illuminate Henrich's own work, certainly. But I am also interested in seeing how they point toward a fundamental continuity underlying comprehensive philosophical questioning, even in forms as diverse as those that take their start from Plato and Kant.

The Basic Structure of Modernity: Sensus Sui and Conservatio Sui

In a 1992 essay titled *Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking,* Jürgen Habermas critically noted a "New Obscurity" which had come to characterize philosophy on the Continent and (especially in Germany) after the collapse of positivism. With amused detachment, he note a "renewal of metaphysics…whether this be a version of metaphysics asserting itself in the wake of Kant or one that is blatantly scrambling back behind Kant's transcendental dialectic."[5] For

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[2] Dieter Henrich, "The Basic Structure of Modern Philosophy," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1974): 14, and "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thinking," in *Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute and Others in Classical German Philosophy¸* ed. David E. Klemm and Günther Zöller (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 119.

[3] Henrich, *Basic Structure,* 9.

[4] To date, the only commentator on Henrich's work who has really seen the significance of these Platonic affinities is Richard Velkley. See his excellent introduction, titled "Unity of Reason as Aporetic Ideal," in Dieter Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Velkley (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-15.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, "Themes in Post Metaphysical Thinking," in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Klaus Offe and Albrecht Wellmer (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992) , 28-29.

Habermas, this renewal is rendered hopeless *ab initio*. In his understanding, the history of philosophy is a series of "paradigm shifts" from the ontological thinking of unity through the paradigm of subjectivity to the present linguistic and inter-subjective paradigm. The tectonic plates have therefore moved us irrevocably away from any thinking which expects that theoretical reason "will rediscover itself in the rationally structured world" but also away from any thinking which tries to preserve philosophy's foundational access to first principles by importing the metaphysical attributes of universality, supra-temporality and necessity into a transcendental subjectivity.[6] Because we cannot escape our present, post-ontological and post-subjective "paradigm" we are living *after* metaphysics and after the deflation of philosophy's extraordinary claims.[7]

In his well-documented *Auseinandersetzung* with Habermas, Henrich denies both of these contentions, working backwards from the second to the first. There is no way to dislodge subjectivity from the center of philosophical concern.[8] We have not, and cannot, shift from a subjective to a "linguistic" paradigm, as Habermas would have it, because subjectivity is not a paradigm at all, i.e. not a framework or model for organizing and interpreting data which could conceivably be organized and interpreted differently. It is instead an ingredient in *every* conscious relation we can have to ourselves, to others and to the world. Henrich is the first to admit that any conceptualization of self-consciousness is beset with irresolvable difficulties but

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[6] Ibid, 40.

[7] Ibid, 48 and 50.

[8] See for example Jürgen Habermas, "Rückkehr zur Metaphysik – Eine Tendenz in der deutschen Philosophie", *Merkur* 439/440 (1985), 898-905. Dieter Henrich, "Was ist Metaphysik-Was Moderne? Zwölf Thesen gegen Jürgen Habermas," in *Konzepte: Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1987), 11-43. For a thorough account of this debate see Dieter Freundlieb, *Dieter Henrich and Contemporary Philosophy: The Return to Subjectivity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), esp. 125-165.

truly philosophical problems are not paradigms which can be declared *passé* whenever "expert knowledge" wishes to move on.[9] They are more like the proverbial Nietzschean abyss, which will continue to stare at us even if we turn our backs on it. Precisely for this reason, Henrich argues that metaphysical thinking is not philosophical nostalgia. It inheres in what he calls the "basic structure" (*Grundstruktur*) of philosophical modernity.

Henrich derives this basic structure from two elements. First, modern philosophical and political thought differ from the Aristotelian world-picture by liberating the individual being's concern for self-preservation from the need to be explained through a relation to an order of natural ends or species perfections. In Hobbes, especially, we see a radically altered anthropology based on man's awareness of and interest in his individual power to persevere in existence against all resistance and danger. This power of *conservatio sui* is experienced in each moment of its exercise. Unlike an Aristotelian *entelecheia*, however, it does not achieve completion or satisfaction within a goal but returns to itself constantly, and feels its own actuality only in its constant striving *from* goal to goal. Thus it is the "structure of an activity" which can be understood without positing a given telos *toward which* it must be directed.[10]

As Henrich himself notes, however, the full range of possibilities for modern thought could not emerge simply from the "trivial" motive urge to remain in existence.[11] For this to happen self-preservation had to be joined to another conceptual structure that had been shaken loose from its traditional Greek or Christian moorings. In the Stoic doctrine of divine fire as the

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[9] Ibid. Henrich refers to Habermas' theory of communicative rationality as the "wastage of comprehensive philosophical orientation," in "Bewußtes Leben und Metaphysik", *Bewußtes Leben* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999), 213.

[10] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 1-3.

[11] Ibid, 5.

logos which permeates every being, Henrich locates the possibility of a being's relatedness to and *familiarity* with itself, its *oikeiōsis*, which precedes any other relation to other beings (including any relation to an essential species form).[12] This self-familiarity is the presupposition of *any* individuality, and of any concern with self-preservation or self-fulfillment. It was only in early modernity however, that thinkers saw the revolutionary potential of this:

> If it should be possible…to derive reason from self-consciousness, it would have been shown therewith that its generality is of a wholly different kind than the specific difference of a species. The awareness of one's own essence, taken purely as this awareness, and as a precondition of self-preservation, could have the same generality which is attributed to being itself in the ontology of Aristotle.[13]

Joining self-preservation to the reality of self-consciousness in order to form a single matrix – *this* is the basis for the modern understanding of the subject as an essentially self-related activity that preserves and asserts itself without determination by a given, natural terminus.[14]

However, this new emphasis on self-consciousness and the related insistence that any search for truth must now take an "inward path" is not, for Henrich, a promethean assertion of the subject's will to power. Henrich criticizes this essentially Heideggerean reading-cum-accusation as placing far too much emphasis on the Baconian/Cartesian roots of modernity and not enough on the way in which self-consciousness, thus defined, is itself a problem and was *known* to be a problem by the deepest philosophical minds of the modern age, including Leibniz, Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Modernity had indeed made possible a form of self-understanding that was no longer tied to the presupposition of a substantive rationality

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[12] On the *sensus sui* see, for example, Cicero, *De Finibus,* III, 16.

[13] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 8.

[14] This is what I referred to earlier, on p. 2, as the understanding of the subject entirely based on itself.

operative within nature, but by no means does it follow that modernity asserts the subject's unproblematic *presence* to itself.

Self-Relation and Circularity

Henrich's systematic reflections almost invariably begin from the question of this self-presence. We have an irreducible relationship to ourselves, which Henrich calls *wissende Selbstverhältnis,* or epistemic self-relation, i.e. the immediate *unity* with ourselves which we all experience in the consciousness we have of ourselves.[15] For Henrich, following Kant and Fichte, this self-relation is transcendental – it is presupposed in any other conscious relation in which we could possibly stand. This can be shown quite clearly from the use of indexicals like "this", "here", and "now" in even the simplest kind of indicative statement. Such use, Henrich argues,

> presupposes the mastery of the first person singular. It is a commonly known fact that "this" does not indicate anything if it is unknown from which standpoint the indication occurs. Yet to indicate one's standpoint and to designate oneself as the holder of a particular standpoint means to employ the…first person singular I.[16]

The same is true if we turn toward more complex propositional structures. To predicate something, or assert that "it seems…" that something is the case, is already to reveal someone who is able to stand behind this proposition and justify it or, for that matter, withdraw it when what seemed to hold does not in fact hold. There must be someone *to whom* something appears and this means someone who relates himself both to that appearance *and simultaneously* to the

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[15] This is not to say that Henrich is concerned with a solipsistic analysis of the subject to the exclusion of social, cultural or other contexts, collective or individual. He has much to say about these as well, but to get there we must begin with the question of the precise nature of the knowledge which the self can be said to have of itself.

[16] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 106. Cf. with P.F. Strawson's substantial agreement on this point, despite their other, significant differences. See P.F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959) and also *Bounds of Sense,* (1968), esp. p. 117: "…any course of experience of which we can form a coherent conception must be, potentially, the experience of a self-conscious subject…"

awareness of himself as the one to whom it appears. But this entails that the unity of self-consciousness must already be in play for the act of predicative synthesis to be possible.[17] Furthermore, this unified self-consciousness cannot be exhaustively explained by attributing it to an empirical person at a particular point in space and time and avoiding all talk of a unified and temporally enduring subject of experience. To be able to assert and maintain a particular belief at a particular point in time *is* to possess, to be defined by, a history of successful or failed beliefs which are the context from which (and against the background of which) a judgment made at some singular moment in time can emerge.[18] Self-consciousness, then, will not allow itself to be explained away or absorbed into a third person perspective. Reference, intention, or ascription cannot happen without self-consciousness, but unlike all other objects, self-consciousness is actualized *in the very act* of intending or referring. It does not depend upon the act of intending then being "filled" by objective content. Bernard Lonergan puts this quite well: "unlike objects, subjects are present to themselves not by being attended to, *but by attending* [emphasis mine]. As the parade of objects marches by, spectators do not have to slip into the parade to be present to themselves."[19]

However, Henrich insists that this immediacy of self-consciousness does not translate into immediate conceptual grasp. Rather every attempt to analyze the internal structure of self-

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid, 107: "For no being is to be addressed as a person who does not have a history of belief…We refer to ourselves as subjects insofar as we know that our state of belief is in each case related to other such states and insofar as we view, in the unifying connection of such states, the addressee of the pronoun 'me', through which each proposition of the form 'it seems' is constituted."

[19] Bernard Lonergan, *Collection: Papers by Benard Lonergan,* ed. Frederick Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 210. Cf., Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 116: "This peculiarity of self-consciousness – that in the act of intending the real it is already established as something real – distinguishes it radically from all other truth claims, which cannot guarantee their reality through their occurrence."

consciousness into parts or to explicate the relation which constitutes it in a non-circular, non-question-begging form proves to be hopeless. It was Fichte's great merit to first make completely explicit the circularity which infects all "reflection" models of the self, i.e., those which try to explain self-consciousness as unique kind of object-awareness in which the object is the subject itself. On this model, self-consciousness is an act in which "the knowing subject, abstracting from all other particular objects, turns back into itself and in this way becomes aware of its constant unity with itself."[20] It quickly becomes evident that this model is either circular or vitiating. Let us assume that reflection means that the self qua subject enters into a two-place relation of knowing itself qua object. But what is the Subject-self that is going to undertake this act of reflection? If it is actually a self, it must already be capable of saying "I". That is, it must already must know itself if it is going to be able to objectify itself and then recognize that what it is looking at here is *itself*, a subject. In this case, we have clearly presupposed what we set out to constitute. Next, let us try to escape the circle by insisting that the self-conscious Subject-self is a *result*, i.e. that the subject which entered into the reflective relation was not yet a self. But this means that the "I" is constituted out of two relata which were *other* than it. How, then can it ever achieve that identity of relational poles (I=I) which defines self-consciousness? In this case, we have "cured" the circularity by killing the patient.[21]

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[20] See "Fichte's Original Insight, *Contemporary German Philosophy* 1 (1982): 19.

[21] See Henrich's essay "Fichtes Ich*,"* in *Selbstverhältnisse: Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), 63: "Die Relexionstheorie des Selbstbewußtseins steht also vor folgender ruinöser Alternative: Entweder setzt sie das Phänomen voraus, ohne sie explizieren zu können, oder sie zerstört es." Cf. also "Fichte's Original Insight, 20-21.

Thus, Henrich concludes that, "The Self possesses itself *as Self,"* but "to be a Self is to be a unity emerging from a ground that the Self does not control".[22] In other words, while the self is manifest to itself, it is **not** aware of, and certainly does not produce or conceptually grasp, the ground which makes this self-manifestation possible. On this point, Henrich sees himself as taking a stand firmly on the true intentions governing Kant's entire project: On the one hand, Kant describes the synthetic unity of apperception the "highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge".[23] At the same time, as the "objective condition" of all knowledge (that is, of all employment of categories) this unity cannot itself be known *objectively*.[24] Therefore, the fact that Kant provides no completely deduced "theory" of the unity of the subject is, Henrich insists, not a failure of philosophical nerve. That fact embodies reason's critical awareness of its limits.[25]

Consequently, the link between self-familiarity and self-preservation in modernity means that modern subjectivity is aware of two irreducible modes of its being - freedom *and* dependency: self-consciousness as a self-relation is independent of any other relation to the world (=the element of freedom), but it is not *causa sui.* We must posit that it depends for its

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[22] Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight", 42.

[23] *KRV*, B, 135: it is indeed not only the supreme principle of all employment of the understanding, but "understanding itself" (*ja dieses Vermögen ist der Verstand selbst*). And cf. B134 (note): "it is the highest point *(höchste Punkt)* to which we must ascribe all employment of the understanding." The translation is Kemp-Smith's.

[24] *KRV*, 138. In the Paralogisms of Pure Reason, Kant mentions, albeit only in passing, that any attempt to go beyond the "completely empty representation I" as a "bare consciousness" (*bloses Bewußtsein*) to a *concept* of the I will send us revolving "in a perpetual circle, *since any judgment upon it has always already made use of its representation*." [emphasis mine] (*KRV*, A346:B404).

[25] Kant, writes Henrich, "actually believed it was *impossible* to substantially elucidate the actual grounds of our knowledge – what underlies and gives rise to knowledge – any further than the account already given in the *Critique*…" The reflection characteristic of the *Critique* does not lead, *and was never meant to* lead, to a "self-sufficient first science enjoying a sort of pure object domain made up of self-contained, transparent grounds…." Dieter Henrich, "Origins of the Theory of the Subject," in *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 29-87, see esp. 48-56.

being on a ground which it cannot grasp (=the element of dependency and the origin of our concern with self-preservation).[26]

Competing Ontologies

From this it follows that even our most basic comportment is shot through with unavoidable obscurities. This basic comportment, what Henrich calls the "basic relation" (*Grundverhältnis*), is the relationship which holds between our self-descriptions (our epistemic self-relation) and our relation to, and description of, the world of finite objects and individuals we encounter as separate from ourselves.[27] On the one hand, one is always aware of oneself as an individual in a nexus of relations to other individuals and objects in the world, and hence localizable at a specific place in space and time. And yet, simultaneously, our experience of ourselves as subjects having an internal unity and identity is prior to and independent of any relation to the world.[28] We are, both "Persons" in the world and self-related "Subjects" that can "have" a world. These two elements are inescapable but also irreducible to one another especially because, for Henrich, no relation or complex of relations in which we stand "in" the world will ever be sufficient to serve as the explanatory ground for our relation to ourselves as Subjects. We have, as it were, dual citizenship in competing ontological realms.[29]

The Kantian doctrine of the "fact of reason" (the facticity of our free responsiveness to the rational moral law) and the Platonic Idea of the Good are, for Henrich, two further angles of

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[26] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 8-9.

[27] On Henrich's analysis of the *Grundverhältnis,* see Dieter Henrich, "Selbstbewußtsein und seine Selbstdeutungen" in *Fluchtlinien* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), 99-124, esp. 104-113.

[28] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 107: "We understand ourselves equally originally as one among others and as the one over and against the entire world." And cf. also "Bewußtes Leben und Metaphysik," 199.

[29] See Freundlieb, 73. Our awareness that we inhabit "irreconcilable ontologies" is an achievement of our rationality.

approach to this same conclusion. For him, the very possibility of a philosophical discussion of ethics requires – prior to elucidating the specific content of a moral doctrine – an awareness of the uniqueness of moral insight into the good (*Sittlichen Einsicht*). This form of knowledge has a "special structure" in which object and subject are related differently than in theoretical apprehension.[30] Knowledge of something as good is not simply the *adequatio* of cognition and object. In cognizing the good we also *affirm* it as good and accept it upon ourselves as normatively binding.[31] The good is thus always present to us as an immediately comprehensible demand, not merely a matter of fact for disinterested inquiry.

Now, just as the object is present in a unique way in moral insight, so too is the subject. Theoretical knowledge "can only let be", i.e. the self "recedes", as Henrich puts it, in order to allow for theoretical cognition of the object. The affirmation of something as good and binding, however, is a *free act* of consent in which the self is always present: "When I know in moral insight what is good, I also know that I understand myself in relation to it…"[32] As Kant saw, freedom is noumenal. It cannot be subsumed within the rules governing the constitution of phenomena.

Henrich credits Plato and Kant with seeing that in moral insight, "…the self confirms the *reality* of the good in approving it". Such insight therefore has ontological implications; it places

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[30] Dieter Henrich, "The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason," in *The Unity of Reason,* ed. Richard Velkley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 56.

[31] Ibid, 61. "What is correct makes sense, what is good is originally *affirmed*."

[32] Ibid, 63. And cf., 64: "Without a complete self, the special traits that differentiate moral insight from theoretical knowledge would be impossible. Therefore, knowledge of the good cannot be isolated from the reality of the self…Without approval, motivational force and the conviction that it is possible for me to be adequate to the good, I cannot recognize the good as good, and I deal only with empty, incomprehensible formulas when I employ the basic concepts of ethics." See Velkley, "Unity of Reason as Aporetic Ideal," 11 and Freundlieb, 56.

"all being under the condition that the good is possible in it,"[33] and it thus requires that ontology and ethics be intimately related as parts of *prima philosophia*, as Plato tries to do by making the Good both the origin of intelligibility and the goal of all praxis. Both Plato and Kant, in fact, are credited with trying to understand ethics and ontology as parts of one problem but in such a way as to preserve their distinctness. Both saw that it was impossible to turn the good into one being among others or to derive moral insight as simply another form of theoretical knowledge.[34] For Plato and Kant, comprehensive thinking means the correlation, not derivation, of these different realms of rationality.

For Henrich, a life which is going to be a truly "conscious life" (*Bewußtes Leben*) – i.e. one that is actually *lead* and not merely "had"[35] - is impossible without the subject being *aware* of these various obscurities (*Dunkelheiten*) in its structure and grounds and without trying integrate that awareness into a comprehensive picture. Hence, the subject cannot do without a "conceptually articulated understanding of its experience."[36] Since our experience as subjects and persons always involves relation to the world, self-interpretation must transcend in the direction of an interpretation of the whole and the subject's place within it:

> The question arises for self-consciousness: What grounds its own reality in the totality of that which is real, in the twofold manner according to which it is both a being in the world and also has original certainty regarding its reality?...the question now concerns a conception of *all reality* into which its own self-understanding, including the latter's inner oppositional character, could be inserted without reduction. This question

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[33] Ibid, 66.

[34] Henrich, "The Concept of Moral Insight", 66: In this regard, Henrich sees the Kantian restriction of strict natural causality to phenomena as doing for modernity what the Ideas achieved in antiquity: account for the reality of the good without subjecting ethics and ontology either to reduction or radical separation.

[35] Dieter Henrich, "Was ist Metaphysik, Was Moderne?" 14.

[36] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 17: "For it is a part of the essence of consciousness itself not to be able to exist freely without a concept of itself."

corresponds to the one that in the Western tradition of explicitly philosophical thinking gave rise to…metaphysics.[37]

Metaphysics as Critique and Integration

In keeping with his Kantian commitments, Henrich abjures all talk of metaphysics as a foundational or deductive science.[38] It has, instead, two main tasks: critique and integration.

On the one hand, it must provide that standpoint from which philosophy can expose all "disguises", all forms of self-deception, by which the modern subject tries to simplify or hide from itself the tensions between the irreconcilable ontologies it must inhabit. Hence, for example, it must be a critique of all attempts to relieve conscious life of the 'burden' of its freedom and self-determination through the reduction of subjectivity to a set of naturalistically explicable drives or by a retreat into heteronomous forms of understanding. In an interesting reversal, we can say that contra Heidegger it is the task of metaphysics here to constantly force Dasein to see the truth of its "Situation".

But such a critique is possible only from a standpoint that reveals the limited or partial world-views being critiqued *as* limited or partial. That is, critique requires a conception of the whole in which its activity is legitimated. In its integrative function, speculative thinking must ascend from the perplexities inherent in the basic relation, toward an articulation of "the entire area of thoughts that are possible or even necessary for self-conscious life in the face of the

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[37] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 120. And see his "Bewusstes Leben und Metaphysik", 197. on the connection between autobiographical reflection and the thinking of the whole.

[38] "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 126-127 and see also Dieter Henrich, "Grund und Gang Spekulativen Denkens," in *Bewußtes Leben* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999), 85-138.

ultimate reality of its nature, *and…find and justify the most comprehensive and adequate among those thoughts…"* [emphasis mine][39]

For Henrich, the thinking which can accomplish all this proves to be an amalgam of Hegelian and Platonic sensibilities. On the one hand, we have seen that the structure of the 'basic relation' is not entirely intelligible. In seeking a *Weltinterpretation,* then, we have no choice but to "radically transcend the conceptual structures available in the basic relation."[40] Henrich locates the paradigm of a conceptual structure which can enable such an ascent in Hegel's logic. Hegelian conceptuality thinks together what our natural comportment to the world endeavors to keep separate - self-identity and difference. In our ordinary thinking about the world, identity and difference are treated as static, determinate concepts. In Hegel's language, we think them as "external" to one another. But it is of the essence of subjectivity, as the German Idealists saw clearly, that self-consciousness is identical to itself only *through* its being divided against – and hence different from – itself. The basic structure of the subject, for Hegel, is self-identity through difference. He thus takes the crucial step of insisting that we must replace the static concepts of Same and Other with their dialectical interpenetration: the unity of identity and non-identity. This, says Henrich, is the "elementary structure of the speculative form" which first makes it possible to begin to describe the Absolute not as a transcendent being or a super-sensible reality, but as an activity present within every moment of the whole, natural and

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[39] "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 116.
[40] Ibid, 126-129.

spiritual. "Only this ontology," he writes, "can achieve an interpretation of the world that conceptualizes this world as a unity and provides a home for self-conscious beings...."[41]

And yet, despite a strong affirmation of the philosophical significance Hegel's dialectic, Henrich does not, in the end, accept its claim to *completeness*. Even in Hegel's metaphysical reconstruction of conceptuality, "the real centering of self-consciousness around the first person remains *uncaptured* [emphasis mine].[42] As a result, the re-orientation of metaphysical thinking must be achieved not by objective theoretical knowledge of the whole but rather by Kantian 'ideas', or 'thoughts of closure' (*Abschlußgedanken*), postulates or projections of the final ends of reason as a coherent unity and of the world as one in which such final ends make sense. Henrich describes them as "thoughts that are valid for all reality and that simultaneously confirm its [reason's – AG] most essential goals".[43] The "essential goals" are the indispensable conditions of an "emancipated life": freedom and self-understanding, or more specifically the freedom of modern self-consciousness, liberated from traditional ties and from the normative order of nature, to actualize and interpret itself. [44] Like Kantian ideas, these thoughts are only "regulative"; that is, they give direction to a process in which conscious life endeavors to interpret itself and is itself transformed through this process of self-interpretation. The thoughts, however, do not *constitute* objects or a nexus of knowable objects.

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[41] Dieter Henrich, "Kant und Hegel: Versuch zur Vereinigung ihrer Grundgedanken, in *Selbstverhältnisse: Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), 207.

[42] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought," 131 and 132. Cf. also "Der Grund im Bewußtsein" in Dieter Henrich, *Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 604-605.

[43] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought," 121.

[44] Henrich, "Basic Structure," 16-17.

A metaphysical thinking which is attuned to these goals must have a form which aims at maximal coherence but without sacrificing the plasticity that is needed in order to accommodate the tensions in the basic structure of the self and the essentially open horizon of its self-interpretation. Henrich finds the prime example of such a form in Plato:

> One can call theories "linear" that are constructed from a set of axioms…organized around a simple basic principle and that are meant to be exhaustive for their respective domain. It cannot be excluded that a comprehensive philosophical theory of this structure might also prove adequate for an understanding of life. But that is improbable to the highest degree…By contrast, the theories designed to save the phenomena and to preserve the space for self-conscious life in philosophy were multidimensional. Their basic historically effective pattern was designed by Plato and was translated by Leibniz and Kant into the philosophical present."[45]

In addition to its multi-dimensional character, evident in the ability to think of ethics and ontology together in a non-reductive manner, Henrich sees in Plato the lineaments of a thinking that strives for knowledge of the whole and remains fully aware of the finitude that always condition such striving.[46] Indeed, one could argue that the very choice of the dialogue form is determined by the need to preserve a continuity between philosophical inquiry, however radical and abstract it may become, and the experiences of conscious life from which it began, namely experiences of *aporia* and of inescapable tension, for example, between theory and practice or between the desiring and intellectual powers of the soul.[47]

What, then, does it mean for this paradigm to be translated into modernity and why does it need to be? The general drift of Henrich's thinking would seem to point in two directions: first, to the generality and fundamentality of self-consciousness. Of course, in a

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[45] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought," 101.
[46] Ibid, 104.
[47] Ibid, 102. Henrich speaks of "conflicting tendencies of life and positions of consciousness."

certain sense Plato's dialogues as a whole are a reflection on the soul. Socrates' repeated invocations of Delphic *Gnōthi Sauton* and his images of the soul's journey to enlightenment (such as the Divided Line and the Cave), should suffice to demonstrate this. However, the paradoxical structure of self-consciousness is not made thematic in Plato, beyond a few short passages which are not developed at any length.[48] The kind of multi-dimensional thinking embodied in the dialogues must therefore be re-oriented around this new point of departure.

Second, however, we have seen how the modern, self-conscious subject is "a being whose peculiar nature within the totality of an order with determinate limits is as yet unknown…" Since there is no "given" way of life which constitutes its *telos*, the subject must explore "all possible modes of existence" and validate to itself over and over again its own being and power, just as Hobbes had shown in defining *felicitas* by denying the existence of a *summum bonum*.[49] For beings such as we are, "this very dynamism is an expression of…preservation of life."[50] In post-Kantian thought the horizon in which modern subjectivity must actualize itself is essentially *open*. Therefore, conscious life cannot understand itself in the terms used, for example, in that passage of the *Timaeus* which describes why the god gave man the gift of vision:

> ….in order that, by observing the circuits of intellect in heaven, we might use them for the orbits of thinking within us, which are akin to those, the disturbed to the undisturbed; and by having thoroughly learned them and partaken of the natural correctness in their calculations, thus imitating the utterly unwandering circuits of the god, we might stabilize the wander-stricken circuits in ourselves.[51]

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[48] See for example, *Charmides* 167a9-169c3 and *Alcibiades I,* 132c9-133c6.
[49] Hobbes, *Leviathan,* I, vi, 58 and xi, 1.
[50] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 14-15.
[51] *Timaeus*, 47b5-c4. The translation is taken from Kalkavage. Cf. *Rep.* 500c1-7.

The modern subject must understand itself over against (or at least independent of) a nature which it experiences as "alien" or "indifferent".[52] But what do these differences actually amount to? I turn now to a Platonic text in order to try and answer that question.

Unity and Intelligibility

As discussed earlier, for Henrich, the privileged status of self-consciousness by no means entails that its unproblematic status. In fact, it entails awareness that the coherence and rationality of experience are recalcitrant to reason, because the ground of the unity of experience in self-consciousness is not amenable to analysis. We can restate this in Kantian terms: the unity of objects and unified coherence of an experience in time cannot be explained without the activity of the subject. This unity, the unity of the manifold given in sensuous intuition which alone makes conceiving an object possible, is an act of the synthetic unity of apperception, to which we cannot gain access without "revolving in a perpetual circle".[53] Hence while unity is an act of spontaneous subjectivity, from the point of view of our *conceptual understanding* it is 'factic', a given the grounds of which must remain obscure.

Now, in the *Republic* Socrates too speaks of *epistēmē* as grounded in, or dependent on something, namely upon what is (*epi tōi onti*)". Of course, he would not speak of the *ousia* of each thing as constituted by a spontaneous act of the soul. Instead, the dialogues usually begin from the distinction between many and one, say between the many examples of virtue and the "some one form" (*hen ti eidos*) *through which* (*di'ho*), these many are all virtues, to take an

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[52] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 13.

[53] *KRV*, B131 and B137: Without unity, combination is impossible and "without such combination nothing can be thought or known….Consequently, it is the unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, and therefore their objective validity and the fact that they are modes of knowledge; and upon it therefore rests the very possibility of the understanding."

example from the *Meno*.[54] The oneness of the form is what is responsible for the unity of the particular of sensuous experience. But how is the unity in the Idea related to our discursive reasoning, our *dianoia*, in Plato and how does this differ from the situation Henrich describes, following Kant? To decide, we need to grasp as precisely as possible the question which the Ideas were meant to answer as well as what Plato thought can be legitimately expected from the answer. And Plato does give us a careful depiction of someone asking this question and assessing his own answers - in the "autobiographical" account of Socrates' journey toward the Ideas in the *Phaedo.*

It is crucial to remember that for Socrates, the Ideas represent a "second sailing" (*deuteros plous*) in search of cause (99c9),[55] on which he embarked only after the failure of a first attempt. What relationship holds between these two sailings? The general destination might be the same, reaching the safe harbor of a suitable account of cause, but it does not follow that the second sailing achieves exactly what the first, frustrated, sailing had intended. In fact, Socrates' description indicates that between the two there has been a change, a deepening in his understanding of what it means to search for a cause, why we do so, and what one can hope for in such a search. He had begun with the confidence that it would be magnificent to know the *aitias hekastou* – the causes of each thing, both of its coming to be and perishing, *and* of its *being* (viz., the *dia ti esti*)(96a6-10). But the particular interests which engaged Socrates' youthful enthusiasm are primarily the processes of coming to be and perishing, not being. He wants know about the generation and growth of animals, whether there is a material substrate to

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[54] *Meno,* 72c7-8. And cf. *Rep,* 475c9 and 478e7-479a5 and 507b2-7.

[55] All further references to the Phaedo will appear parenthetically in the text. The Greek edition by Burnet is used here and translations are my own, though I have consulted the translation by Brann, Kalkavage and Salem.

thinking, and what are the "affections pertaining to heaven and earth" (96b1-c1). In other words, the questions that concern him are mainly those of the "pre-Socratic" Socrates lampooned in Aristophanes' *Clouds*.[56] However, in this largely materialistic or mechanistic inquiry into *physis* he could not find a satisfactory cause, or constellation of causes, that would preserve the pre-theoretical intelligibility of things.[57]

Socrates now mentions a first change in direction, which occurs as a result of something that he heard "once" (97b8),[58] namely, Anaxagoras' assertion that Intellect (*Nous*) is the cause of order and of the whole (the *diakosmōn te kai panton aitios*)(97c1-2). In *Nous*, Socrates hoped to find the overarching cause of a nature which exhibits both goodness and intelligence, or differently stated, a teleology in which *Nous* grounds the appearance in nature of the "good common to all" (98b2-3). He returns to this again at 99cff when he speaks of the "Good and Binding" (*to agathon kai deon*) that truly (*hōs alēthōs*) binds and holds things together. Had Anaxagoras been able to reveal that sort of cause, Socrates "would not yearn" for another (98a1-2).

The positioning of this Anaxagorean interlude is somewhat puzzling. At 97b7, after having described his disappointment with his first *skepsis*, Socrates appears to be on the verge of turning to a description of his own, new way of proceeding, and this would indeed be the natural transition (from first to second sailing). But then he interjects, almost as an afterthought:

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[56] For the best interpretation of the significance of this, see Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[57] 97b4-7: "…nor do I persuade myself any longer that I know through what a one comes to be nor, in a word, anything else comes to be, or perishes, or *is*…"

[58] Socrates does not mention whether this was at the same time as his earliest natural scientific inquiries or after his abandonment of them.

"Once though, I heard someone reading from some book of Anaxagoras…." (97b8). I believe the abruptness of the Anaxagoras passage is meant to emphasize that the second sailing which will be described later cannot be understood simply as the direct reversal or disavowal of the materialistic physics of the first. The Socrates of the second sailing has been marked by his passage through a further stage of *teleological* reflection, and the Ideas are also the response to the *absence* of teleology, which he could not find in Anaxagoras nor he was capable of discovering it himself or learning it from anyone else (99c8-d2). The hypothesis he is about to describe, then, is meant to be an explanation of cause which not only improves on physical ones, but comes *in lieu of* the full presence to the soul of a completely noetic and teleological nature. Appropriately, "second sailing" is a nautical term for taking up the oars when the natural motive force of the vessel, the wind, has failed.[59]

Socrates describes the second sailing as a turn away from looking into beings "directly" by means of the senses and toward "taking refuge in *logoi* (*eis tous logous kataphugonta*) in order to look in them for the truth of beings (*en ekeinois skopein tōn ontōn tēn alētheian*)"(99e1-6). This does not mean turning to concepts or linguistic constructions which refer to, represent or image the beings in another, semantic, medium. Socrates explicitly denies this is the case at 100a1-2, but we could also establish its impossibility by independent reflection: If the Ideas were only mental models, representations or concepts of the beings, we would not be looking at the beings at all but at something else. If we want to avoid this conclusion by arguing that, of course, Socrates means a mental image that "looks just like" the being, or a concept which "captures"

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[59] See C.J. Rowe's commentary on 99c9-d2, in *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 238-239.

exactly the truth of the being, then we have obviously begged the main question: *How* is the truth of the being present both in that being and in its concept? In short, the *logos* to which Socrates looks is not a mental artifact at all, but must somehow be, or exhibit, the community of being and thinking.[60] But if so, we must try to grasp Socrates' meaning in the immediate sequel: "…I put down as a hypothesis (*hupothemenos*) whichever *logos* I judge to be strongest (*errōmenestaton*); and whatever seems to me to be consonant with this, I set down (*tithēmi*) as being true, both about cause and about all the rest; whatever isn't, I set down as not true (100a3-7)". When Cebes does not understand, Socrates says that he means "just this" (*hōde legō*): "…putting down as a hypothesis that there *is* something Beautiful Itself by Itself and Good and Big and all the rest" (100b6-7). What is the connection between "looking into" *skopein* and hypothesizing here? How is setting down a hypothesis about the Beautiful Itself an example of looking into the truth of beings?

Our approach to an answer must begin by noting how deeply rooted the Ideas are in practical concerns; that is, in accounting for our ability to act based on the distinctions between better and worse or noble and base. That such concerns are very much on Socrates' mind is clear from his critique of the worthlessness of purely material causes, which cannot even explain Socrates' sitting in prison. He is there not because his bones and sinews occupy a certain position in space and time, but because of the confluence of two acts of judgment: a *doxa* which the Athenians have about what is better (that Socrates die) and a *doxa* which Socrates has about

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[60] Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (South Bend, ID: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 67-80, and see esp. 68: "*Logos* means here something that is common to being and to speech. To retain the visual metaphor, what we see in the *logos* must be the same as what we would see if were able to look directly at the beings without blinding the soul. This same look…is the Idea."

what is better or "more just and beautiful" (enduring the penalty rather than fleeing).[61] It is not for nothing that the Beautiful itself plays the central role in introducing and explaining the Ideas to Cebes at 100c3-e3.

The setting down "in each case" of a *logos* that is judged to be the strongest, that is of an Idea, is thus best understood as a conclusion drawn from reflection on, from "looking into", ourselves as agents who are moved by considerations of nobility and baseness. We simply could not be such agents if the beings among which we act and choose did not present a unified, stable and identifiable look. This look is what Socrates is searching for in turning to the logos: the mode of being which makes possible the visibility of the unity, stability and identity upon which even our ordinary experience of ourselves as knowers *and* agents depends.[62] The Ideas are the safest (*asphalestaton*) ground on which to stand in trying to "save the phenomena and preserve the space for self-conscious life", as Henrich puts it,[63] while preventing a fall back into the vortex of "absurd" causes Socrates had criticized.[64]

However, Ideas are *not* the Good and Binding cause Socrates had sought. They are not the cause which holds all things together, because they cannot explain the whole. To take only one problem, the Ideas are the intelligibility of beings to which the soul has access but they do not explain the soul itself and such an account is unlikely in the extreme, since the soul does not have a stable unity and a graspable structure. It is a *dynamis* whose unity is itself a great, and

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[61] *Phd.* 98e1-99a4.

[62] This is another reason why "taking refuge in logoi" cannot mean fleeing into conceptual constructions of the Good, Beautiful or Just. Such constructions cannot explain how we distinguish between better and worse unless they themselves embody a prior vision of what is good, beautiful, just.

[63] Henrich, "Self-Consciousness and Speculative Thought", 101.

[64] *Phd.* 99a5.

unanswered, question in the dialogues. For this reason the Ideas are one element, albeit crucial, in the complete explanation of how we are rational agents. A complete explanation requires an account of how soul is open to, or knows, the Ideas, but in Plato we have only mythical or allegorical accounts of this openness as vision or the recollection of such a vision.

Furthermore, while Ideas are the *aitiai* of intelligibility, they themselves cannot be grounded or explained through a further, more fundamental account. To be intelligible, any such account would have to assume the unity, identity, and stability of the elements which it weaves together in explanation, but this means it is already assuming the Ideas themselves. This is true throughout the dialogues, where the mode of being of *eidos* is most often approached by mythical artistry rather than direct argument. The same holds for the passage we have been studying. Socrates does not try to prove or deduce the Ideas for Cebes. He simply asks him to "grant" that they are (*sunchōreis einai tauta*)(100b7) in order to proceed from there to the proof of the soul's immortality.[65] Nor does Socrates go into any detail about *how* the Ideas serve as a cause, for example, of the presence of beauty in the beautiful thing. They do so, he says, by "*parousia* or *koinōnia* or however and in whatever way". Socrates does not insist on precision, but only on the assertion that it is "by the Beautiful that all beautiful things are beautiful" (100d6-8). Indeed, as is fitting for a way of proceeding which Socrates claims he "throws together" by himself (97b6-7),[66] he seems to shy away from a direct identification of Ideas as the "true causes" (*tas hōs alēthōs aitias*) mentioned in his critique of materialism (98e1), even though that is clearly the gist of the argument. Instead the emphasis is on the "safety" (100d8-10, 101d2)

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[66] The verb I translate with "throw together" is *phurein,* which can also carry the sense of to confuse or confound.

or "strength" of the hypothesis as opposed to all others which are, by implication, weaker. But this weakness is not the same as total falsehood and strength or safety does not imply that the more secure hypothesis is susceptible of definitive proof, but only of one that Socrates calls sufficient (*hikanon*) (101d6-e1) – that is, sufficient to preserve our sense of the rationality of our lives.

By emphasizing Socrates' provisional language I am by no means denying the seriousness of the hypothesis or even the existence of Ideas. On the contrary, and without denying the great perplexities which surround the identification of essential being with form, I am personally convinced that history of philosophy since Plato has not shown how we can explain determinacy and intelligibility without something like it. I only mean to point out that the Ideas are hypothesized *in fully reflective awareness* of their incompleteness. They account for rationality within a natural whole which is itself only partially transparent to the intellect.[67]

But this means that despite their radically different points of departure, Platonic and post-Kantian thought meet on a fundamental point. In both cases, a recognizably human life, one in which deliberate choice and action is possible, depends on the presence of intelligibility in the world. Intelligibility however, depends on the unity and stable identity of the elements of experience. In Kant, unity is an apperceptive achievement which "*precedes a priori all concepts of combination*" (B131). Henrich follows Kant here, insisting that no objective world can be thought of by us entirely independent of *Ich-gedanken,* which are expressions of the already present unity of self-consciousness. For Plato, the *eidos* grounds intelligibility as that "one" within manyness

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[67] This holds true even for a dialogue like the *Timaeus,* as evidenced by the role of the *chōra,* accessible to us only via a "bastard reasoning." See *Tim.* 52b6.

which is open to *noēsis*. But in neither case can the principle of unity itself, whether it is apperceptive or eidetic, be deduced discursively in a non-circular manner. The shift from intelligibility as a property of the rational order of nature to intelligibility as an achievement of the transcendental ego is, of course, a great axis on which the history of philosophy turns. But it is not quite accurate to describe it as a shift from the pre-critical "assumption" of the availability of intelligibility to a critical and reflective awareness of the conditions for the possibility of intelligibility. Both thinkers are perfectly aware that unity is *given* to discursive reason.

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The question now becomes how we are to relate to the presence of these 'primordial' elements within rationality that defy further analysis. Earlier, we had discussed Henrich's reading of the Idea of the Good as proof that Plato had come to the conclusion that a correlation of theoretical and practical reason which maintains their distinctness could only happen by connecting both to an ontology in which the Good is the highest principle. There is no doubt much truth in this although the ontological function of the Good was a famously vexed question already in antiquity. There is, however, a further significance to the fact that Plato identifies the highest principle as Good, which may be independent of the difficulties in explicating its ontological function. Socrates explains to Glaucon that the idea of the Good is the *aitia* of *epistēmē* and *alētheia*, though it itself is neither knowledge nor truth. *Epistēmē* and *alētheia*, however, are said to be *agathoeidē*, they are "like", or have the form or look of the Good.[68] Now, what does this mean? At minimum, I understand it to imply that for Plato it is

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[68] Ibid, 509a3.

not possible for rationality to justify itself if its relationship to nature is one of total alienation, or absolutely unmediated difference. It would seem that the fact that unity and identity are available to thinking at all signals, for Plato, that there is a commonality between the activity of intelligence and the ground of the intelligibility of things. This commonality is certainly only an approximation, since the Good has a "hexis" which is greater in honor than either *epistēmē* or *alētheia.*[69] But apparently the justification of our pre-philosophical sense that rationality is better than the alternative is only possible if some way is found for reason to recognize itself and its interests in the nature of things.

We might expect matters to stand differently in Henrich's project, which begins from subjectivity rather than nature but it is not clear to me that they do. Henrich insists that self-consciousness "expects a reason, an intelligibility of its own essence" and must find "a basis for its own possibility, a footing which no longer appears to it alien and indifferent, as does that aspect of nature against which it must direct its energy of self-preservation."[70] But where is such a reason or footing to be found? On the one hand, since a philosophy of subjectivity must take the "inward path", or at least cannot attain to knowledge without it, such a footing cannot be simply external to subjectivity. On the other hand, neither can it be a mere subjective construction or posit. This explains the significance, for Henrich, of Hegel's attempt to articulate an Absolute in which subjectivity, "having become free of external authority is legitimatized in its origin, *within a whole homogenous with itself*".[71] However, the achievement of such a whole stands or falls with Hegel's claim to the completeness of his logic, that is, with his success in

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[69] Ibid, 509a4-5.
[70] Henrich, "Basic Structure", 13.
[71] Ibid, 15. The emphasis is mine and I have slightly modified the translation.

showing how the *concrete* content of the whole can be developed from out of the interrelation of

identity and difference without *any* remainder. About this Henrich has his doubts.

Modern metaphysical thinking, starting from its own premises, would thus seem fated

to retread a path taken by Plato, in at least two senses. First, if the structure of the "I" cannot be

completely transparent to discursive reason, rationality will have to be justified in a philosophy

that *knowingly* abjures a systematic structure, or at least any system which includes its first

principles within itself.   The second sense is more complex and has to do with Henrich's

defense of metaphysics as self-interpretation and interpretation as the highest expression of our

freedom. Here, for example, is a passage from an essay of his titled "Philosophy and the

Conflict among Tendencies of Life":

> Revisionary metaphysics is *interpretation* of conscious life on the part of conscious life. It is by no means the disclosure of a supramundane realm which we could conceive as the domain into which we have to transform ourselves. What undergoes transformation is our understanding of ourselves and our condition. Thus the very world in which we live appears in a new light once it has become subject to a new description. By virtue of that description, the constitution of self-conscious life and its course become encompassed within a unitary conception of what there is which is made possible by means of a restructured ontology." [72]

But what is this "unitary conception" and how does it transform what the world looks

like? It would seem that a world-description which can encompass the modern subject's need

for transformative self-interpretation must describe a world in which such an effort is not

ultimately hopeless and absurd.   Furthermore, it must provide some guidance in *choosing*

among our self-interpretations. If it does not then the process of self-transformation in which we

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[72] Dieter Henrich, "Philosophy and the Conflict among Tendencies of Life," in *Konzepte: Essays zur Philosophie in der Zeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1987), 122, quoted in Freundlieb, 107.

undertake ever new interpretations would have the character of a Hegelian bad infinity, simply one interpretation after another. If our self-interpretative effort is absurd in what sense can we speak of it as freedom and in what sense is it highest?

Accordingly, in some of his essays, Henrich takes a different path, seeking to reestablish the connection between freedom and happiness in classical *theoria* not through the satisfactions of a completed dialectical logic but rather through a concept of contemplative gratitude (*Kontemplativen Dank*), a kind of thanks that goes beyond the reciprocal gratitude familiar within the moral horizon of communal life.[73] *Kontemplativen Dank*, however, does not depend on a personal deity as its addressee nor is it thanks for the transparent intelligibility of the whole. It is rather the philosopher's gratitude for a world in which philosophy is possible at all, it is gratitude offered in full recognition that the whole is characterized by intractable *aporiai*, and thus recalcitrant to contemplation. In fact, the philosopher gives thanks precisely for these *aporiai*.

How is this thanks to be understood? As Socrates showed, to recognize an *aporia* is already to engage in philosophy. To understand why certain fundamental problems, *as problems*, are constitutive elements of the whole can thus be seen as the most complete expression and *justification* of philosophical activity. Philosophy is justified because the aporiai, or *Dunkelheiten*, within our rational self-understanding recall or mirror or partake in the aporetic structure of the whole, which is the comprehensive object of our reflections.

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[73] See for example, Dieter Henrich, "Gedanken zur Dankbarkeit," in *Bewußtes Leben* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999): 152-93.

I, for one, am not convinced that we can make much sense of this relation of mirroring or partaking (however we choose to name it) without finding our way to a concrete re-appropriation of the Socratic insight that reason is like the Good, that it somehow shares in the *eidos* of *archē tōn pantōn.* That is, it seems to me that the possibility of philosophical thanks for a whole in which the life of philosophy is possible is already a confession that reason *does*, in some important sense, recognize itself and its highest interests in nature. Henrich might not agree. However, that it less important for now than the following: he provides a powerful demonstration that, whatever position one takes on this question, the fact that we are still asking it is not symptomatic of any "scramble" back behind Kant. On the contrary, we get there just as well by starting from eminently Kantian premises. In this way his reflections reveal a thematic continuity in Western metaphysics very different from Heidegger's and ultimately, I believe, more vital.

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