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Metametaphysical Monism, Dualism, Pluralism, and Holism in the German Idealist Tradition

G. Anthony Bruno

Philosophy, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, UK

ABSTRACT
During his Jena period, Fichte endorses a curious dictum: 'the kind of philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person one is'. How can Fichte's dictum support a vindication of German idealism over Spinozism, which he also calls 'dogmatism'? I will show that the answer to this seemingly straightforward question reveals a rather complex series of metametaphysical objections that shape the development of the entire German idealist tradition. Ultimately, as I will suggest, the series of metametaphysical questions that shape the German idealist tradition must culminate in the question of how to understand the relation between philosophy and its presuppositions. I will conclude by briefly considering a hermeneutical response to this question.

The philosophical aim of German idealism is to prove that being is completely intelligible, i.e. that actuality is rational without remainder, and hence that thought and being are ultimately identical. The German idealists' method of proving this is to deduce the system of the conditions of intelligibility either from an immediately evident unconditioned condition, e.g. Reinhold's principle of consciousness, Fichte's reason or the I, and early Schelling's absolute I, or as a mediately articulated unconditioned condition, e.g. Hegel's absolute idea. According to either expression of this method, the deduced system of conditions is a science that has no thinkable contrary and thus is absolute.

In pursuing its aim, German idealism is motivated by two main problems. First, Kant deduces the conditions of intelligibility, which include the forms of sensibility, the forms of judgment, the categories of the understanding, and the ideas of reason, from no unconditioned condition and thus presents them as ultimately groundless, i.e. as brute,

radically contingent, or, as it comes to be known, factical. The German idealists' solution to the facticity problem is to provide the missing systematic deduction of Kant's conditions and thereby secure what they call the missing 'premises' of his 'conclusions'.

Second, the ultimate groundlessness of Kant's conditions leaves open the nihilistic possibility of a position that deduces a system of conditions of intelligibility from substance or the not-I and consequently rules out human freedom and purposiveness, viz., Spinozism. The German idealists' solution to the nihilism problem is to provide a systematic deduction of the conditions of intelligibility that manifests human freedom and purposiveness in the form of the autonomy of reason and that thereby refutes Spinozism.

Fichte is the first German idealist to posit the autonomy of reason or the I as first principle and to argue that we must both exhibit its autonomy, thereby eliminating nihilism, and deduce the system of the conditions of intelligibility from it, thereby eliminating facticity.

During his Jena period, Fichte endorses a curious dictum: 'the kind of philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person one is'.[1] How can Fichte's dictum support a vindication of German idealism over Spinozism, which he also calls 'dogmatism'? I will show that the answer to this seemingly straightforward question reveals a rather complex series of metametaphysical objections that shape the development of the entire German idealist tradition.[2]

In §1, I will clarify Fichte's dictum by explaining his commitment to metametaphysical monism, i.e. the view there is one kind of philosophy. He arrives at this view by defending a conditional claim: if one can only consistently posit the I as first principle, then idealism is the only livable philosophy, where a philosophy's livability consists in the amenability of its content to being consistently exhibited not just in how one thinks, i.e. theoretically, but also and primarily in how one acts, i.e. practically. However, Fichte's claim invites the objection that more than one philosophy is livable.

In §2, I will consider a version of this objection that is made by early Schelling, which is motivated by his commitment to metametaphysical dualism, i.e. the view that there are two kinds of philosophy. He arrives at this view by defending a conditional claim: if idealism and dogmatism are equally livable, then one can consistently posit either the I or the not-I as first principle. However, Schelling's claim invites the objection that more than two philosophies are livable.

In §3, I will consider a version of this objection that is made by Jacobi, which is motivated by his commitment to metametaphysical pluralism, i.e. the view that one's philosophy depends on one's historical epoch. He arrives at this view by appealing to historicity. However, Jacobi's appeal faces a historicist dilemma: either it risks fatalism by implying that philosophy is

the necessary effect of a causal series or it risks relativism by implying that philosophy is the contingent expression of a given epoch.

In §4, I will consider Hegel's distinct appeal to historicity in his commitment to metametaphysical holism, i.e. the view that one's philosophy depends on world history. He arrives at this view by defending a biconditional claim: there are many livable philosophies just if one true philosophy dialectically demonstrates their role in the rational progression of history as a whole. While Hegel's claim avoids the objections to metametaphysical monism and metametaphysical dualism and the historicist dilemma of metametaphysical pluralism, it depends on the idea that the one true philosophy is presuppositionless.

However, if, as I will suggest, philosophy cannot avoid presuppositions, then the series of metametaphysical questions that shape the German idealist tradition must culminate in the question of how to understand the relation between philosophy and its presuppositions. In §5, I will conclude by briefly considering a hermeneutical response to this question.

§1: Fichte's Metametaphysical Monism

In 1797–98's *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte claims that philosophy's first 'task' is to posit the 'explanatory ground' or 'first principle' of experience.[3] Such a principle is an ultimate explanatory ground as opposed to a derivative explanatory ground, for it is meant to serve as the original source from which the conditions of intelligibility are to be deduced. Whereas an idealist posits reason or the I as first principle, a dogmatist posits substance or the not-I as first principle.

According to Fichte, the dispute between the first principles of idealism and dogmatism is theoretically insoluble: 'Neither of these two systems can directly refute the opposing one; for the dispute between them is a dispute concerning the first principle, i.e. concerning a principle that cannot be derived from any higher principle. If the first principle of either system is conceded, then it is able to refute the first principle of the other. Each denies everything included within the opposite system'.[4] Fichte here offers two reasons for why the dispute between idealism and dogmatism cannot be resolved theoretically, i.e. by conceptual analysis. First, each principle is an ultimate explanatory ground and so cannot be derived from the concept of a further ground.[5] Second, each principle grounds an account of intelligibility that rules out the concept of the other principle, such that there is no autonomous reason if the not-I is ultimately explanatory and there is no substance in itself if the I is ultimately explanatory.

The idealism-dogmatism dispute must therefore be resolved practically. As an idealist, I practically resolve the dispute by attaining consciousness of

my freedom. This is consciousness, not of a fact, but rather of an act, since it is consciousness, not of something that I receive, which limits me, but rather of something that I perform, which I actualize. Consequently, it is not a consciousness that can be imposed on me, but rather can only be solicited from me. As Fichte says, an idealist must be 'summoned' to exhibit the freedom of which they are conscious.[6]

Fichte typically summons our freedom by inviting us to think for ourselves. In being summoned, not just to think of the wall, but rather to think of myself as thinking of the wall,[7] I determine the content of my thought and thereby commit myself to being responsible for what I think. In becoming conscious of determining what I think, I become conscious of myself as self-determining and thus conscious of myself as free. Moreover, by attaining consciousness of my freedom, I exhibit the autonomy of reason or the I, thereby practically resolving the dispute in favour of idealism.

Fichte acknowledges that, in attaining consciousness of my freedom, I resolve the dispute for myself but not for the dogmatist.[8] This is because my consciousness depends on my performing an act of freedom, whose possibility the dogmatist denies. A decisive resolution of the dispute therefore requires showing that the dogmatist's own position is self-refuting. Fichte argues in four steps that a dogmatist refutes themselves.

First, positing a first principle is a normative activity insofar as it is a response to a task, a response that one regards as correct and for which one regards oneself as responsible. Second, a normative activity presupposes freedom insofar as a norm is a standard with which one strives to conform, a striving that is inappropriate to attribute to something that is not free. Third, a dogmatist posits a first principle that rules out the freedom that their positing presupposes. Fourth, therefore, a dogmatist betrays their capacity for freedom and so, through a performative contradiction, they refute themselves. As Fichte says, the dogmatist's position contains its own 'cure'.[9] But if dogmatism is self-refuting, i.e. if positing the not-I as first principle is a performative contradiction, then one can only consistently posit the I as first principle.

Recall Fichte's conditional claim that if one can only consistently posit the I, then idealism is the only livable philosophy. His four-step argument justifies affirming the antecedent, from which the consequent follows. Hence, Fichte declares that '[t]he only type of philosophy that remains possible is idealism',[10] where 'possib[ility]' refers, not to mere conceivability, but rather to livability. Idealism is exclusively livable because, unlike dogmatism, its content is amenable to being consistently exhibited both in one's thought and in one's action. By defending his conditional claim in this way, Fichte demonstrates his commitment to metametaphysical monism.

Explaining Fichte's metametaphysical monism enables us to clarify his dictum that one's chosen philosophy depends on one's kind of person. We

saw that dogmatism is self-refuting, leaving idealism as our only livable philosophical option. To live like a dogmatist is, in spite of oneself, to live like an idealist. But this means that one can either choose idealism or fail to see that idealism is one's only choice. And this means that one must be an idealist kind of person, whether wittingly, like Fichte, or unwittingly, like the dogmatist.

However, this invites the objection that more than one philosophy is livable, i.e. that there is more than one kind of person in philosophy. This objection would entail that metametaphysical monism is false. I will now consider a version of this objection that is made by early Schelling.

§2: Schelling's Metametaphysical Dualism

Schelling sends 1794's 'On the Possibility of a Form of Philosophy in General' to Fichte after reading the latter's 1794 'Concerning the Concept of the *Wissenschaftslehre*'. Fichte then sends him fascicles of 1794–95's *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*, which inspires Schelling's 1795 'Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge', in which the absolute I is meant to avoid nihilism by being absolutely free and to avoid facticity by grounding the system of conditions of intelligibility. In 1795–96's 'Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism', Schelling agrees with Fichte on three metametaphysical points.[11]

First, Schelling acknowledges that idealism and dogmatism, which he also calls 'criticism' and 'realism', respectively, are both theoretically possible, i.e. conceivable. Second, he himself endorses idealism and ascribes dogmatism to Spinoza. Third, he regards the dispute as theoretically insoluble and thus as requiring a practical resolution. Nevertheless, Schelling is committed to metametaphysical dualism, a view that he arrives at by defending a conditional claim, viz., if idealism and dogmatism are equally livable, then one can consistently posit either the I or the not-I as first principle. In affirming the antecedent of this claim, Schelling must reject the consequent of Fichte's conditional claim, undermining that claim by *modus tollens*. We will now see how it is that Schelling affirms the antecedent of his conditional claim.

According to Schelling, dogmatism is 'like any other ethics' in that it is no mere 'mental play', but rather is a mode of conduct that is to be 'lived'.[12] In other words, Spinoza's posthumous 1677 *The Ethics* offers not an abstraction, but rather a practice. This is because it describes ways of rationally living within nature, among others, and as oneself. Spinozism is thus meant to be livable insofar as its content is meant to be amenable to being consistently exhibited in action and, indeed, in affect. Hence, Spinoza 'delights' in knowing that his emotions 'follow from the same necessity' as do all

things, he 'desires' to '*help other human beings*' to persevere, and he 'endeavours' to '*persevere in existence*' as far as 'external cause[s]' permit.[13] These descriptions of affects and actions taken toward nature, others, and oneself demonstrate that dogmatism affords a way of conducting one's life.

Schelling's observation of the practical character of dogmatism leads him to conclude that idealism and dogmatism are the same in kind insofar as they are active, differing only in the degree of activity. As he puts the point, these systems differ, not in terms of 'action as such', but rather 'in the spirit of the action'.[14] Thus, we can distinguish the relatively high degree of activity in Fichte's moral striving to bring nature under the sway of his rational autonomy from the relatively low degree of activity in the 'stoical peace of mind' with which Spinoza delights in the necessity of a deterministic universe.[15] Indeed, in characterizing idealism and dogmatism as differing only in the degree or 'spirit' of action, Schelling prefigures Fichte's dictum with his own, metametaphysically divergent version of that dictum: '[w]hich of the two [systems] we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we ourselves have acquired'.[16]

This will not convince Fichte, according to whom 'Spinoza could not have been convinced of his own philosophy' because it 'contradicts those convictions that [he] must necessarily have adopted in his everyday life, by virtue of which he had to consider himself to be free and self-sufficient'.[17] Arguably, Spinoza cannot regard his actions as praiseworthy or blameworthy while endorsing dogmatism, whose deterministic worldview rules out the 'free-[dom] and self-sufficen[cy]' that is required for one to be the source of actions for which one can be held responsible and thereby praised or blamed.[18] If this is right, then the content of Spinozism is not amenable to being consistently exhibited both in how one thinks and in how one acts, for conviction in that content contradicts conviction in the culpability of action. Such a contradiction would entail, *contra* Schelling, that idealism and dogmatism differ in kind, not merely in degree.

However, Schelling's account of what it means to posit a first principle differs subtly yet crucially from Fichte's account. For Schelling, positing consists, not in a normative activity, but rather in deciding philosophically who to be. His distinct account of what it means to posit a first principle figures in a four-step argument for the antecedent of his conditional claim.

First, one posits a first principle, not 'by reasoning up' to it, but rather by willing that it be a first principle since, as we saw, a first principle cannot be derived from the concept of a further ground. Second, willing that something be a first principle consists in the 'practical decision' to be the kind of person who lives according that principle, i.e. to '*be* what we call ourselves', viz., to live as an idealist or as a dogmatist.[19] Third, an idealist can decide to live according to rational autonomy, such as to exhibit idealism's content in action, while a dogmatist can decide to live according to natural causality,

such as to exhibit dogmatism's content in action. Fourth, therefore, idealism and dogmatism are equally livable. As Schelling says, idealism and dogmatism 'hold their own' in their common pursuit of absolute science.[20] However, if idealism and dogmatism are equally livable, i.e. if both rest on no more than positing a way to be, then they afford genuine ways of conducting one's life.

Recall Schelling's conditional claim that if idealism and dogmatism are equally livable, then one can consistently posit the I or the not-I as first principle. His four-step argument justifies affirming the antecedent, from which the consequent follows. Hence, Schelling declares that the 'validity' of the first principles of idealism and dogmatism have equal footing as '*original insuperable prejudices*'.[21] By defending his conditional claim in this way, he demonstrates his commitment to metametaphysical dualism.[22] Moreover, by affirming the antecedent in his conditional claim, he rejects the consequent of Fichte's conditional claim, undermining that claim by *modus tollens*. Schelling thus rejects metametaphysical monism. As he says, 'nothing can be more unbearable than the despotism of narrow minds who cannot tolerate another system beside their own'.[23]

However, this invites the objection that more than two philosophies are livable, i.e. that there are more than two kinds of person in philosophy. If a third philosophical option is both conceivable and livable, such that its content is amenable to consistent exhibition in thought and action, then it is just as 'despoti[c]' of Schelling to hold that we must choose between idealism and dogmatism as it is for Fichte to hold that idealism is our only choice and therefore just as 'narrow'-minded of Schelling to hold that one must be either an idealistic or a dogmatic person as it is for Fichte to hold that we are only idealistic persons, whether wittingly or unwittingly. This objection would entail that metametaphysical dualism is false. I will now consider a version of this objection that is made by Jacobi.

§3: Jacobi's Metametaphysical Pluralism

In his 1799 open letter to Fichte, Jacobi coins 'nihilism' to name the apparent consequence of Fichte's and, indeed, any system of conditions of intelligibility, viz., the denial of the immediate givenness of individuals with intrinsic properties including freedom and purposiveness. In the open letter, Jacobi approvingly cites Fichte's dictum.[24] However, Jacobi rejects metametaphysical monism and, indeed, metametaphysical dualism. He does so by endorsing a modified version of Fichte's dictum, according to which one's philosophy depends on one's historical epoch, where the multiplicity and hence variability of historical epochs rules out the monistic and dualistic restrictiveness of Fichte's and Schelling's metametaphysical views, respectively. Jacobi arrives at this modified dictum with a four-step argument for

metametaphysical pluralism in 1785's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Mr Moses Mendelssohn*.

First, historically bounded interests shape our pursuit of knowledge, where such interests shape what we deem it possible to know, e.g. mere appearances, and what we deem it most worth knowing, e.g. what we perceive with clarity and distinctness. Second, our pursuit of knowledge shapes our current body of knowledge and its unifying principles. Third, these principles shape the 'doctrine' that defines our current philosophical standpoint. Fourth, therefore, historically bounded interests shape our current philosophical standpoint. As Jacobi says, for individuals of any historical epoch, 'their way of thinking originates from their history. [...] And can living philosophy ever be anything but history?'.[25] But if one's philosophy depends on one's historical epoch and since historical epochs vary given their multiplicity, then there is a plurality of livable philosophies.

Jacobi's argument for metametaphysical pluralism is plausible insofar as historical context makes salient certain philosophical problems and solutions rather than others, e.g. the historical context of German idealism makes salient the facticity and nihilism problems and their, respectively, deductive and practical solutions. Moreover, Jacobi avoids the objections to metametaphysical monism and metametaphysical dualism by acknowledging the livability of a genuine plurality of philosophies.

However, Jacobi arrives at his metametaphysical pluralist view by appealing to historicity, which raises a historicist dilemma. Such an appeal either risks fatalism by implying that one's philosophy is the necessary effect of a causal series or risks relativism by implying that one's philosophy is the contingent expression of a given epoch. On the one hand, if the historically bounded interests that shape one's philosophy are part of a causal series that is composed of all preceding and succeeding historical contexts, then one is necessarily fated to adopt one's philosophical standpoint, which ironically threatens the very nihilistic consequence that Jacobi diagnoses and, moreover, rules out the possibility of freely living, i.e. consistently exhibiting, the content of one's philosophy in thought and action. On the other hand, if the historically bounded interests that shape one's philosophy are irreducibly unique to the historical context that defines one's present epoch, then one's philosophical standpoint is contingently relative to that epoch. In either case, it is not possible to rationally motivate or defend one's philosophy, for it is either the pointless product of a causal mechanism or the short-sighted report of a parochial perspective.[26]

Jacobi's appeal to historicity is vulnerable to the historicist dilemma because he does not clarify the precise nature of philosophy's dependence on historical context. Even assuming that he historically contextualizes

philosophy in a way that Fichte and Schelling ought yet fail to do, Jacobi does not provide an account of philosophy's historicity that definitively avoids fatalism and relativism. We will now see that Hegel provides precisely this account.

§4: Hegel's Metametaphysical Holism

Hegel's metametaphysical holist view that one's philosophy depends on world history avoids the historicist dilemma by clarifying the nature of philosophy's dependence on historical context. In his 1822–23 Berlin lectures on the philosophy of world history, he says that one's philosophy is one's epoch 'comprehended in thought'.[27] This is to say, like Jacobi, that one's philosophy is self-consciously historical in that it grasps itself in terms of the historical context that makes salient certain philosophical problems and solutions rather than others. As Hegel puts the point, the 'spirit of a people' consists in 'knowing itself and thinking what it is'.[28] However, he claims that history's 'enormous cost must be for some ultimate purpose'.[29] This is to say, unlike Jacobi, that one's philosophy is purposively historical in that it is neither a mechanically pointless product nor a parochially contingent report, but is rather, along with philosophies from all historical contexts, the actualization of a 'purpose' or final cause.

For Hegel, then, philosophy is not only self-consciously historical but also purposively historical. This indicates that the nature of philosophy's dependence on historical context consists both in the philosophical comprehension of one's epoch and in the actualization of the common purpose of all philosophically comprehended epochs.

Hegel clarifies the common purpose of all epochs by claiming that the 'final end' that 'governs' epochs is that 'there is *reason in world history*'.[30] In other words, the final cause of all philosophically comprehended epochs is collectively proving that the structure of world history is neither mechanically pointless nor parochially contingent, but rather is absolutely rational. Crucially, proving the absolute rationality of world history contributes to the satisfaction of the philosophical aim of German idealism *qua* absolute science, which is to prove that being is completely intelligible. This has the double effect of avoiding nihilism, since such a proof concerns the purpose of history and the freedom with which historical agents contribute to its actualization, and avoiding facticity, since such a proof is afforded by a science whose account of the conditions of intelligibility leaves no conditions ungrounded.

Finally, Hegel explains the dialectical 'matrix' in which the series of philosophically comprehended epochs actualize the rational structure of world history. First, an epoch exhibits the 'demise' whereby its philosophical comprehension contradicts itself. Second, the 'sublation' of the opposing

terms of that epoch's self-contradiction yields a 'higher principle' for the next epoch's philosophical comprehension. Third, the series of demise and sublation completes itself in the contradiction-free comprehension of 'true being, the absolute itself', which is to say, the absolute rationality of world history.[31]

Hegel's account of philosophy's dependence on historical context constitutes a defense of the biconditional claim that there are many livable philosophies just if one true philosophy dialectically demonstrates their role in the rational progression of history as a whole. On the one hand, without a plurality of livable philosophies, there would be no actual series whose historical purpose the one true philosophy could even 'imagin[e]'. On the other hand, without an account of the purpose of the series of historical philosophies, this series would amount to mere 'din and nois[e]', in which case the content of such philosophies could not be said to be consistently exhibited in any thought or action that concerns, as thought and action must, one's historical context.[32]

According to Hegel, the one true philosophy is alone capable of providing a philosophical history. As he says, whereas '[o]riginal history' chronicles contemporaneous events and '[r]eflective history' orders and evaluates extant chronicles, '[p]hilosophical history' details the dialectical process whereby 'a necessary succession of stages' of 'the spirits of peoples' culminates in the 'totality of the one world spirit'.[33] Given these definitions, we can see that, for Hegel, Jacobi is an original historian insofar as he neither organizes extant chronicles of the spirits of peoples nor argues that such spirits culminate in a world spirit.

By demonstrating that the entire series of philosophically comprehended epochs actualizes the absolute rationality of world history, the one true philosophy reveals itself to be metametaphysically holistic. Hegel's commitment to metametaphysical holism clarifies the nature of philosophy's dependence on history in a way that Jacobi fails to do. Moreover, metametaphysical holism avoids, not only the objections to Fichte's metametaphysical monism and Schelling's metametaphysical dualism, both of which deny the historically manifest plurality of livable philosophies beyond idealism and dogmatism, but also the historicist dilemma of Jacobi's metametaphysical pluralism, which fails to ask what historical purpose saves the series of historical philosophies from amounting, whether fatalistically or relativistically, to mere din and noise.

In his 1830–31 Berlin lectures on the philosophy of world history, Hegel claims that the one true philosophy is presuppositionless:

> Reason governs the world and [...] therefore world history is a rational process. From the point of view of history as such, this conviction and insight is a *presupposition*. Within philosophy itself this is no presupposition: by

means of speculative cognition it is *proved* that *reason* [...] is *substance* and infinite power. [...] [T]he distinctive character of the discipline of philosophy does not allow it to accept presuppositions.[34]

From the 'point of view' of any philosophically comprehended epoch, it is a '*presupposition*' that world history is 'a rational process'. As we saw, every such epoch presupposes as its final cause the absolute rationality of world history. However, this ultimate purpose is 'no presupposition' for philosophy, which is 'distinctive' among all 'discipline[s]' in that it can 'accept' no presuppositions. We have seen why this is so. Facticity is one of the two main problems that motivates German idealism, for it characterizes a putative condition of intelligibility that, like a conclusion without a premise, is simply presupposed and thus brute or radically contingent. Facticity thus restricts the autonomy of reason, thereby inviting the other main motivating problem, viz., the nihilistic possibility of Spinozism. Insofar as the one true philosophy cannot tolerate facticity, it must instead deduce a system of the conditions of intelligibility and so must *inter alia* '*prov[e]*' that 'reason governs the world' such that world history is absolutely rational.

However, I suggest that, notwithstanding its unobjectionable opposition to dogmatic assumptions, philosophy cannot avoid presuppositions entirely. While a defense of this suggestion exceeds the scope of this paper,[35] it perhaps suffices to acknowledge that philosophy presupposes that there is anything at all whose intelligibility could be complete and that there is a purpose to pursuing the one true philosophy *qua* absolute science, which is not to say that this science presupposes either its method or its content. If that is so, then the series of metametaphysical objections that shape the German idealist tradition must culminate in the question of how to understand the relation between philosophy and its presuppositions. I will now conclude by briefly considering a hermeneutical response to this question.

§5: Hermeneutics on Philosophy's Presuppositions

We have seen that Fichte's metametaphysical monism and Schelling's metametaphysical dualism face related objections, while Jacobi's metametaphysical pluralism faces a historicist dilemma. Hegel avoids these objections and this dilemma, but faces the plausible suggestion that philosophy cannot be absolutely presuppositionless. This raises the question of how to understand the relation between philosophy and its own presuppositions. A hermeneutical approach is well-suited to answer this question, for it interprets a phenomenon and its presuppositions as standing in a relation of mutual illumination, e.g. a chapter and the text in which it appears or a text and the historical context in which it is written. Insofar as the relata in such a relation render each other increasingly intelligible,

neither relatum has priority of intelligibility over the other. Accordingly, the relation of mutual illumination turns in a virtuous circle, viz., the hermeneutic circle. Thus, on a hermeneutical approach, philosophy's relation to its presuppositions would be such that they are mutually illuminating, rendering each other increasingly intelligible through a circular expansion of our understanding. Crucially, the hermeneut can only enter the hermeneutic circle from the standpoint of lived experience, which guarantees a consideration of the presuppositions of philosophy insofar as it is livable.

Curiously, although early Schelling stands at the beginning of the series of metametaphysical objections that shape the German idealist tradition, he does not remain there. Even more curiously, he tends in the direction of a hermeneutical approach to the culminating question of philosophy and its presuppositions.

After committing to metametaphysical dualism in 'Philosophical Letters', Schelling turns to metametaphysical monism during his identity philosophy.[36] He then turns to metametaphysical holism during the 1820s.[37] Finally, in his 1841–42 Berlin lectures, Schelling adopts a position that exhibits some of the characteristic features of a hermeneutic approach.

On the one hand, Schelling argues that what Hegel regards as the one true philosophy is necessary for deducing the system of the conditions of intelligibility. However, this philosophy presupposes that there is anything at all whose conditions of intelligibility could be systematically deduced, i.e. it presupposes existence as such, without which such conditions would be empty and their systematic deduction would be purposeless. On the other hand, Schelling argues that the experience of existence as such is necessary for proving the applicability and hence the actuality of the system of the conditions of intelligibility. However, this experience presupposes that existence is intelligible, i.e. it presupposes the conditions that render existence intelligible, without which such experience would be blind.[38] To modify a Kantian slogan, for Schelling, the one true philosophy and the experience of existence are mutually dependent such that philosophy without experience is empty and experience without philosophy is blind.[39]

Crucially, for late Schelling, the relation between philosophy and its presupposition of existence is one of mutual illumination. Since philosophy can no more systematically deduce the conditions of the intelligibility of existence than the experience of existence can afford philosophy the applicability and purpose of this deduction and vice versa, neither relatum has priority of intelligibility. Indeed, the mutual dependence of philosophy and its presupposition promises increasing intelligibility through a circular expansion of understanding, as one would expect from a hermeneutic circle.

Of course, late Schelling does not make explicit his arguments' exhibition of these characteristics of the hermeneutic approach, an approach that is not

articulated until the German idealist tradition cedes to a post-Kantian tradition that includes Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. However, Schelling's gradual movement through the metametaphysical views and objections that move the German idealist tradition forward points fruitfully toward a hermeneutical approach to the lasting question of philosophy and its presuppositions.[40]

Notes

1. Fichte SW I/1: 434.
2. In this paper, I use 'metametaphysical' to denote what might seem rather to be metaphilosophical issues, i.e. issues that concern the nature of philosophy. However, these issues qualify as metametaphysical insofar as the thinkers that concern me here regard metaphysics as essential, if not identical, to philosophy.
3. Fichte SW I/1: 423. This section includes a version of material in Bruno (2023).
4. Fichte SW I/1: 429.
5. By Fichte's lights, a first principle is factical insofar as it is an underivably brute fact. Accordingly, his campaign against facticity is near-total and thus limited. On this, see On this, see Bruno (2021).
6. Fichte SW I/1: 461.
7. See Fichte GA IV/2: 29, 38.
8. See Fichte SW I/1: 510.
9. Fichte SW I/1: 16.
10. Fichte SW I/1: 484.
11. This section includes a version of material in Bruno 2023.
12. Schelling SW I/1: 305.
13. Spinoza (2018): E3 Preface, P8, P59S.
14. Schelling SW I/1: 334.
15. Schelling SW I/1: 284. Schelling implies that Spinoza is innocent of nihilism when he describes dogmatism as 'bent [. . .] not upon enforced but on voluntary annihilation' (Schelling SW I/1: 284).
16. Schelling SW I/1: 308.
17. Fichte SW I/1: 513.
18. See Spinoza: 'For each thing there must be a cause, or reason, both for why it exists and for why it does not exist' (Spinoza 2018: E1 P11D2).
19. Schelling SW I/1: 308.
20. Schelling SW I/1: 331. Thus, the difference between Fichte's and Schelling's accounts of positing a first principle is subtle in that Fichte accepts its first two premises yet crucial in that Fichte rejects its third premise.
21. Schelling SW I/1: 312–3.
22. Kemp and Iacovetti effectively claim that Schelling is a metametaphysical monist on the grounds that he regards dogmatists as alone vulnerable to the delusion of intellectual intuition (Kemp and Iacovetti 2020, 34). However, Schelling is clear that intellectual intuition is a delusion to which idealists and dogmatists are equally vulnerable (Schelling SW I/1: 326–7), even coining 'dogmaticism' to signify this common delusion (Schelling SW I/1: 307n, 313; see Nieke 1972, 278–9, Bruno 2020).
23. Schelling SW I/1: 306.

24. Jacobi (1994), 526–7.
25. Jacobi (1994), 238–9.
26. Given the nihilistic consequence that it threatens, Jacobi must reject the fatalist horn of the dilemma. Crucially, his four-step argument emerges from his assessment of the case of Sperchis and Bulis, two Spartans who 'boast' of no 'virtue' as it might be defined by reason, but instead 'professed their heart's sentiment' as it is shaped by their life, and who thereby show themselves to be 'in possession of a truth' that we can find 'within us', viz., that one's philosophy depends on one's history (Jacobi 1994, 238–9). This suggests that Jacobi must accept the relativist horn of the dilemma.
27. Hegel GW 18: 173.
28. Hegel GW 18: 48.
29. Hegel GW 18: 20.
30. Hegel GW 18: 21.
31. Hegel GW 18: 17, 39, 58.
32. Hegel GW 18: 20.
33. Hegel GW 18: 5, 7–15.
34. Hegel GW 18: 140, 146.
35. For a defense of this suggestion, see Bruno (forthcoming).
36. See Schelling's 1802 *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*: 'Identification of form with essence in absolute intellectual intuition snatches the ultimate doubling {of the real and ideal} away from the dualism it inhabits and establishes *absolute idealism* for the partial idealism of the world of appearances' (Schelling SW I/4: 405).
37. In Schelling's 1820–21 Erlangen lectures, he says that although philosophy 'has often been accused' of 'internal conflict', thereby provoking the assertion '*quot capita, tot sensus*, however many heads, so many systems', in fact 'in philosophy there must be systems precisely because there is one system'. He explains that an 'individual system relates to the system κατ'εξοχήν [*par excellence*] in much the same way as illness and health', for '[a]nyone who suffers from one of these systems […] is, as it were, tied to this system, inhibited in their freedom, actually a slave to it', whereas 'the healthy person does not feel any of these systems in particular'. Thus, given (1) the 'conflict' among systems that is (2) 'apparent' and (3) not 'accidental', (4) '[o]ne must give up the hope of ever ending this dispute by one system becoming master over the other' and (5) instead take up the 'task' of recognizing that all systems 'should exist together, like the different systems in an organism', whose 'differences of organs and functions dissolve into one indivisible life, the sensation of which is well-being' (Schelling HKA II/10: 212–3).
38. See Schelling (2007), 141–212.
39. On Schelling's modification of the Kantian slogan, see Bruno (2015).
40. Thanks to Dominic Alford-Duguid, Robb Dunphy, Sean Smith, David Suarez, audiences at the University of Freiburg and Simon Fraser University, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on this paper.

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