

BEING, DETERMINATION, AND DIALECTIC

ON THE SOURCES OF METAPHYSICAL THINKING

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I

Dialectic is tied to the entire range of ways of thinking about being that we find in the tradition of metaphysics. I will not review that range, as I have done so elsewhere.¹ Metaphysics now of course often meets with outright rejection, as purportedly dealing with what lies beyond our ken, or as a conceptual projection onto an illusory transcendence of our own powers and impotences, or as the cunning conceit of an intellectual will to power. The intimacy of connection between dialectic and the thinking of being also defines part of the problematic of so-called “post-metaphysical” philosophy. The claim is that we are now to think beyond all of that, beyond dialectic, beyond metaphysics, beyond being. None of these claims are themselves immune from contestation. Hence I want to consider this contested place of metaphysics and the complex, indeed ambiguous role that dialectical thinking has played in defining that place.

Often we attribute the sources of this contested place to Hume and, in a more qualified way, to Kant. By contrast, Hegel is frequently presented as embodying a post-critical resurgence of metaphysics, a recrudescence of what seemed to have been safely stowed in its grave. True, one now finds interpretations in which Hegel as metaphysician is subordinated to Hegel as the true

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heir of the Kantian project. Nevertheless, Hegel's continuity with the prior tradition is so massively evident, and not least in his respect for the Greeks, especially Aristotle, that this interpretation has much to do with the commentators' own embarrassments with metaphysics. And yet Hegel has been a contributor, sometimes witting, sometimes not, to metaphysics' contested place.

The view is not without truth that Hegel represents a kind of summation of major strands in the Western tradition. This being so, if we wish to follow in his footsteps, we must strive for as comprehensive and nuanced an understanding of the possibilities of the philosophical tradition as he had. Obviously, this is extraordinarily difficult. Here a point I would stress is that it is Hegel's *greatness* that has made things more difficult for metaphysics rather than easier. To be a great metaphysician is not only to release essential possibilities of thinking, it is to cast a shadow over descendent thinkers under which they must struggle for light. Excess of light blinds eyes unused to the surplus of greatness.

Reconsider thus the view of Hegel as the summation of the essential possibilities in the metaphysical tradition. As such, there seems to be something unsurpassable about him. And yet just the alleged consummation leaves us strangely disquieted and hungry. If Hegel is a completion, the very completion shows forth starkly that something was missing in the quest, perhaps from the outset. The completion suggests the full richness of metaphysics, and yet the richness seems also to show (in Marx's phrase) the poverty of philosophy. And so if we are to "surpass" this alleged end of metaphysics, we must do so beyond the alleged poverty of philosophy. It goes without saying that this language of "the end of metaphysics" is not only the fashionable rhetoric of post-Heideggerian thought. It names a task that a plethora of thinkers set themselves in Hegel's wake, for instance, Marx in his will to realize, complete, and surpass philosophy in revolutionary praxis, Kierkegaard in his desire to be "post-philosophical" in religious faith, Nietzsche in his eros to be a "new philosopher" celebrating the aesthetic theodicy of Dionysus. As much as, indeed more than, the more positivistic or scientific heirs of Kant or Hume, the Continental heirs of completed idealism have been the "surpassers of metaphysics," be they rhapsodic descendants of Nietzsche or deconstructive heirs of Heidegger.

I do not invoke this throng of "post-metaphysical" despisers of "metaphysics" to enlist in their company. I think that much of this contestation of metaphysics is bound up with crucial ambiguities in dialectical thinking. I will explain what I mean in due course. But in advance I want to reject the view that Hegel embodies the culmination of the tradition of metaphysics. I say this, not because I want to surpass metaphysics, in whatever direction, be it to praxis or to rhapsody or to poesy or to scientism or to grammatology.² I say it because Hegelian dialectic represents a very powerful interpretation of

thinking, yet one that hides nuances, nuances that, if resurrected for rethinking, shed a different light on metaphysical thinking and the possibilities of its contemporary renewal.

The claim that Hegel represents the culmination of metaphysics has had disastrous consequences, not because Hegel is a disaster, but because the reiteration of this claim has stood in the way of rethinking metaphysics. It is like a mesmerizing fetish whose bewitching spell we cannot break. Why are we in its spell? Precisely because of Hegel's greatness, and the great difficulty of thinking philosophically at a level comparable to Hegel's. We cannot surpass Hegel, because Hegel surpasses us, and the seeming comprehensive system freezes us, or exhausts us, instead of freeing us. It does not have to be so. Nor does one's strategy need to be just the predatory exploitation of this one aspect of Hegel's system to call that other aspect into account, as though we could beat one bone of Hegel's head with another bone taken from his dismembered body. We cannot confine ourselves to Hegel and his legacy. We must return to the sources of metaphysical thinking.

I cite four reasons why we need to do this: first, to have self-knowledge of what we are doing, and thus to understand the lack of understanding in much talk about the completion of metaphysics; second, to understand better Hegelian dialectic in the flawed incompleteness of its claim to completion; third, to understand better the equivocal legacy of dialectic with respect to some of Hegel's successors; and fourth, since the sources are never behind us, to see how and why metaphysics will always continue to be reborn, beyond every claim to determinate completion. The different sections that follow will address these considerations. Since I am primarily approaching the matter in terms of a reflection on the sources of metaphysical thinking, I offer only a mediated glimpse of *what* one thinks when thinking thus.

II

I think the beginning of mindfulness is in an original astonishment before the givenness of being.³ Being is given to us; we are given to be, and to be as mindful; we do not first produce being, or make it be as for us; originally it is given as an excess of otherness which arouses our astonishment that it is at all. There is something childlike and virginal about this. I do not say childish. A child looks into the night sky and sees the silver orb of the moon. He or she may merely point, or exclaim, "Look, the moon!" There is something indeterminate about this. The point is not definite indexical reference but an elemental acknowledgment of the being there of that beautiful being.

None of this is determinately known as such. It is lived, with a mindfulness that may be more or less rudimentary, more or less articulate. As has

often been pointed out, children tend to ask the “big questions.” They are not normally chastised for this; sometimes they are indulged. There are philosophers who will chastise the child in themselves for the seeming indulgence. There are philosophers who believe that if this virgin openness is lost completely, then metaphysics has truly reached its dead end. The metaphysician keeps alive this elemental astonishment, and it is never dead, even in the most articulated and developed of his or her categorical thoughts.

Why do we sometimes chastise the child, or more mellowly, indulge him or her? Because we have this inveterate tendency to think that to be is to be intelligible, and that to be intelligible is to be determinate. But—and this is the rub—the original astonishment is not determinate in that way at all. We believe that we must make definite every indefiniteness, made determinate all indeterminacies. Only thus, we hold, do we come to the proper knowing of being. Moreover, this movement from the indefinite to the definite is often seen as a progressive conquering of the indeterminate, hence a progressive process of leaving behind the original astonishment. Astonishment may be a beginning, but it is one that is left behind as knowing fulfills its own destiny of completely determinate cognition.

I think that this is what is implied, for example, in Aristotle’s discussion of *thaumazein*. Wonder may be the beginning of philosophy, but the end of the question is the dispelling of wonder in as determinate as possible a knowing of matters. This is why he uses geometry as an example of knowing. There is a solution that leaves behind the indefiniteness of the initial wonder, and that offers a definitely articulated answer. It is not that wonder is deepened in the end, it is dispelled.

By contrast, my sense is that Platonic wonder is not to be simply dispelled in the end but deepened. I know it was said that over the gates of the Academy the admonition stood: Let none who has not studied geometry enter here! But this does not say that geometry is all that we will study, once having entered, or that it epitomizes the highest kind of knowing. Indeed, if we take geometry as a figure for completely determinate cognition, it is not incidental that it reappears as an honorific goal throughout the tradition of philosophy. We see it in Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Husserl, to mention some. What Pascal calls the *esprit géométrique* stands for a way of knowing deeply beloved by philosophy. But as Pascal knew otherwise, there may be needed other modes of mindfulness, captured under the name of the *esprit de finesse*. There may be indeterminacies or overdeterminacies about the ontological situation that demand metaphysical finesse, which does not conquer astonishment or perplexity but deepens and disquiets thinking even more radically.

What are some instances of such overdeterminacies? The question of being is one: why being at all, why not nothing? The question of nothing is

another. The question of the very givenness of being at all is an indeterminate perplexity before an overdeterminacy that resists complete conceptual determination. So is the question of the meaning of freedom, as also beyond complete determination. Questions about the suffering of the tragic, about the enigma of death, and about the monstrousness of evil, are overdeterminacies in the ontological situation. So are the traditional concerns with the being of truth, of the good, of the beautiful. The question of the ground of intelligibility is one such: can we give sufficient reason for the principle of sufficient reason? Is there a surd to intelligibility—that the intelligible is intelligible at all—a surd that is not just absurd?

Such questions put thinking on trial. They provoke determinate thinking, but they issue in perplexities that do not yield a univocal answer, indeed they resist being conclusively formulated as univocal problems. A constitutive ambiguity persists, a constitutive openness remains, beyond our efforts at determination. Since such questions concern the being or the good or the intelligibility of the determinate, they come to articulation from beyond the determinate. We may not be able univocally to answer such perplexities, but we cannot negate them. They continue to be reborn. Though we cannot master or dissolve them completely, we must return to them again and again, and with thinking informed by mindfulness of what comes to be at the edge of determination.

I have no desire to undermine or deconstruct the emphasis on definite cognition of the determinacies of beings or processes. But I do not think that philosophical mindfulness is simply a progressive conquering of an initial indefiniteness by a more and more complete determinate cognition. There is something about the beginning that is not only in excess of objectification and determination at the beginning, but that remains in excess at the end, even after our most strenuous efforts at determination. I think we need to distinguish between the following: first, the original astonishment; second, perplexity; and third, the curiosity that leads on to definite cognition. Let me explain further.

Astonishment names the original wonder. I prefer the term *astonishment* because contemporary usage of the word “wonder” easily slides into the sentimental. We are struck into astonishment. We do not think our way into astonishment; we are overcome by astonishment. There is a certain shock or bite of otherness in astonishment. There is also a certain receptivity, indeed patience. The givenness of being is offered for our beholding. We are patient to its giving insofar as we do not produce it, or bring it toward ourselves, only just to be cognitively possessed by us. There is always an excess in astonishment. Something is both given to mindfulness and yet is in excess of what mindfulness can grasp clearly and distinctly in that given. Astonishment is aroused when there is, so to say, a “too-muchness” about the givenness of

something that both overcomes and fascinates us. Moreover, this astonishment, although not first within our control, and though resistant to exhaustive illumination in clear and distinct concepts, is not a mere vague indefiniteness. It is indeterminate, but indeterminate in a positive and an affirmative sense. This is why I prefer to speak of an overdetermination: such a sense of the indeterminate is not antithetical to determination. Rather, it exceeds every determination that we will later attempt, exceeds complete encapsulation in a definite and exhaustive definition. This affirmative overdetermination of the beginning will be very important in understanding the equivocities of dialectic later, and the fact that there is no end to metaphysical thinking.

Perplexity, by contrast, is a movement of mindfulness that arises subsequently to the first astonishment. The very excess of what is first given rouses thought and questioning on our behalf. Something excessive is given, and we would fain interpret its meaning. Perplexity arises when mind becomes troubled about the meaning of the original astonishment and what is given to thought in it. There is also something indeterminate about perplexity, but there is a more concerted movement to overcome the indeterminate. The very troubling of thought here seeks its own overcoming in a peace of mind that is no longer troubled or perplexed. Thus we find the beginnings of the movement toward determinate cognition, but in such a fashion that the aura of the beginning still wraps itself around mindfulness. Perplexity is not patience to the otherness of being in quite the same way as is the original astonishment. In its troubled mindfulness there works a vector of self-transcendence that would go toward this otherness of being and, if possible, overcome its own perplexity. Perplexity is felt as a lack of definite cognition, driving out beyond itself to overcome that lack.

From this drive there arises the movement of mind toward determinate cognition. That is, perplexity becomes *curiosity* when the indefiniteness of perplexity is focused more specifically on particular beings and processes. Perplexity may have an indefiniteness about it, in that one might be perplexed and not know quite what one is perplexed about. But curiosity is more clearly definite; one is curious about this, that, or the other. Curiosity is not vague, though it may be itchy, that is, it may greedily extend itself to everything coming within its purview. It is with curiosity that definite questions arise about particular beings and processes, definite questions that seek determinate answers. Yet like perplexity, the movement of curiosity is also out of an initial sense of lack: I lack the definite knowing of this, that, or the other; nevertheless, I take the definite steps to acquire proper determinate knowing, and the goal is just such determinate cognition as brings to an end the thrust of curiosity and overcomes the initial lack of knowledge that drives the seeking.

Overall, then, there is something excessive and overdetermined about the astonishing beginning; then there is a troubled indefiniteness and sense of

lack, in the perplexity of mind that is subsequently precipitated; finally, there is a drive to definiteness and determination in curiosity that seeks to overcome any survival of troubled indefiniteness and lack, such as we find in perplexity.

Why is it important to distinguish among these three? Because in the main we have tended to think of the process of mindfulness, whether philosophical or scientific, in terms of the third possibility, and in such a fashion that certain fertile resources in the first two are easily distorted. I think the first two are not reducible to the third. But because we have often privileged the third, we have a predilection for modes of cognition like mathematical knowing or objective science, as most fully living up to the inner exigence of the desire to know. These seem to epitomize the ideal of knowing that is as completely determinate as possible, wherein all indeterminacy and indefiniteness seem to be progressively conquered. The *esprit géométrique* is tempted to make redundant the *esprit de finesse*, and to do so with a clean epistemological conscience. For after all, is not this redundancy just the inevitable end of proper progress to epistemic enlightenment? Who could possibly want to sing the praises of the indeterminate?

I ask allowance to offer another way to describe the differences between astonishment and perplexity, with implications for curiosity and determinate cognition. I use the classical language of eros and agape. Astonishment is agapeic, perplexity is erotic. When determinate cognition, begotten of curiosity, forgets or denies its origin in these parents, it becomes an ungrateful child, at times begetting some unsweet issue of its own.⁴

What I mean in calling astonishment agapeic is that it arises from a surplus or an excess out of which an affirmative movement of mind as self-transcending emerges. The beginning is already full, overfull, and out of this overfull beginning a movement of self-transcendence toward the other arises. It is to the excessive richness of the origin that I want to call attention. Moreover, the arising movement of self-transcending is not simply for purposes of a return to the self. I do not go out from myself toward the other to appropriate the other and through the other to return to myself. I go toward the other because the other is for itself and is always irreducible to what it is for me. It is its being for itself that is affirmed, celebrated in this movement of going beyond self. It is the stunning beauty of *the moon* that the child's exclamation celebrates, not the child's own feelings. This agapeic relation to the other as other must be kept in mind in metaphysical thinking, especially since other possibilities can come to distort its promise, as indeed does a certain rendition of dialectic.

By contrast, I call perplexity erotic because it arises out of a troubled sense of lack and desire: as ignorant, one lacks definite knowledge of the other that is given to mindfulness in astonishment; and yet one desires to

overcome that lack of ignorance. The beginning of perplexity is this indigence of knowing, out of which indigence there is a movement of self-transcendence toward the other. I also call this movement erotic because the other sought is sought for the sake of alleviating perplexity's own troubled mindfulness. It is for the sake of returning the self to its own epistemic peace or satisfaction with itself. I go toward the other out of my own lack, I need the other to requite my own lack; I appropriate or possess the other to enable my own self-appropriation or self-possession. There is a return to self through the other; hence the movement is a complex self-mediation that passes toward and through the other on the way back to itself; and now, at the end, we no longer live in the initial lack of perplexity but think we have fulfilled the eros of knowing in its own self-knowledge. The lack of the beginning seems to be overcome in the end that returns to the beginning, which is consummated self-knowing.

Note that if our major philosophical emphasis falls here, the other is no longer for itself, but it is a medium in which I become for myself. Then the drive of self-transcendence puts primary stress on the self rather than on the transcendence. Whereas in agapeic astonishment there is also self-transcendence, but the transcending is *more* than the self and, in a way, the self is more than itself, in genuinely exceeding itself toward the other.

Curiosity, it seems to me, partakes more of erotic perplexity than agapeic astonishment. For it is driven by a lack of knowledge, and this it wants to overcome through cognitive possession of the other it first lacks. Curiosity seeks its own alleviation in the mitigation of its ignorance of what is other to itself. In contradistinction to perplexity proper, it exhibits greater insistence on the determinacies of knowing. The eros of perplexity has an openness to its self-transcendence; and it can be willing to let its deeper exigencies be troubled by questions that may perhaps exceed its present, even future, determination. There may be perplexities about life, about death that are forever beyond complete determination. And yet the eros of perplexity is not brought to a standstill by this always unavoidable failure of determinate cognition. Its very failure may augur something other that is positive and incite a new restlessness of self-transcending thinking. The ultimate failure of complete determination may energize mind in another dimension to determinate curiosity. The eros is infinitely restless.

Let me offer this illustration. I think that one can read Kant as a thinker marked by this restless perplexity, even though he was also marked by an insistent desire for as much determinacy in cognition as possible. When he speaks about the exigence of asking metaphysical questions as ineradicable, he recognized something that resisted reduction to complete determination. And in its own way, his system is with the view to liberating a self-transcending beyond the validated cognitions of theoretical science, a noncognitive ap-

proach to what lies at the boundary or beyond the boundary of scientific cognition. I think also that Kant had a bit of a bad conscience about this restless perplexity, since as both restless and perplexed it did not quite fit into the system. It generates the system and generates the movement from one Critique to the next, but it is not an element within the system, and indeed it outlives the system in all of its majestic categorial determination.

For curiosity is definite, hence limited. I do not mean to deny that curiosity is potentially unlimited in passing from this concern to another concern, and so on *ad infinitum*. But this infinity is merely the unending, hence limitless, distention of limited mindfulness over limited matters. I mean that curiosity's proper focus is on a limited matter over which it anticipates an epistemic ascendancy. It is limited also in that it is always inclined to turn away from what it cannot thus finally possess. Kant's greatness was not to turn away. With other thinkers less great, what cannot be made determinate will be dismissed as an intractable equivocity against which we must methodologically quarantine ourselves. Metaphysical problems will be dismissed as pseudo-problems in a quasi-positivistic fashion. Or they will be suspected as signs of sickness, a pathology whose roots we must extirpate. Of course, just the signs of discomfort may be the symptoms of real health, insofar as the erotic restlessness of thinking cannot be entirely stifled or consumed by determinate curiosity and its answers. Perhaps the absolutization of determinate curiosity is the real infection: in stifling the restless eros of mind while seeming to epitomize its most hardheaded expression, it generates its own pathology, a pathology that preens itself as being the *non pareil* of epistemic robustness.

III

What does all of this have to do with dialectic? What does it have to do with metaphysical thinking in the wake of German Idealism? I will comment now on the first, and then in the next section I will turn to the second question.

With respect to the first question, I must confine myself to the relation of dialectic and determination. One might make the case that we find throughout the philosophical tradition a very strong adherence to the view that to be is to be intelligible, and that to be intelligible is to be determinate. The intelligibility of being, the being of being at all, is unthinkable apart from determinacy. This view is also connected with a predilection for the univocity of being. To be is to be a determinate this somewhat. A being is itself and nothing but itself. To be is to be something, to be self-identical and one. Likewise, in answer to how we know beings and their intelligibility, and in

line with this emphasis on the determinate, we think of knowing as a determinate answer to a specific curiosity that leaves behind the indeterminacy of both astonishment and perplexity.

The problem here is not just the negative view of astonishment and perplexity. It is the risk of losing sight of *another* perplexity about the determinate itself. Suppose beings are intelligible as determinately there, then is this determination itself immune from our further astonishment and perplexity? How comes the determinate to be determinate? How comes it to be at all? Such questions are not about another determination but about the coming to determination of something. Is the process of coming to determination just another determination? I think one has to say no, since then the product of a process would be indistinguishable from process itself, and then any exclusive emphasis on the determinate would itself become questionable once again. Beings are determinate, but they are determinate because they come to be determinate. They are the issue of a coming to be that is not a determination but a determining. How then do we think of the determining? Our answer cannot be just another univocal solution to a specific curiosity.

The issue is further complicated in that there are difficulties in completely fixating beings with absolute univocal determinacy. A spade is a spade, we say. So we uphold the univocal sense of determinate being. But we also say, there are spades and spades. And then we imply ambiguity and indeed a more equivocal sense of being that resists specification in entirely univocal terms. There are differences as well as identities, othernesses as well as samenesses, determinings that resist complete determination, comings and goings that exceed this or that object that has appeared in the process of coming and going. Things are themselves, but they also are differentiating, and other to any simple fixation. They exhibit nuances that demand the *esprit de finesse*, as well as determinations that can be fixed and formulated by the *esprit géométrique*. These differences and nuances and othernesses speak to the modes of mindfulness that find form out of astonishment and perplexity.

I suggest that dialectical thinking emerges at some such juncture. It arises when there are recalcitrances to univocal determination and when definite curiosity about a straightforward problem does not quite do justice to what is at play in the situation in question. For instance, Socratic dialectic is a way of dealing with differences, not only of propositions but of living interlocutors. Their differences, even their hostilities, demand a way beyond sheer difference, demand a reasonable mediation of conflicts, wherein a more complex determination of a question will be forthcoming. While Aristotle's view of dialectic is different than Plato's, his view is revealing concerning the aforementioned question of determining. For him, dialectic deals with the scrutiny of premises that are generally accepted, or of premises that are probable, or generally accepted as persuasive. It has a function in intellectual

training, even though it is not a method of demonstrative knowledge that offers valid deductions from true and self-evident premisses. For Aristotle, dialectic also has value for arguing with others in terms of their presuppositions and premisses. Further, it helps us—and this is the important point now—in our approach to the first principles of demonstrative science, principles that are not themselves demonstrated or demonstrable. The ultimate principles of sciences cannot be approached within the terms of the determinate science itself, since these principles are prior to and presupposed by the determinate science. These principles are to be approached through the discussion of the generally held opinions—to do this is a proper function of dialectic.

If dialectic has this last function, crucial consequences follow. Dialectic, we may say, opens up the matter of the intelligible beyond determinate, demonstrative intelligibility. Aristotle says that dialectic offers “a process of criticism wherein lies the way [path] to the principles of all inquiries” (*Topics*, 101b3–4). This is an extraordinarily important statement. In effect, it is an acknowledgment of the other to determinate intelligibility without which demonstration could never be demonstrative. Demonstration is made possible by ultimate principles that are not themselves univocally demonstrable. The drift to ordered determinacy is so strong in Aristotle that he does not seize here on something coming into the open that exceeds all determinate systematization, and that hence demands quite another sense of dialectic that eludes fixation in any determinate logic.

Hegel, I think, grasped the importance of the opening hinted at in Aristotle’s point, namely, that there is a *determination process* more ultimate than determinate intelligibilities. The dynamization of self-transcending thinking has to be understood differently to think of this process articulately. The systematic determinations of formal logic will not do justice to the process as other to fixed determination. A different logic will be required, a “dialectical logic.”

Hegel confesses to being aided here by the Kantian sense of the antinomies. Kant himself says that ancient dialectic was always the logic of illusion (*Logik des Scheins*, *CPuR*, A61, B85–86). In fact, he misrepresents the variety of views of the ancients by all but reducing dialectic to its sophistical exploitation. Dialectic now is used by Kant in an almost opposite sense, namely, in the critique of dialectical illusion. Transcendental dialectic deals with the illusions that inevitably arise when, through pure understanding, we try to pass beyond the limits of experience. And yet transcendental illusions, it seems, are somehow unavoidable, never to be completely dispelled. There is something inherent in metaphysical thought that inevitably comes to such an impasse.

Here I see Kant equivocating with respect to what I call the second indeterminate perplexity. This metaphysical perplexity might be called illusory, if by this we mean its transgression of the determinate univocities of

validated science. But this is to accept determinate univocity as the standard of what is ultimately valid. And despite the quarantine imposed on mind by Kant's transcendental dialectic, metaphysical mindfulness, by the inherent movement of its own self-transcendence, finds itself still and always perplexed by what lies at the limit of determinate univocity. Kant only sees an equivocity, or an antinomy there; he vacillates between univocity and equivocity, always with a bad conscience, as I suggested before, for he could not snap free of the idolatry of the univocal determinacy. And yet he also had a metaphysical bad conscience from the other side, because he knew the self-transcendence of mind as inevitably carrying him beyond. Kant was tortured by being between two forms of bad conscience: a bad conscience concerning scientific univocity and a bad conscience concerning a stifled metaphysical mindfulness.

I think one can see the vacillation as potentially positive. It may make us think more intensively of the play of indeterminacy and determination, beyond univocity and equivocity. Kant's antinomies made possible for Hegel this movement to another level, and in relation to the opening suggested by Aristotle with respect to dialectic as a path to the principles of all inquiries. Dialectic, as Hegel understood, is not mired in an oscillation between univocity and equivocity such as Kant displays, but shows a dynamism of thinking at work, even in this vacillating oscillation between indeterminacy and determination. This dynamic of dialectic is made possible by another side of Kant that also takes us to the edge of determinate univocal intelligibility, though here from the side of the self, and not, as in Aristotle, from the side of being. This is Kant's sense of the transcendental, understood in terms of *the self as process of synthesizing* that is prior to all determinate analyses and syntheses. This opens up the dynamism of thinking as determining activity within minding itself. In other words, the deduction of the transcendental unity of apperception is beyond a merely formal logical deduction, for it is a regressing movement toward what *exceeds* determinate form. This is said to be the source of the formal and determinate, the source indeed of the formal intelligibility of the categories and their unification with the manifold of sense that goes into the constitution of ordered, that is, intelligible, experience of the world. Dialectic, as Hegel saw, must be newly defined relative to this transcendental self.

Hegel expands the notion of dialectic immeasurably beyond transcendental subjectivity, yet the latter makes possible the transformation of dialectic and its comprehensive renewal. Hegel offers no static formalization of thesis, antithesis, or synthesis. The passing of opposites into opposites is more nuanced. Nor is contradiction to be denied; rather, it assumes an *enhanced role* as a way to truth. All of being will be said to be dialectical: nature, history, God. Hegel will claim to articulate the logical necessity in all of this. He will offer dialectic as articulating the logic of the whole, the *logos* of the whole.

The subjectification of being by transcendental idealism will be expanded beyond subjectivism. An interplay between the self and other will be granted, and a recognition of the interplay of indeterminacy and determination. This interplay will be subjected to dialectical self-mediation. Thus there persists the heritage of the univocity of thought thinking itself, and of the privileging of the self in post-Cartesian, and especially post-Kantian transcendentalism. Moreover, Hegel will continue to be an Aristotelian, in that determinacy still wins out, though in the form of self-determination. He will forget the transcendence that Plato fought tirelessly to preserve and affirm.

We might summarize Hegel's account of the interplay of indeterminacy and determination in the following terms. What Hegel does is renew the self-transcending thinking of what I am calling erotic perplexity. I say erotic perplexity rather than agapeic astonishment, because Hegel's sense of the origin or beginning is always that of a lack that must be progressively overcome by a further process of development. The beginning is an indefinite lack that must be determined in a process of determining, in order to be itself fully, and to manifest properly the intelligibility that initially is merely rudimentary. He recognizes a process of determining that we must grant in order to make determinacy intelligible, but his sense of intelligibility is still tied to the determinate. Philosophical thinking is driven by an erotic perplexity that progressively overcomes its initial indefiniteness and puts in its place greater and greater conceptual determination.

Moreover, the process is for Hegel one of *self-determination*, and here again the erotic movement of transcendence is evident. The process that originates in the indefinite beginning is itself to be made intelligibly determinate. But it is the process that *makes itself* thus intelligible. In other words, intelligibility is inherent in the self-unfolding of the process; indeed, it is the self-mediation of the process. It is not that what is other is denied, but rather otherness and differences are seen as moments through which the process of self-mediation comes to be itself. Beings come to be themselves by becoming other to themselves, and what they become as other is not absolutely other to themselves, but is just themselves again in a more properly articulated form. The movement is from the indefinite, to the determinate to the self-determining, and then from there we move all the way on to the absolute self-determination of the absolute whole.

When I say that Hegel sees a movement from the indefinite to the determinate to the self-determining, I am simplifying slightly to highlight this point. A more nuanced view would run thus: from the indefinite to the determinate, to what I will call *exclusive self-determination*; then from exclusive self-determination to mutual determination; and then from mutual determination to what I will call *inclusive self-determining*. By exclusive self-determination, I mean a self-determination in which the self is set against,

or sets itself against, the other: it determines itself over against the other as an opposite. But by the nature of the case, this exclusive self-determination cannot be the final word, for the other is necessary to its self-determination; the self is as much determined by the other, as the other is by the self, hence the move to mutual determination. By inclusive self-determining, I mean the claim that the doubleness of self and other in what looks like mutual determination is held by Hegel to reveal that both self and other are included in a more embracing process of dialectical self-determining. It suggests a dialectical inclusion of self and other in a more comprehensive self-determining process. Only the absolute whole is inclusively self-determining in the fullest sense. The absolute whole *is* inclusive self-determining.

This might be illustrated, for instance, in the theological articulation of Hegel's position. God must other Himself in finite creation, not to allow finite creation to be as irreducibly other to Himself, but because without God's own self-othering, God Himself as beginning is all but nothing. The creation is God's self-othering and hence not other, but the ontological mediating detour in God's dialectical self-mediation with Himself. This is the erotic absolute that is love disporting with itself, as Hegel puts it in one place, and in a kind of erotic echo of Aristotle's thought thinking itself. It is not that Hegel ends with a complete table of univocal determinations; rather, he ends with a complete self-determining that dynamically renews itself in beginning once again. Nevertheless, there is the implication of a complete categorial determination, albeit in Hegel's own dialectical sense. This emphasis on dialectical self-determining is deeply continuous with the modern ideal of autonomy in which the other or *to heteron* is not denied, but serves the fuller self-activation of self-mediating autonomy. For Hegel, dialectical self-mediating autonomy is identical to rational necessity.

Notice that in this account what I have called agapeic astonishment does not play the part that it should. At best it is quickly transmuted into erotic perplexity, which is driven forward to categorial determination by a will that is not unlike the restlessness of curiosity that wants to know definitely, to the utmost possible. The sense of plenitude of the beginning, the sense of the overdetermined that also shadows the entire process of determination and self-determining, the surplus that remains, even when we have attained an end of determinacy, all of these play no part in the process. Were they to play a part, we would have to acknowledge an excess to being-other at the beginning that is never completely conquered by our conceptual mediations—not in the beginning, not in the between, not in the end. We would have to acknowledge a patience to the process that does not fit with the ideal of absolute self-determination. We would have to rethink the place that otherness plays in every process of determining, and hence in the very definition of intelligibility.

More, perhaps even intelligibility itself might have to be seen as the dayside that turns the face of lucidity toward us of what, otherwise, is reserved in a deeper enigma. The very lucidity of determinate intelligibility may not itself be lucidly intelligible in terms of determinate intelligibility. This very lucidity is perplexing and mysterious in a way that astonishes thinking into a different metaphysical mindfulness. We may have to rethink the claim that the telos of coming to be is that of complete autonomous self-determination. There may be a heteronomy, a patience to the truth, that is on the other side of all such autonomous determination. And all of these possibilities are occluded just by the seeming success of the Hegelian venture. That very success is the death of what gives life to the success. For erotic perplexity and its dialectical completion could not be at all, were not the self-transcending of perplexity first precipitated out of the original agape of astonishment. The Hegelian success is made possible by failure to live with, and by covering over, the overdetermined surplus given by the beginning. Just that original agape is then made unintelligible by what originates from it. And the closure is not just the closure of erotic perplexity, but the closure of erotic perplexity to its own more original source.

IV

What does the above do with metaphysical thinking in the wake of German Idealism, and relative to the equivocal legacy of Hegelian dialectic? I will make four main points, first in relation to the continued place of determinate intelligibility, second in relation to categorial reason, third in relation to what as other to reason resists the idealistic model of dialectically self-mediating thought, and fourth in relation to the so-called end of metaphysics.

First, one development of metaphysics after Hegel relates to a renewed emphasis on determinate intelligibility, only now understood in the light of the modern *mathesis* of nature and the effort to define beings in terms as univocally mathematical as possible. This is *one* legacy of scientific enlightenment that can take a "scientistic" form. I say scientistic not scientific, since we are talking about metaphysics, hence not science in itself, but a philosophical interpretation of science. Scientism is one such interpretation that is moved by the faith that all of the basic problems will yield to scientific solution. Those that do not so yield are redefined as not essential, having more to do with the psychology of humans, or the incompletely eradicated toxins of past obscurantisms. Even if science is not now entirely comprehensive, science *will* be comprehensive.

We have here a *project* for the complete embracement of all basic questions by science or its methods. This project proposes a radical development

of specific curiosity and its quest of determinate solutions to determinate problems. Anything that cannot be thus formulated will have to be excised, or consigned to subjective psychology or otherwise rendered epistemically innocuous. Not surprisingly, most of what traditionally counted as metaphysical questions must here be consigned to oblivion, or to the junk heap of history, or to the safekeeping of harmless, intellectual antiquarians. I see here an astonishing contraction of both astonishment and perplexity to definite curiosity and its specifiable problems. Positivism, in a number of guises, represents this contraction of metaphysical thinking. Of course, upon reflection, one sees that this attitude is informed by metaphysical assumptions that are not correlated with curiosity in the definite sense it erects into its ideal of determinate intelligibility. This development does not lead to the end of metaphysics but to the death of metaphysics.

Interestingly enough, Heidegger's view is in strange collusion with this "positivist" view. Heidegger sees metaphysics completing its destiny by its being overtaken by cybernetics. In my nomenclature, cybernetics is a very effective form of the univocalization of being, and the confinement of mind to determinable questions. How strangely Comtean Heidegger is!⁵ Religion (the gods) is displaced by metaphysics, only in turn to be displaced by positive science. Of course, Comte and Heidegger have a different view of the beginning, and of the end. Maybe the historicist progressivism (not to be identified with "progress") is what is questionable in both. Heidegger erects this end in cybernetics into the destiny of metaphysics, indeed the destiny of the West as under the sway of reason. But it is not the destiny of metaphysics, nor of the West. It is one possible interpretation, albeit powerfully influential in modernity, which shortchanges the meaning of astonishment and perplexity, and the sense of the overdetermined surplus of being going with them, and tries to put them all into the one mold of scientific curiosity. Astonishment and perplexity are more deeply implicated in the destiny of metaphysics, if destiny it has. But this is a destiny that does not have any historical telos in quite the determinable sense that positivism and Heidegger seem to suggest. I know that there is some strain of lament in Heidegger's account of this destiny, since the completion is also a loss. Acquiescence in this interpretation, in positivist or Heideggerian mode, does not help us adequately recover the a promise of agapeic mind and perplexed thinking. And do not too many of us still remain, so to say, Comteans in the closet?⁶

I should add that the above scientific line of development goes hand in hand with an objectifying approach to things, and hence to a devaluation of being. Things are just there, neutrally there, homogeneous through and through. There is no charge of inherent value, such as would make us jubilate before the being there of beings, or celebrate the marvel of their being given. The agape of being has become the indifference of being, all the more to make it

easier for our calculative exploitation. The prevalence of this interpretation creates a kind of a priori attitude antithetical to fostering the modes of mindfulness that go with metaphysical astonishment and perplexity. I cannot argue the point fully here, but if we generalize this objectifying devaluation, I cannot see how we avoid ending in nihilism.

My *second* point concerns categorial reason. Instead of an interpretation of the determinacies of science, I now consider a philosophical interpretation of reason itself. I look at a development of perplexity, but this time with regard to the status of reason itself. The thrust of modernity, on the whole, takes shape in a turn to self; but this proves impossible to complete short of the *self-critique of reason itself*. Let scientific reason claim cognitive mastery of the world of nature, there comes a juncture when reason becomes *perplexing to itself*, troubled by its own status.

Ironically, this self-perplexity of reason arises in the train of reason's self-apotheosis by the idealisms of self-thinking thinking. The Hegelian system seems to be the consummation of reason, the complete categorial self-determination of erotic perplexity; but this consummation makes idealistic perplexity perplexed about itself, makes it wonder if its own perplexity puts roots down into something more original and darker than reason itself. There is something infinitely restless about perplexity; but in the present instance certain possible equivocalities in reason itself rear their heads. Most extremely, reason does not appear to be completely transparent to itself, despite the claims made to this effect by the idealists. Quite to the contrary, its self-transparency seems to be borrowed from a darker source that allows the lucidity but that is not itself thus lucid. In effect, perplexity turns into suspicion about the high claim made on behalf of idealistic reason. Thought thinking itself is shaken by the suspicion that it has given short shrift to what is other to thought thinking itself. The other to thought thinking itself calls for thought, an other kind of thought to idealistic thinking.

There is the further complexity too, stemming from the fact that perplexity proceeds by negating its present position and moving on restlessly. Perplexity signals a form of negative self-transcendence. This is just what Hegel puts to work in his logical exploitation of the link between negation and determination. Thus self-determination works by negation of what is other to self, and the incorporation of this other into the embrace of a fuller self-definition. And, in fact, the line of development I am now examining is driven by the lack or negativity in erotic perplexity, but it has turned *against* the affirmative consummation claimed by idealistic thought thinking itself. For it is just out of its own sense of lack and negativity that transcending reason here has grown suspicious of itself. There arises a proclivity to skepticism whose energy is carried precisely by thought's power to debunk the limitations of every determinate position. I cannot state some needed

qualifications, but perplexity here becomes a negative dialectic, in the sense of a negating dialectic. For it turns the same power that drives Hegel to his consummation against just that consummation and Hegel's own affirmative self-completion of dialectical thinking.

I am put in mind of some uses of dialectic by Marxists, especially the negative dialectics of the Frankfurt school. I think of Nietzsche and some deconstructive strategies. Nothing determinate can stand as final before the erotic drive of perplexity; every univocity of determinate curiosity and its solution seems to generate a further equivocation, driving mind on restlessly, without cease or peace. Perplexity grown thus skeptical and suspicious can issue in the torment of metaphysical mindfulness. But as with the scientific development, there is a deficiency of astonishment to balance the lack of erotic perplexity. There is insufficient mindfulness of the overdetermined agape that is the original giving of being and that even in torment is still given. Were its givenness acknowledged, at least one might be given pause, perhaps even made to stop in one's tracks, and reconsider whether the teleology of minding is rightfully understood as just the self-transcending drive of erotic perplexity.

In that pause the hermeneutics of suspicion would have to be balanced by a hermeneutics of generosity. Without the generosity of being that is intimated in astonishment, the spirit of suspicion easily turns into a vengeance against the inflated claims for false autonomy we find in the idealistic self-apotheosis of thought thinking itself. Reason tears apart this, *its own idol*, but it is caught up in such a tailspin of negativity that it can no longer see itself as reason. For after all, it is reason itself tearing reason to pieces. And perhaps this tearing is perversely with the intention of somehow finding a way back to the astonishing thereness of being. But the splendor of the latter is not best prepared for by this torture. There can be no regaining of contact with the sources of metaphysical thinking until that self-laceration rediscovers the origin of perplexity in astonishment, and the deeper source of its own lack in the overdetermined agape of being. At best, this tortured way augurs a breakdown of false closures, but there is not always adequate hint of, indeed patience to, a breakthrough beyond the breakdown.

My *third* point is continuous with my second point. It concerns the other of reason that cannot be accommodated to the model of dialectical self-mediation and idealistic thought thinking itself. Again, the work of erotic perplexity is crucial here, coupled with an atrophy of astonishment. What I mean is that perplexity becomes darker and darker as its eros seems less and less fulfilled and the more it loses rapport with its own origin in the agape of being. I stress that *both* astonishment and perplexity suggest that not all of being can be included in a complete categorial self-mediation and self-determination. But what remains thus not included is susceptible to a number of different interpretations. I cite some important post-Hegelian instances.⁷

We can think of Marx's invocation of praxis as a turning to something other to self-thinking thinking. We need a different thinking and praxis of philosophy to deal with this other, all purportedly beyond the comprehensiveness of Hegelian dialectic. The complexities of this view of praxis are not now the issue. Despite its claim to be other to Hegel's self-determining thinking, the view embodies its own logic of determination. So too it is not immune from infatuation with a productivist mentality, and the calculative technicism that is one pragmatic offshoot of curiosity and the urge to determination. Determination still means self-determination, though now concretized by our pragmatic determination of the otherness of material nature, by our imposition on the matter of nature and society of the supposed necessity of the communist ideal. The restless eros driving philosophy is transmuted into the revolutionary impatience that would impose its dream on the present, determine it in the image of the dreamt utopia, and thus determine the indeterminate. In this revolutionary, pragmatic determination, metaphysical astonishment and perplexity, once again, are given short shrift. This is especially so, insofar as the scientifically enlightened revolutionary thinks just like the scientific technicist, that metaphysics and the religious are phases of the infantile mind, lost in the "mystification" that prevents our more robust determination of reality as *for us*.

Two other citations are perhaps more important, namely, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. They represent developments of the idealistic completion that issue in its subversion. "The world is my representation": thus Schopenhauer opens his *magnus opus*. Nor did Nietzsche ever escape the activist idealism of a kind of Kantian constructivism: no facts, only interpretations; what is real is not given as real; what is real is real for me, is indeed my reality, the reality that I as a strong interpreter, as an ascendent will to power, impose on the so-called given. I legislate reality, I do not find it. That said, in both there is an other to self-thinking thinking.

Recall Aristotle's description of dialectic: dialectic offers "a process of criticism wherein lies the way [path] to the principles of all inquiries." Hegel thinks dialectically in order to articulate what he believes is the determining source of determination, and names it *Geist*, or the Idea, or simply the concept. I think Schopenhauer and Nietzsche can be seen to follow a similar path toward the determining source of determinate intelligibilities. But they will not name it *Geist* or Idea. Schopenhauer will call this determining source Will, Nietzsche will to power, or mythologically Dionysus. The notion that there is something unprecedented about Hegel's successors is very overstated. They are doing what metaphysicians have always done, and not always with the great self-consciousness that they have claimed for themselves: thinking the ultimate origin or sources of intelligibility. Still, there is a crucial difference here. I mean that, perplexity, having given way to a darker skepticism in

the aftermath of Kant and Hegel, this origin or those sources of intelligibility are not themselves seen in the mode of light, or of intelligibility itself. Quite the opposite: the source of intelligibility is said to be itself unintelligible. The determinacies of univocal intelligibility and its definite grasp of things give way to the indeterminacies of darker origins and to equivocities of being, ever elusive to complete grasping. The other of thought thinking itself cannot be thought again: it is other as Will or will to power.

Consider Schopenhauer's discussion of the principle of sufficient reason. This principle, in one of its forms, claims that to every event there is a determinate or determinable cause or reason. Our specified curiosity can be answered in terms of such determinate reasons or causes. But there is another, different kind of question or perplexity: What of the principle itself? What grounds this principle? Contrary to the idealistic response which, in the end, will claim that it is self-justifying, that reason justifies itself, Schopenhauer's approach finally implies that the principle has no ultimate rational justification, because the ultimate source is not in itself reasonable at all. It is a dark origin forever on the other side of sufficient reason. Indeed, if there is to be any salvation from the darkness of being, it must be by means of escape from this dark other, whether through philosophical or aesthetic contemplation or religious release. Notice in all of this that Schopenhauer's way of thinking is moved by a basic metaphoric of eros. His descriptions of Will clearly show this: all willing begins in lack and suffering; willing is originally a dark, insatiable striving, endless and futile. He could not be more blunt: the genitals, he exclaims, are themselves the metaphysical organs of the Will!

Like Hegelian *Geist*, Schopenhauerian Will objectifies itself in rational forms, which he identifies with the Platonic Ideas. But in itself, and unlike *Geist*, Will is not rational. Moreover, as expressed in human eros, it seeks its own eternal fulfillment of which it is eternally frustrated. Indeed, this insatiable restlessness is an *eros turannos*, not an *eros ouranos*. To my mind Schopenhauer's description of the origin is not informed by metaphysical astonishment and an affirming sense of the surplus of being in its givenness. There is a kind of disgust and recoil at the ultimate givenness. (Sartre's nausea before *etre en-soi* comes to mind here) Perplexity has turned into a kind of revulsion before the absurdity of being at its putatively most basic origin. Not surprisingly, our final response to its futility must be to escape it, or to extirpate it at the root. As Schopenhauer reiterates: better not to be at all, or if in being, better to be quit of it quickly.⁸ Perplexity before the darkness of the original source of being turns into a nihilism, a nihilism to be overcome through negation of that same darkness of being.

Nietzsche may differ in many ways from Schopenhauer, but his perplexity was shaped by similar concerns. There is the exploration of the other to reason. There is the image, indeed caricature, of metaphysics as only con-