Introduction

Dialectic and Otherness: The Historical Problem

This book is a philosophical effort to deal with the problem of otherness, particularly as it has been bequeathed to contemporary thought by the legacy of German idealism, whose most challenging, influential thinker was Hegel. The problem of otherness is not just a contemporary issue, of course; because of its intimate link with dialectic, it reverberates throughout the entire tradition of philosophy.[1] In the wake of Hegel, many thinkers have come to see the philosophical tradition as invariably favoring sameness over otherness, identity over difference, unity over plurality. Hegel's significance for Western philosophy in the last century and a half revolves around the

1. Thus Parmenides' view of non-being as radically other to being, and hence barred from inclusion within philosophical *logos*, evidences one of the first instances of philosophical diffidence regarding irreducible difference. Of course, difficulties with this uneasy relation to the other have occupied the tradition from Plato, through Hegel, down to Sartre. Not surprisingly the latter has strong Parmenidean tendencies in his ontology, though it is man as nothingness (via Hegel's negativity) who becomes the other (*pour-soi*) of being (*en-soi*). The problem of otherness is treated by the Eleatic Stranger in Plato's *Sophist* (e.g., 257ff.), where non-being is seen as the other but not the opposite of being. The issue of dialectic and "logocentrism" here centers on the Stranger's effort to encapsulate the other through *diaeresis*, a strongly analytical method. There is, of course, a different, more concrete dialectic in Socrates' maieutic dialogue, where the "other" is not an abstract concept, but the living individual. These two senses of dialectic (*diaeresis* as logical analysis and Socratic dialogue as seeking truth in conversation "between" the philosopher and the other) are *both* in Plato, and must make us uneasy about any charge of "logocentrism." On this doubleness in Plato, see my "Plato's Philosophical Art and the Identification of the Sophist." See also Stanley Rosen, *The Limits of Analysis*, 156ff; also his *Plato's Sophist*, especially 1–57. On Hegel and ancient dialectic, see Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, ch. 1. Some commentators see Hegel as trying to include the law of contradiction within the law of identity. See Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, for a discussion of Hegel and the principle of identity. On Hegel and contradiction in relation to the ancient problem of non-being, see Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel*, especially ch. 4.

suspicion that his dialectical system is the final apotheosis of this ontological bias. That is, dialectical philosophy, in Hegel's hands, completes and fulfills, but at the same time exhausts, the predilection of the Western tradition for sameness, unity, and identity. Not that Hegel simply rejected otherness, difference, and plurality, as less sophisticated monists tend to do. The metaphysical coup de grace was rather to subsume otherness within a dialectical *Aufhebung*, yielding diversity *within* unity, difference *within* identity, otherness *within* sameness. Otherness thus seems to be both saluted and domesticated within a larger, overarching totality.

Many thinkers, beginning with Feuerbach and continuing with Marx in his turn to revolutionary praxis, sought an alternative to the philosophical tradition that they saw as completed and exhausted by Hegel. Kierkegaard is one of the first in a line of philosophers who find otherness outside philosophical rationality as represented by Hegelian dialectics.[2] Closer to our own time, Nietzsche's dalliance with the artist, Heidegger, and post-Heideggerianism, as epitomized most recently by Derrida's deconstruction, represent various efforts to explore an otherness on the margins or outside traditional philosophical reason.[3] Existentialist concern with concrete existence as resistant to categorical abstraction, psychoanalytic probing of desire and the elusive recesses beyond the threshold of self-possessed consciousness, continuing philosophical concern with the nonphilosophical, and the pervasive repudiation of the clarity and distinctness of the Cartesian *cogito* are all indications of movement into realms of otherness, seemingly resistant to philosophical dialectics.[4]

2. The beginning, of course, is really with the later Schelling, whose "positive" philosophy sought to go beyond his own early position and Hegel's purportedly "negative" philosophy. Kierkegaard, accorded by many the honor of being the first existentialist, attended the later Schelling's lectures, agreeing with Schelling's *desideratum*, but becoming disillusioned with its implementation. Schelling's importance is beginning to be recognized again. See, for instance, Alan White, *Schelling*; Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F .W. J. Schelling*. It was not only thinkers like Feuerbach and Marx, among others, who saw Hegel as bringing philosophy to a certain end. So also did the poet Heine, who, for instance, says: "Our philosophical revolution is concluded; Hegel has closed its great circle." Heine, *Philosophy and Religion in Germany*, 156.

3. I am thinking here of Jacques Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*; also Heidegger's notion of the "unthought" in *Identity and Difference.*

4. Existentialism, of course, develops the search for what Kierkegaard (against the so-called objectivism of Hegelian rationalism) called "the subjective thinker." On philosophy and non-philosophy, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, ch. 1. The generation of the 1930s in France saw in Hegel's dialectic the salutation of otherness, whereas from around 1960, thinkers have tended to see only its domestication. On non-philosophy, see Alan Montefiori (ed.) *Philosophy in France Today*; also Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*.

Instances could be multiplied,[5] but perhaps it will suffice for present purposes to put the many-sided problem of otherness in terms of the contemporary concern with finitude.[6] Since many of the crucial issues of contemporary thought can be articulated with reference to Hegel, I will take my bearings from him. Hegel is not only a towering thinker in the history of philosophy, but a continuing presence in contemporary thought, sometimes as a dragon to be slain with a myriad razor slashes of analysis, sometimes as a ghostly presence to be exorcised by the incantation of deconstructive chants.[7] Hegel challenges us both because of his profound historical self-consciousness regarding the philosophical tradition and because of the power of his systematic development of dialectical thought.[8]

5. The Anglo-American version of concern for the non-philosophical is related to the break with Idealism in its British form (which tended to be flabbier than Hegel himself), starting with Russell, Moore, and James, moving through the Wittgensteinian distrust of theory and suspicion of philosophy as a sickness, and ending with ordinary language analysis.

6. See Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, ch. 5, on Hegel and Heidegger; also Taminiaux, *Dialectic and Difference*, especially chs. 3 and 4

7. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, ch. 1, treats of the influence of Hegel (through Kojève's lectures of the 1930s) on Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bataille, among others. On Hegel and the nineteenth century, see Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*; on Hegel and recent German thought, see Bubner, *Modern German Philosophy*, especially ch. 3. Also Schnadelbach, *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933*. On the Hegel revival among English speaking philosophers, see Harris, "The Hegel Renaissance in the Anglo-Saxon World Since 1945." The pragmatists' break with Hegel, having taken a detour through Anglo-American analysis, seems to have come full circle, and with Richard Rorty a joining of Hegel and pragmatism is again emerging. Thus in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 224, Rorty diagnoses the dilemma of Anglo-American philosophy today in terms of the question "Who is going to teach Hegel?" Rorty's Hegel is a radical historicist Hegel, a Hegel without the absolute. It is a Hegel laundered through analytical thought, through Heidegger's "overcoming" of the tradition and recent post-Heideggerian thought, a rather wan encyclopedist philosopher, encyclopedist not in Hegel's but Rorty's sense of a rag-bag thesaurus of interesting philosophical pictures, someone you can rely on for an interesting angle in the "conversation of humanity" (see, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, ch. 8). For a more serious view of Hegel in relation to the issue of time and eternity, see Rosen, *G. W. F. Hegel*, 128–40. Rorty might seem to confirm some of Rosen's suspicions in *The Limits of Analysis* (153, 170), that analysis will succumb to some form of post-Heideggerian deconstruction.

8. Hegel's challenge might thus be seen as analogous to the challenge of Heidegger to the stream of thought that takes its bearings from phenomenology. Like Hegel, Heidegger was profoundly self-conscious regarding the history of philosophy, as well as penetrating in his dwelling with certain central thoughts. See Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*. Hans-Georg Gadamer might be seen as trying to mediate between Hegel and Heidegger, in that he develops the Heideggerian emphasis on historicity while attempting to restore important aspects of Hegel's thought, for instance, in aesthetics. See, for instance, *Truth and Method*, 87ff.

The problem of otherness in relation to man's finitude can be put in terms of what has been called Hegel's "panlogism." This is a reading of Hegel's thought as a philosophical system for which nothing but reason is actual; whatever is not rational is merely an evanescent, eventually self-canceling existence. Hegel's philosophy here becomes exclusively a logical doctrine, and even the absolute is identified entirely with the dialectical system of categories developed in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Of course, we can evaluate panlogism in opposite ways. Erdmann, who coined the term originally, seems to have judged the matter positively and to have upheld Hegelianism as panlogism. More recent thinkers who have identified Hegel with panlogism have tended to evaluate him negatively on this basis, however. They have regarded panlogism as something to be rejected, and precisely on the grounds of man's historicity, finitude, and the experience of otherness that art, among other things, brings home to us. We find this repudiation of the tendency to panlogism in William James's denunciation of "the block universe," in Paul Tillich's claim that Hegel represents the essentialist tendency of modern philosophy, which has culminated in an account of reality as a system of logical essences, and in Russell's claim that Hegel reduced the richness of the real to something "thin and logical."[9]

Some thinkers after Heidegger have extended this charge, under the guise of "logocentrism," to the entire tradition of metaphysics. Hegel's panlogism is said to be evident in the seemingly hubristic claims he makes for his *Logic* as the thoughts of God before the creation of nature and finite spirit.[10] It appears that here we have the dissolution of finiteness into the infinite—indeed, Hegel's identification of himself, despite his limited humanity, with the absolute.[11] More generally, we have the seemingly totalitarian thrust of dialectical thinking, which seems to finally refuse to recognize anything other as other but reduces and subsumes all otherness within the overreaching development of dialectical thought itself.

Most of Hegel's critics take their stand somewhere here; which is to say that they refuse to accept what they see as the totalizing pretensions of dialectical thought and try to discover some knot of otherness or difference that resists the dialectic sufficiently to humble its purportedly hubristic

9. See Butler, "Hermeneutic Hegelianism." Also Alan White, *Absolute Knowledge*, where Hegel's logic is seen as a system of categories, though White does not exclude a different task for philosophy (somewhat in the mode of the later Schelling). Also my "Hermeneutics and Hegel's Aesthetics."

10. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.

11. This view is associated with Kojève's interpretation in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*; for a recent work, sympathetic to Kojève, see Cooper, *The End of History*.

aim.[12] Thus, the Marxist finds the knot of otherness "mystified" by Hegel's idealistic distortion and downplaying of the economic conditions of practical life. The Kierkegaardian finds unsurpassable otherness in the absolute, qualitative difference between man and the God of faith, a gap that can be bridged only by a leap of absurd faith, not by any mediations of dialectical reason. The Nietzschean finds what is other to logocentrism in art. "Plato versus Homer: this is life's great antagonism," Nietzsche claimed, and sided with Homer.[13] Much contemporary thought follows Nietzsche in this sense: logocentrism, the tradition of philosophy since Plato, is suspected of attempting to illegitimately privilege or absolutize the logical, thereby producing a systematic undervaluation of experiences of otherness, as encountered in the poetic and the aesthetic. A different kind of thinking is needed to contest this evaluation and to restore what is other than the abstractly logical to its rightful place. Once again, Hegel seems to carry the thrust of logocentrism to its extreme, not only in his dialectical reduction of difference to identity, but in making art, despite its revelation of otherness, subordinate to philosophy in his system of absolute spirit. Thus in our own time, it is no surprise to find successors of Nietzsche—Heideggerians and post-Heideggerians—seeing Hegel as coming to grief on the thought of a difference that is not a dialectical difference, one that cannot be subsumed within the self-developing identity of dialectical reason.

12. See André Glucksmann, *The Master Thinkers*, 119ff, where this standpoint is polemically applied to many thinkers, starting with Fichte. The results are initially provocative but subsequently flattening and insipid. The polemic is rammed home against the "master thinkers" with an overkill in the *argumentum ad hominem*, verging on the *argumentum ad baculum* (were that possible in a book). One begins to wonder *who* is more infected by will to power, the author or the "master thinkers."

13. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 25. On Nietzsche, Platonism, and Nihilism, see Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I*, 151–61. For an anti-dialectical, anti-Hegelian Nietszcheanism, see Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 8ff. and ch. 5. On Nietzsche and Hegel and the will to power, see my review of *Hegel: The Letters*. On the importance of dialectic in German literature, and its destructive consequences with Nietzsche, see, for instance, Peter Heller, *Dialectics and Nihilism*, 80, where Nietzsche is said to be a Hegel without Hegel's absolute, a dialectician "deprived of all faith in an enduring and harmonious condition of being." As indicated above in note 1, it is unfair to reduce Plato to simple "logocentrism." The critics of Plato seem to agree with Whitehead's famous statement: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 63). But whereas Whitehead implied a compliment to Plato, these critics imply a condemnation—though the issue is not without ambiguity, since the Plato of dialogue tends to be still respected, while the Plato of dualism tends to be rejected. For a sympathetic post-Heideggerian reading of Plato, see Gadamer, *Dialectic and Dialogue*. On Plato's provocative ambiguities regarding philosophy and art, see Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*; also Moravcsik and Teinko, eds., *Plato on Beauty,* esp. ch. 4.

These are just a few indications of the problem of dialectic and otherness in historical context. Suffice it to say that we can agree with the contemporary suspicion of panlogism, if by this we mean a certain elevation of dialectical thought into a totalitarian absolute. We must also agree with the stress on human finitude and an appropriate sense of limits, though, as we shall see, this finitude coexists with a certain infinite restlessness in human desire. This restlessness, while it may feed man's totalitarian pretensions, can also be seen, I shall argue, as nurturing his continuing openness to otherness.[14] Thus we can support the contemporary emphasis on guarding the genuine openness of authentic thinking. On this score, the interpretation of Hegel's thought is not without important ambiguities; and, as I have argued elsewhere, specifically in relation to art, a more open reading of Hegel is possible.[15]

I also differ from many post-Hegelians in not being convinced that Hegel has exhausted the wealth of the philosophical tradition, for I find in the tradition as much reverence for otherness as violence toward it. I find there no simple unilinear tradition, but rather a plurality of streams, among them what is called logocentrism. It is not self-evident that the tradition can be totalized, either in a Hegelian way or in the way the anti-Hegelian, supposed antitotalizers appear to attempt, albeit for purposes of deconstruction. I find that dialectical thinking is often far richer than its antagonists are willing to grant.[16] I am not saying that dialectical thinking is adequate to all

14. In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus,* Plato was very clear about the unstable ambiguity of human desire, of the possibilities of *both* the ennoblement and debasement of man through eros. Mirroring eros' double nature as mixing *poros* (resource) and *penia* (poverty), it may yield man's receptivity to the highest good, or else become the boundless, unbridled desire of the tyrant. Both of these extremes are emergent from desire's restlessness, from its dangerous doubleness or intermediate character. On this see Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*; also Rist, *Eros and Psyche*, ch. 2. For the negative and positive sides of man's uneasiness, in both the ancient and modern world, see Marcel, *Problematic Man*, 67–144.

15. Desmond, *Art and the Absolute*. Here I try to bring a generous hermeneutic to Hegel's thought; on art and philosophy, see ch. 2 where I argue that Hegel's subordination of art is complexly qualified and presupposes philosophy's openness to art. See also ch. 5 where I take up the issue of dialectic in relation to deconstruction, situating both relative to Nietzsche and Heidegger, and their respective relations to univocity and equivocity.

16. See Desmond, *Art and the Absolute*, ch. 4. On the totalizing pretensions of the supposedly anti-totalizers, see my review article of *The Irish Mind*, edited by Richard Kearney, in *Philosophical Studies* XXXI. I make some remarks there on "logocentrism" and the reverence for otherness in the tradition. On efforts to preserve dialectic in Merleau-Ponty, see Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, ch. 2. Even Derrida grants the distance and *proximity* of dialectic and his own différance (see, e.g., Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 13–14).

forms of otherness. Indeed, one of the chief aims of this book is to show the limits of dialectic in relation to certain forms of otherness and to develop a further possibility of thought. But a proper philosophical response to otherness does not mean that we jettison dialectic or leap outside it. It is rather to find within dialectic some further openness that will serve to break open any totalitarian pretension and then to develop it fully in a manner more faithful to irreducible otherness. The desire to "overcome" Hegel, the will to "overcome" the tradition, sometimes only gets beyond each by bypassing them both. But in the process we stand to lose what we might learn from them should we probe them with a more generous hermeneutic.

The Problem of Otherness: Four Fundamental Possibilities

These remarks must suffice to indicate something of the issue in historical perspective. But this book is not a book on Hegel or on the history of philosophy or on post-Hegelianism, whether of a right-wing, a left-wing, or an anti-Hegelian sort. It is a book about otherness as a philosophical problem, a problem that in its origins is concretely human. Man finds himself estranged from being, different from things and alien to himself. Otherness stuns us long before we even begin to think. For we are delivered over to this earth a raw, wrinkled crease of flesh in need. Our first act is to cower; our second to cry out; our third to cast about for a breast to suckle; our fourth to suck feverishly; our fifth to sleep mindlessly. If there is to be a sixth waking day, much less a seventh of delight, a Sabbath, we must be reconciled to our furious fragility. I say reconciled, not resigned. We are bound to a finitude we cannot negate, though we may affirmatively transmute its hectic.

This, fundamentally, is the human context wherein the question of otherness arises, requiring a philosophical interpretation of its complexity and an attempt to see how its ambiguity may be variously mediated. Let me state the issue in terms of the notions of identity and difference. There is both a positive and a negative aspect to the matter. Negatively, one might assert one's identity by withdrawing from the fullness of otherness in such a way that the difference between human beings and the rest of being becomes a dualistic opposition. Then one might be tempted to one of two alternatives: to will to appropriate what is other and incorporate it within a horizon that subordinates being in its difference to us, as, say, in the Cartesian project of the mastery and possession of nature; or to disperse one's own difference in the manifoldness of the outer world in a manner that reduces one's identity to one finite thing among other finite things.[17] In connection with these

17. Heidegger, among others, tends to see all of modernity as the offspring of such

alternatives, there are two extremes to be avoided: first, that of fixing difference in such a way that genuine mediation becomes impossible; second, that of allowing the notion of identity to dominate to such an extent that the mediation of difference becomes, instead, its reduction or disappearance. This allows us to state the problem positively. The question then is how, in avoiding these extremes, one can be affirmatively rooted in oneself, yet appropriately in relation to being other than oneself. The solution is not to disperse the center of selfhood within or to absorb the other without, but rather, to enter into a fitting relation with what is other and so come to proper wholeness within oneself. The issue, that is, involves the possibility of a *double* attainment: internal wholeness *of* being and external harmony *with* being.

In considering this matter, I find it helpful to think in terms of four fundamental relations between man and what is other. These are the univocal, the equivocal, the dialectical, and what I will call the *metaxological*. Since these relations and their diverse manifestations pervade this book, it will be useful if, at the outset, we try to delineate something of their essential character in terms of the notions of identity and difference.

The first relation, the univocal, defines the relation of self to other as one of immediate identity. It stresses their sameness, excluding any difference between them and asserting that their oneness precludes their manyness. It also excludes any internal differentiation in either the self or the other. The second relation is the equivocal, which, in contrast to the immediate identity of the univocal, conceives of the self and the other in terms of a simple, unmediated difference. It puts the accent on sheer difference, barring the possibility of conjunction. It underscores manyness without the possibility of oneness and, like the difference of recent deconstructive thought, tends to undermine the possibility of a grounded immanent identity of the self. Whereas the univocal relation sees the self and the other as absolutely the same and hence as having no unifying relation other than that of identity, the equivocal relation sees them as absolutely different and hence as having no relation whatsoever. Thus, they are both privative relations, one derived from a negative sense of union, the other from a negative sense of separation.

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a project of mastery; though, more questionably, he extends the line of origin back to Greek philosophy, totalizing (again I believe questionably) the entire Western tradition as now a more hidden, now less hidden will to power. On the intertwining of the modern subject's mastery of an objectified nature, with the reduction of man himself to an object amenable to technical manipulation (by the seemingly opposite modern "materialisms" of capitalism and communism), see Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique*. Also Gabriel Marcel's critique of technical, functional man in *The Mystery of Being*, vol. I, ch. 2.

The third relation, the dialectical, takes us beyond this privative sphere, by claiming that self and other are neither entirely the same nor absolutely different. First, by contrast with the univocal, the very notion of relation implies some difference, however slight. Second, by contrast with the equivocal, every relation entails some mediation of this difference, however minimal. But most important, the dialectical relation claims that at least one of the terms of the dyad of self and other is *internally* differentiated and hence capable of effecting a mediating relation with its counterpart. The dialectical relation tends to put the stress on the *self* as such a reality: the self is not shut up within itself, as it were, but is capable of entering the space of external difference from its own side. Moreover, this mediating approach need not be a dispersion on an equivocal manyness. On the contrary, the self may try to appropriate such manyness and thus in some measure to circumscribe and internalize it. Hence the dialectical relation asserts that the self as a unity in itself is also able to encompass some degree of difference. It does not exclude difference and complexity from itself; nor does it define external difference as an absolute exclusion between irreconcilable opposites. Through its immanent power of differentiation, the self can traverse external difference; yet it can also return to itself and be self-possessed and so achieve some degree of self-identity, unity, and wholeness for which difference is immanent. And so, beyond mere unity and sheer manifoldness, it attains a certain manyness *within* a one.

The reader will recognize certain Hegelian overtones in this description of dialectic. Dialectic, as I have already suggested, must be given its due. But the matter does not stop with dialectic; nor need we step back from or behind dialectic, as some recent thinkers seem to try to do. Here I conceive of a fourth possible relation, one that tries to address the problematic, ambiguous status of otherness in an exclusively dialectical approach. Above, I called this fourth relation the metaxological relation. This neologism, despite its unpleasing sound, has a very specific significance for our purposes, for it is composed of the Greek words *metaxu* (in–between, middle, intermediate) and *logos* (word, discourse, account, speech). The metaxological relation has to do with a *logos* of the *metaxu*, a discourse concerning the middle, of the middle, and in the middle. Thus it has a close affinity with the dialectical relation in as much as this may involve dialogue (dialectic as *dialegein*). For, like the dialectical relation, the metaxological relation affirms that the self and the other are neither absolutely the same nor absolutely different. But, unlike the dialectical, it does not confine the mediation of external difference to the side of the self. It asserts, rather, that external difference can be mediated from the side of the *other*, as well as from that of the self. For the other, as much as the self, may be internally differentiated, immanently

intricate; hence, it too can enter the middle space between itself and the self and from there mediate, after its own manner, their external difference.

Thus, the metaxological may complete the dialectical by doing justice to the fact that from both directions a conjunction between self and other may be established that is more than an extrinsic juxtaposition. The metaxological is like the dialectical in seeking to overcome the tendency of the equivocal relation to fall away into dualism. But it is unlike the dialectical in having no propensity for the monism that arises when dualism is resolved from the side of the self; in this latter respect the dialectical resembles the univocal, but as having incorporated and interiorized equivocity. Because the metaxological relation allows the mediation of external difference from both sides, and because both sides are rich in their difference, not only in their mediation, it does not circumscribe their difference within an overarching monism. Thus it avoids the totalitarian propensity so rightly abhorred by many contemporary thinkers. Rather, it grounds a *positive plurality*, each of whose members is rich in its distinctive identity, and whose mediation is not only *self*-mediation but also *inter*mediation. In sum, the intermediation of the metaxological relation grounds an open community of self and other. Beyond mere unity, beyond sheer manyness, beyond manyness within a single unity, it entails a community of full unities, each of which is inexhaustibly manifold within itself.[18]

These four relations, I believe, can help us develop an ordered approach to the self and otherness. In a sense, the four are bound together, for, if we isolate the first three from the last, they can easily become abstractions that generate certain contractions of our sense of being. In the first, self and other run absolutely together, so it is impossible to speak of a distinct other or a distinct self—indeed impossible to speak at all. In the second, self and other are split apart so absolutely that it becomes all but impossible to articulate their relation. In the third, we posit either the self or the other as the

18. Of course, the univocal, the equivocal and so on, have an august ancestry since Aristotle spoke of the many senses of being (*to on pollachōs legetai*; see *Metaphysics*, 1004bff.). I might note here that though the present work will strongly insist on man's crucial importance, this need imply no post-Kantian reduction of metaphysics to philosophical anthropology, as later parts of this work will make evident. We might also note the importance of these concepts in the Middle Ages with respect to analogical predication concerning God. They figure in recent thought, in Ricoeur and Derrida, for instance, with respect to the whole issue of polysemia, where we tend to find denunciations of univocity in favor of an equivocal polysemia. Similar issues are at stake in analytical philosophy with respect to the question whether the plurality of ordinary meanings can be reduced to one proper univocal sense, as in technical, formal systems like logic or mathematics. On analogy and metaphor, see especially Vaught, *The Quest for Wholeness*, 178–82. Vaught tries to develop a complex sense of plurality and wholeness rather other than an equivocal polysemia after the manner of the Derrideans.

overarching totality, with the result that either the self tries to appropriate the external world absolutely, making it part of its total self-appropriation; or the external world becomes a whole of which the self is merely a subordinate part among other, indifferent parts. In the fourth case, however, we try to go beyond these inadequate possibilities: self and other are recognized as distinctive in themselves, neither of them a mere part or the only whole, since the plurality, which together they constitute, may be a community of wholes. Thus the metaxological also tries to preserve what is distinctive about the first three. It preserves the unity of the univocal in community, the self-mediation of the dialectical in the rich identity of its members, and the difference of the equivocal by qualifying this through communication between nonidentical members of its positive plurality.

This description of the four relations is highly schematic, of course. Their bare bones lack living flesh, and the animating spirit has yet to be breathed into them. This we will proceed to do in the main body of the work. For now, let us merely note that a logos of the intermediate, of the "between," is of crucial importance for contemporary thought. In one sense, the metaxological is as old as the Platonic *metaxu* in the *Symposium* through which the dynamism of human eros, culminating in philosophical vision, moves and unfolds. Yet it is deeply relevant to the thought of our own time, whether this takes a phenomenological or hermeneutical form, whether it be the recent "conversational" model of philosophy or the anti-Cartesian, antidualistic search for a new "holism" or, indeed, the post-Heideggerian concern with the problem of difference.[19] At its best, philosophy has always spoken out of "the middest,"[20] even when it has tried to speak about

19. It would take a volume to itself to substantiate this properly. I have already tried to indicate the problem of dialectic and otherness. The notion of a rich "between" is relevant to all forms of philosophy, like phenomenology and hermeneutics, that seeks to transcend the traditional opposition of subject and object. The "between" is also crucial for all "conversational" models of philosophy, whether Rortian edification, or the emphasis on dialogic models in, for instance, Habermas or Apel. On this see Bubner, *Modern German Philosophy*. The "non-closure" of the "between" is obviously not irrelevant to the deconstructionist's concern with difference, though I believe that dialectic and the metaxological go beyond an alternating to-and-fro between univocity and equivocity. I also believe that the metaxological tries to deal with the problems of dialectic in a more affirmative fashion than tends to be found in the negative dialectics of the Frankfurt School. I will try throughout to give some indication of the differences and convergences of the view developed here with some of the important strands of contemporary thought.

20. In his *Apology for Poetry* Sidney says the poet "thrusteth into the middest . . ." In saying the philosopher speaks out of "the middest," I imply a different, reflective directionality to philosophical thought, coupled, of course, with a proper scepticism regarding abstraction. Mark C. Taylor in *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* makes much of the notion of the middle. He mixes Hegelian, Nietzschean, and Derridean notions,

extremes and ultimates in its sometimes hubristic way. In this respect, the metaxological tries to renew the promise of an old possibility within the context of current pressing concerns.

Desire and Origins

Abstraction cannot be avoided in any philosophical venture. Yet the metaxological is not just an abstract concept that yields its full meaning only to the virtuosity of merely analytical thought. The metaxological points to a complex, concrete interplay between man and the otherness of being. Hence, to be faithful to it, our philosophical discourse must take its bearings from something dynamic in human experience. For this reason, my strategy is to focus on desire. Reflection on desire may yield philosophy a pathway of thought in the middle between the extremes of abstract analysis and an immediacy that is totally inarticulate. Desire erupts in experience; it does so spontaneously and, to that extent, is immediate. But beyond its initial, spontaneous upsurge, it may unfold in an articulated, mediated way. I want to plot a hermeneutic of desire that links its unfolding to the four fundamental possibilities outlined above. These four possibilities offer essential perspectives with respect to both human experience and the real itself. To interpret the metaxological properly, we must first dwell in, then move through and beyond the partiality of the first three. By sifting and moving through the univocal, the equivocal, and the dialectical, we must think our way toward the ultimate concreteness of the metaxological. This is not to deny the possibility of disorder, even chaos, in desire. Inevitably, too, in trying to let the line of articulation shine forth clearly for philosophical purposes, an element of formalization will be unavoidable. But driving even such formalization is the eros for intelligibility, the desire to discern order amid disorder and the need to illuminate and trace the contours of that order.

If the metaxological involves a dynamic interplay between self and other, it cannot be assigned a simple, stable fixity, as if the self and the other

not always doing justice to the differences between Hegel and these others. On the middle as a divine milieu, see 112ff; also interestingly he cites (114–15) this assertion from Nietzsche, where Zarathustra is talking about the ring of eternity: "The middle is everywhere (*die Mitte ist überall*). Bent is the path of eternity." Taylor seems so intent on avoiding univocity that he tends to lean towards equivocalness (e.g., 173ff.), where, echoing Derrida, he says that ends and origins are unacceptable. How one can have a middle without an end and origin is not faced, as one would expect it to be by one who has written extensively on Hegel, as Taylor has done. Dialectical thought in Hegel, as Taylor himself well knows, is much more complex than a mere oscillating interplay between univocity and equivocity.

could be congealed into static, inert substances. On the contrary, they are original centers of active being, whose relations are relatings—dynamic bonds in the process of being constituted, rather than fixed structures already sedimented. Self and other are realities in the process of being defined and of defining themselves. Being dynamic, they are implicated in the movement through the complex middle, between origins and ends. If the four relations outlined above give a certain structure to such movement, it is the primordial intention of human desire, its thrust to what is ultimate, that gives it dynamism and matter. To explore this movement is to try to address the heart of our finitude, its frailty and its grandeur. For the point is not to baldly declare a series of propositions and then to demonstrate their validity with evidence extracted from elsewhere. It is to delve into the deepest aim of desire, to struggle with its initially amorphous goal, and to attempt to make both aim and goal visible through a progressive process of naming. It is to try to identify man imaginatively, to symbolize the earth, and to stumble toward a metaphysical metaphor of first and final things.

My concern with the question of origins must be briefly stated here. Some contemporary thinkers, after Nietzsche, treat the question of origins with the same distrust with which they treat any question of absolutes.[21] Questions of this type are suspected of being merely residues of the now supposedly dead religious tradition of the West. Like the quest for an absolute, the search for origins is seen as either an ontological cowardice before the indifferent face of bare becoming or a totalitarian will to power, traditionally disguised as the eros for eternity, over the same becoming. Plato's eros for eternity seems to be indicted by Nietzscheans and post-Nietzscheans as *the* grandiose lie of the philosopher. Philosophy yoked to dissimulated religious sources is branded, charged with being secretly "ontotheology," to put it more strongly. Today this charge is identified primarily with the successors of Heidegger, but, in fact, it simply repeats in a new context the accusation of Left Hegelians such as Marx against the so-called religious "mystifications" of their appropriated—some would say usurped—father, namely Hegel himself.[22] Put very simply, the accusation is that nostalgia for

21. It is not only the Nietzschean style of genealogy that assumes an *a priori* of suspicion here. As Ricoeur reminds us, Freud and Marx, the two other "masters of modern suspicion" display the same *a priori*. These masters of suspicion, having debunked the nineteenth-century superego, now as fathers of modern culture, seem to have taken up residency in the vacant superego of some twentieth-century intellectuals.

22. On this see Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*; on the Young Hegelians, Stepelevich (ed.), *The Young Hegelians*, 1–15; Stepelevich rightly points out the line of continuation from Young Hegelianism down to the Frankfurt School. Bubner, *Modern German Philosophy*, develops the same point in connection with Adorno (ch. 3). See also Toews, *Hegelianism, 1805–1841*.

God poisons traditional philosophy, which should make us suspicious of the apparent purity of its devotion to reason and logos.

This nostalgia, the charge continues, often disguises itself as the search for origins. The more theologically inclined philosopher may direct his search to a philosophical surrogate for the religious absolute, the originating ground of all being. On the other hand, moderns who take seriously the Kantian critique of metaphysics may transfer the search for origins to a transcendental subject who serves as the originating, primordial synthesis in human efforts to render experience meaningful. What we have witnessed in contemporary philosophy since Kant and Hegel is, first, the progressive dismantling of the religious absolute and its purportedly philosophical surrogates, metaphorically exclaimed in Nietzsche's "God is dead" (though, in fact, Hegel and his contemporaries had already traveled a long way down this road). Second, we have witnessed the deconstruction of the transcendental subject as but another version of the quest for an absolute origin. The outcome seems to be the historicization of the transcendental realm and the temporal relativization of all supposedly eternal and unconditional absolutes, culminating in recent proclamations of even the "death of man." There appears to be no divine absolute, as sought by traditional metaphysics and the Hegelians; no human absolute, as believed by humanists, Marxists, or some Left Hegelians; and no transcendental absolute, as held by Kantians and Husserlians. This leaves nothing absolute at all, and any search for a radical original is judged a philosophical wild goose chase. Even Heidegger, seemingly the most radical critic of ontotheology in his destruction of the history of metaphysics, finds himself the object of a similar dismantling by his successors. These decry a similar tabooed nostalgia in his "archaism" and longing for a pristine beginning in the pre-Socratics, undefiled by the forgetfulness of being perpetuated by ontotheology or traditional metaphysics after Plato.[23]

A full discussion of this problem would require a number of volumes and would involve hermeneutical studies of contemporary thought and the

23. The famous madman passage concerning the "death of God" is found in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, section 125. On the "death of man" see Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 385–86. On the tabooed nostalgia for origins in Heidegger, see Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, 236ff; also Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, chs. 3 and 4. One introduces the term "ontotheology" with a certain reluctance, since it seems to set off a kind of programmed reaction in some post-Heideggerians, shortcircuiting the "openness" so much vaunted by these same thinkers. Instead of the *logos* of Occidental metaphysics speaking through them, the texts of Heidegger now speak. One would think that "ontotheologians" were as plentiful as blackberries in a ripe fall, but these bushes are very bare. Hence the air of unreality about the rhetoric.

tradition of metaphysics. While not wishing to downplay such studies, I am here trying, within certain limits, to wrestle with the problem of origins in relation to dialectic, desire, and otherness and to defend the emergence in desire of man's search for origins as among his most basic, metaphysical perplexities.[24] I am trying to turn to "the thing itself," as it were, reminded of both Hegel's requirement of philosophical abandonment to the life of *die Sache selbst* and the phenomenologist's cry of *zu den Sachen selbst*. Again, not forgetting that our approaches are always mediated to some degree by our historical situation, I believe this effort to be absolutely essential, for only by attending to the thing itself is it possible to discriminate among the different views presented by recent philosophical debate. Attention to essential landmarks in the tradition of philosophy is not lacking in this work, but because of the need to impose limits on discussion and facilitate some direct address to the issues themselves, I have sometimes presented these landmarks as essential possibilities, rather than historical contingencies, reluctantly foregoing more extended scholarly, historical exposition.

I have tried to offer as uncluttered a philosophical discourse as possible. Yet I think one can both direct oneself philosophically to the thing itself and not be devoid of sophisticated self-consciousness regarding the tradition of philosophy. I regard that tradition as a plurality of complex efforts, some more successful than others, to think the thing itself, and not as a set of historical curiosities or dead monumental abstractions. While my primary focus is on the direct philosophical address, I hope that there will be some fruitful interplay between this and the historical self-consciousness of philosophy. Hegel's dictum that philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought is often quoted, sometimes against the spirit of Hegel, in justification of a dissolving historicism. But least of all should the philosopher simply drown in his time. The philosopher's sense of time should have something of the span of millennia, not to mention an openness to recurring essentials that may emerge in time. Here I intend as much constructive appropriation as critical reflection on essential philosophical possibilities.

I do not deny that certain legitimate questions need to be put to traditional views; but the question of origins is not, I believe, just a historical contingency foisted on us by certain metaphysical presuppositions of Western

24. Thus I do not think that the question of origins is a sickness to be cured by therapy or due to the bewitchment of language, à la Wittgenstein. See Ricoeur's remark regarding Freudian genealogy: "But psychoanalysis has no access to problems of radical origin, because its point of view is economic and only economic." *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 145. Ricoeur goes on to ask for a hermeneutic of the religious imagination, implying that Spinoza, Schelling, and Hegel were more deeply acquainted than Freud with its significance for radical origins.

thought. A metaxological understanding of desire and otherness, I will try to show, brings out and illuminates its inherent necessity. Indeed, the charge of ontotheology may be seen as a two-edged sword. Against the Nietzschean charge of ontological cowardice, it is perhaps one of the great strengths of traditional philosophy that it drew positively from other sources, religious sources in particular, though often not properly acknowledging this debt or even criticizing these sources that fed it.[25] The term *ontotheology* sometimes strikes one as a kind of intellectual bogeyman conjured up to frighten philosophical thought away from origins, a menacing effigy to be burned on ritual occasions. Ironically, there was a time when the effigy *atheist* served a similar function. Then the threat of fires was physically real; now the power of the taboo is metaphorical or spiritual. The bogeyman role has been reversed: it is now the ontotheologian who has to go in hiding, looking over his shoulder, anxious lest he be unmasked.

The act of philosophical naming defining the overall development of this work can be set forth in three stages. Some remarks on the work's structure may be helpful. Part 1 deals with the restlessness of human desire and its search for immanent wholeness. This restlessness reveals what we might call a certain intentional infinitude marking the human self; but this by no means precludes the self's actual finitude, as will become clear in parts 2 and 3. In fact, finitude would not be a problem at all, properly speaking, were human desire not marked by this ambiguous and powerful restlessness. In chapter 1, I discuss the emergence of this restlessness and its temptation to seek wholeness in what I have called the absorbing god. In chapter 2, I try to develop a view of original selfhood, in the process contrasting this view with both the empirical and the transcendental ego. In chapter 3, I try to develop an intermediate view of human wholeness that avoids a fixed closure on the one hand and sheer indefinite openness on the other. Overall in part 1, we move through the univocal and the equivocal toward an understanding of human desire as capable of dialectical self-mediation.

No final closure emerges from this dialectical self-mediation. Part 2 develops further the absence of closure in desire in terms of its radical openness to otherness. Here we are concerned primarily with man's metaxological intermediation with otherness and the affirmative finitude that may emerge. In chapter 4, I explore a misleading account of transcendence in terms of the

25. On the affinity of philosophy and religion in Hegel, see my "Hegel, Philosophy and Worship"; also "Hegel and the Problem of Religious Representation." I have discussed the affinity of art and philosophy in *Art and the Absolute*, especially ch. 2. It remains an important question why some thinkers today readily affirm this affinity of philosophy with art, while regarding any claimed affinity with religion as immediately suspect.

notion of static eternity. In chapter 5, I develop the metaxological in relation to our knowledge of otherness, and in chapter 6, the sense of concrete being revealed by man's metaxological intermediation with otherness. In chapter 7, I discuss the sense of infinitude that has emerged and offer two significant exemplifications of the metaxological sense of being—namely, the sublime as an aesthetic infinitude, and what I call agapeic otherness, as instancing a rich sense of the community of being.

Finally, in part 3, on the basis of the metaxological sense of being that has emerged in parts 1 and 2, I try to offer a metaphysical metaphor for the ground of being, what I will call the absolute original. The view I am proposing does not see desire in terms of a simple, horizontal progression from finite thing to finite thing. It reveals a sense of human becoming as, horizontally, desire's extension to what finitely is, but, vertically, as capable of a certain metaphysical ascent to the ground of what is. I am not talking about some leap outside experience, but rather the emergence from within experience itself of its own ultimate dimension. Human desire is not only a horizontal exigence for wholeness, but also a vertical openness through otherness to what is ultimate.[26]

Overall we will follow an itinerary reminiscent of St. Augustine's description of the double movement of his own thought, which proceeded, he said, *ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab inferioribus ad superiora*. "Exterior" and "interior," "inferior" and "superior" are not to be taken as kinds of beings, but rather as modes of being.[27] Because of my wish to do justice to the self-knowledge of desire and its openness to otherness, without falling into an unacceptable dualism, this work exhibits aspects of what might be called an Augustinian odyssey, embarked on in the wake of Hegel. Part 1 is roughly analogous to the first kind of movement, from exterior to interior, while parts 2 and 3 correspond to a version of the second, from inferior to

26. I imply no empty *Jenseits* of the kind Hegel inveighed against. On the "*meta*" as "beyond" yet "in the midst," see my "Memory and Metaphysics." See ch. 4 below, and note 5 there on hermeneutics and the metaxological.

27. Augustine, in Platonic vein, sometimes speaks of the soul being alone with itself and God. I imply no such "aloneness," should this be taken to mean a solipsistic abstraction from the otherness of being. See my "Augustine's *Confessions*: On Desire, Conversion and Reflection." On "inwardness" in Augustine and Husserl as a mode of being rather than a kind of being see Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, esp. 205ff. Hegel has sometimes been seen in a kind of Augustinian light in that, say, his *Phenomenology of Spirit* seems driven by a similar restlessness for the absolute. In the end in Hegel one does not find the Augustinian celebration (at least the Augustine of the *Confessions*) of the enigma of divine otherness, or of the otherness of the self as an unmastered, inward abyss. In this respect there is an exemplary lack of totalitarian closure in Augustine, a sense of the enigma and incompleteness of the self, and an affirmative openness to mystery. This is an Augustine who is as much postmodern as premodern.

superior. The importance of desire here is again that it makes it possible to give proper weight to self-knowledge, without sacrificing openness to otherness. Desire need not be some vague psychological feeling but may reveal a metaphysical openness to being that is twofold: an eros for immanent wholeness and a reaching out to being other than itself. Then we may know ourselves without being catatonically contracted into ourselves, cut off in monadic inwardness. We may be like a glass that in one light gives us back our own reflection, but which, in another light, and if we swivel slightly, becomes diaphanous, and we open out into the other's world.