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## Introduction: Questions of Identity and Difference in the Traditions of German Idealism and Existentialism

Jon Stewart

There is thus a tendency to characterize German Idealism as a tradition that ended in the first half of the century, and which was challenged by later schools of thought which were critical of it (Löwith 1964; Copleston 1967). Trends such as Marxism, positivism, pragmatism, scientific naturalism and analytic philosophy are often seen as negative reactions to the tradition of German Idealism. Of the members of this school, Hegel in particular is often singled out for criticism. His theory of the categories and his notions of Spirit and the Idea were regarded as abstractions that had nothing to do with the real world. Feuerbach, Bauer, Marx, Kierkegaard, Bakunin and others stood in line to criticize him on this point. This meant that they were all keen to present a new philosophical program which avoided this problem. These thinkers were educated in the repressive period leading up to the Revolutions of 1848, and their orientation was shaped to a greater or lesser extent by these conditions. They struggled with the question of the meaning of philosophy in a world where there was widespread suffering due to political oppression and economic exploitation. In this context, abstract epistemological discussions rang hollow. As an old man writing in 1888, Friedrich Engels complains of

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the state of German academic philosophy, which he claims is moribund and irrelevant. He argues that university philosophy, dominated by careerism and lacking any critical view of the world, had become self-absorbed in its own meaningless abstractions (Engels 1888, p. 307; 1941, pp. 60–61). It can be argued that a century later, the feeling of empty abstraction in German Idealism was again acutely felt in the context of the World Wars and the Holocaust. These events seemed clearly to demand of philosophy something more concrete and relevant to the urgent events of the day that shocked the sensibilities of the world.

This picture can lead to the conclusion that German Idealism was simply a philosophical school that lived and died in a certain period, after which it was abandoned forever. This is the image that is conveyed in a number of studies of the history of philosophy. In a sense this is natural since such histories of ideas operate at a fairly high level of generalization. They are thus keen to paint the contours of the different philosophical directions by means of contrast. This practice can of course serve some general purpose, but it is important to be aware that it is also distorting in its details. It fails to recognize the myriad points of contact and influence of German Idealism on the individual existentialist thinkers, as is outlined and documented in the present volume. This general reading of the development of Continental philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth century presumably explains the lack of interest in comparing German Idealism and existentialism.<sup>1</sup>

However, upon closer examination, the relation between these two schools of thought is far more complex than the traditional understanding allows. It is well known that many of the leading figures of the existentialist movement, such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty drew great inspiration from the works of the leading figures of German Idealism. With the publication of new materials from the hand of these thinkers, such as lectures, letters and *Nachlass*, new information is now available about their use of the German idealists.<sup>2</sup> Recent work has also shown how Kierkegaard, who is often regarded as the father of existentialism, in fact appropriated a number of key ideas from Hegel and other idealists in the development of his own thought (Taylor 1980; Grøn 1997; Stewart 2003, 2007b). So there is good reason to return to the broader issue of the relation of German Idealism to existentialism.

One of the problems involved in tackling this issue is circumscribing the area of study. This is a problem on both sides of the relation. While there is a standard textbook story about the development of German Idealism from Kant to Fichte to Schelling to Hegel and finally to Schopenhauer, the matter is not so simple. These thinkers mutually criticized one another, and it is not clear that they would have consented to the idea that they all should be

counted as members of the same school of thought. In addition, there are other thinkers from the period such as Schleiermacher or the younger Fichte who also held doctrines that can be regarded as idealist, but who are not usually counted as members of this school. Moreover, it is little recognized that German Idealism continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century with figures such as Lotze and Trendelenburg (Beiser 2013). Thus it is by no means a straightforward issue to define which thinkers, strictly speaking, belong to the tradition of German Idealism and which do not.

On the other side of the relation, there has long been an issue of what exactly defines existentialism as a movement. Some thinkers commonly associated with it, such as Heidegger, explicitly rejected the label. Other thinkers, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, lived well before the development of the movement as a self-conscious school, but yet are often counted as belonging to it. The nature of existentialism as a movement became so problematic during its heyday that Sartre complained that the term had come to be used to describe anything and everything (Sartre 1948, pp. 25–26). He thus felt the need to identify its key dogmas more precisely. As is well known, Sartre proposed, as the defining doctrine of existentialism, the claim that there are no fixed essences and that existence precedes essence (Sartre 1948, p. 26). Instead of resolving the problem, this definition only served to create new controversy since many of those associated with the school rejected it and hastened to distance themselves from him.

While historians of ideas are compelled to work with broad labels such as German Idealism and existentialism, it is clear that these terms always involve a certain degree of simplification and thereby distortion of the actual thought and ideas of the individual figures involved. This poses the question of how the relation between these two movements can be meaningfully explored at all. Indeed, if it is impossible to define or circumscribe either of them clearly and unambiguously, then how can it be possible to compare them?

The strategy employed in the present collection is a cautious one dictated by the demands of modern research specialization. Instead of trying to take on directly the relation of German Idealism to existentialism as a whole, the articles presented here try to approach this issue in a piecemeal fashion by exploring specific connections in the work of specific thinkers. In other words, the authors try to investigate the relation of a specific philosopher in the one school with the thought of the other. With this strategy, the hope is that a general picture of the relation between these two traditions of thought will emerge based on specific well-founded arguments and evidence concerning the thought of the individual thinkers. In this way, it is possible to talk about

this relation in a meaningful way without engaging in clichés, oversimplifications and distortions.

One goal of the present volume is, among other things, to problematize the traditional understanding of the relation of these two traditions as something generally negative. The contributors have been enjoined to find positive points of overlap or contact between the leading thinkers of these schools. This involves, on the one hand, identifying specific existentialist elements in the writings of the German idealists and, on the other hand, tracing the concrete reception of the idealists in the work of specific thinkers from the existentialist tradition. However, the authors have also been encouraged to identify and articulate the important differences in the two movements in ways that are insightful and promote further study.

One of the main aims of the collection is to provide advanced undergraduate students, graduate students, and scholars in philosophy, intellectual history, and related fields with a comprehensive overview that will enable new connections to be made. The goal is thus to open up new research possibilities instead of fix new interpretative dogmas that distort the material and shut down further thinking. Each article featured here represents an original contribution to the broad research fields of German Idealism and existentialism.

## **1 Previous Works on German Idealism and Existentialism**

While much has been written on German Idealism and existentialism as individual schools, very little has been written on them together. Apart from broad studies covering the entire history of modern philosophy, there is almost nothing that treats specifically the relation between these two traditions. One reason for this lies presumably in part in the nature of modern research which dictates a high level of specialization and discourages broader undertakings that try to come to terms with entire schools of thought. Unless one is writing a textbook or a history of philosophy, the question is never really raised about the relation of two large traditions of thought. Those who try to engage in discussions about such questions are often regarded as overly ambitious and academically reckless.

## 1.1 General Studies

With regard to the absence of literature on the broad topic, one exception to the rule is *Idealism and Existentialism: Hegel and Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century European Philosophy* (Stewart 2010). This work, however, is in no way systematic. It is limited in its scope, focusing primarily on episodic points of contact between Hegel and the existentialist movement. It dwells on the grey area between German Idealism and existentialism in the transition from Hegel to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This study argues that while there was, to be a sure, an important shift that took place, the transition between German Idealism and existentialism was by no means a radical break or something characterized by discontinuity. In its objectives the book *Idealism and Existentialism* is more humble in its ambitions than the present volume, which provides much broader and more systematic coverage of the numerous relations and points of contact between the two traditions.

Somewhat similar in concept to *Idealism and Existentialism* is Robert C. Solomon's *From Hegel to Existentialism* (Solomon 1987). This book consists of a series of episodic chapters (from previously published articles) on different figures and subjects in the tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental philosophy. Beginning with a handful of pieces on Hegel, the work continues with chapters on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Camus and Sartre. A smooth transition is thus traced between the traditions of idealism and existentialism, with Hegel's influence being a key determining factor. Like *Idealism and Existentialism*, this work does not aim at systematic coverage but instead tries to hone in on key topics in the development of European philosophy.

A work much closer to the general concept of the present volume is the anthology, *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, vol. 1, *Philosophy and Natural Sciences* (Boyle et al. 2013). The first volume of a series, this outstanding collection features a series of articles assessing different aspects of the influence of German Idealism on later philosophical and scientific thinking. Treating the reception of this tradition in the fields of religion, science, and culture, *The Impact of Idealism* is broader than the present volume in that the latter is concerned only with the field of philosophy. Moreover, *The Impact of Idealism* explores the importance of German Idealism for a number of different schools of thought such as British idealism, phenomenology, pragmatism and French postmodernism, whereas the present volume is limited to exploring German Idealism's relation to the existentialist movement alone. But, by contrast, *The Impact of Idealism* is also narrower

than the present volume since the former is confined to the history of reception more strictly speaking. However, this constitutes only the second half of the present volume, which is also dedicated to exploring different conceptual similarities and ways that the German idealists can be said to anticipate existentialism, independent of any *de facto* point of reception or appropriation. The present volume allows for a more systematic approach by circumscribing the field of study more precisely.

## 1.2 Studies on the Relation of the German Idealists to Existentialism

Apart from the works mentioned above there are specific studies on individual figures from the tradition of German Idealism and their relation to existentialism. To date there exists no monograph-length work on Kant's relation to existentialism as a school of thought. There are only individual books and articles treating Kant's relation to specific figures of the existentialist tradition, although this does seem to be a topic that is currently attracting research interest. Most notable among these are Roe Fremstedal's *Kierkegaard and Kant on Radical Evil and the Highest Good: Virtue, Happiness, and the Kingdom of God* (Fremstedal 2014) and Sorin Baiasu's edited volume *Comparing Kant and Sartre* (Baiasu 2016).

There are only individual articles suggesting Fichte's relation to existentialism (Wright 1975; Kangas 2007; Breazeale 2010; O'Neill Burns 2017). This thus still remains a broadly unexplored topic. The same situation seems to apply with regard to Schelling, where there are only a few articles that try to see him in relation to the tradition of existentialism in general (Hayes 1995). It should be noted that the work of Zoltán Gyenge has tried to present Schelling as an important forerunner of existentialism by identifying points of similarity with the thought of Kierkegaard (Gyenge 1996).

Despite the keen interest in the relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard, there does not seem to have been much work done to trace the connections between Hegel's thought and existentialism in general. To date there is no book-length monograph but only a few articles on this topic (Lessing 1968; Ciavatta 2014). This is somewhat odd since the potential of such a study has already been noted by Merleau-Ponty's thought-provoking article "Hegel's Existentialism" (1992). The historical connection between Kojève's seminars on Hegel in the 1930s and the French existentialists is a subject worthy of further investigation (Marmasse 2013).

Another area with great unexplored potential is Schopenhauer's relation to existentialism. Nietzsche's use of him as a source of inspiration suggests an important connection that might well be extended to the later existentialists (Simmel 1991). Schopenhauer could thus possibly be regarded as an important link between the two traditions. Given this, it is safe to say that specialists in German Idealism have not been particularly interested in seeing this movement as a forerunner of existentialism.

### 1.3 Studies on the Relation of the Existentialists to German Idealism

Although there has not been much written about the relation of the German idealists to existentialism, there has been, however, more interest in exploring the inverse relation, that is, that of the individual existentialists to the tradition of German Idealism. From a purely quantitative perspective, the field of Kierkegaard studies represents the most developed research area along these lines.

There are a handful of studies that examine Kierkegaard's relation to German Idealism in general: Wilhelm Anz's *Kierkegaard und der deutsche Idealismus* (Anz 1956), the edited volume, *Kierkegaard und die deutsche Philosophie seiner Zeit* (Anz et al. 1980), Zoltán Gyenge's *Kierkegaard és a német idealizmus* (Gyenge 1996), and Lore Hühn's *Kierkegaard und der deutsche Idealismus. Konstellationen des Übergangs* (Hühn 2009), and Lore Hühn's and Phillipp Schwab's "Kierkegaard and German Idealism" (Hühn and Schwab 2013). Mention should also be made of Michelle Kosch's *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Kosch 2006), Robert Stern's *Understanding Moral Obligation: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard* (Stern 2012), and Roe Fremstedal's "Kierkegaard's Use of German Philosophy: Leibniz to Fichte" (Fremstedal 2015). Also relevant is the collection *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, Tome I, *Philosophy* (Stewart 2007a), which contains substantial articles on Kierkegaard's relation to and use of the leading figures of the German idealist movement (Green 2007; Kangas 2007; Stewart 2007b; Olesen 2007; Davini 2007; González 2007). Much of the recent work *Faust, Romantic Irony, and System: German Culture in the Thought of Søren Kierkegaard* is also relevant for Kierkegaard's relation to this school of thought (Stewart 2019).

There is also a wealth of research on Kierkegaard's relations to and points of contact with the individual German idealists. If we confine ourselves just to book-length studies, there are a number of works on his relation to Kant

(Green 1992; Fendt 1990; Phillips and Tessin 2000; Knappe 2004; Kosch 2006; Rapic 2007; Stern 2012; Fremstedal 2014), Schelling (Gyenge 1996; Olesen 2003; Kosch 2006; Hennigfeld and Stewart 2003; Basso 2007), Hegel (Thulstrup 1967; Taylor 1980; Grøn 1997; Stewart 2003), Schopenhauer (Cappelørn et al. 2011), and Trendelenburg (Come 1991).<sup>3</sup> The large number of works on Kierkegaard and these thinkers in contrast to the general paucity of works comparing other existentialists to German idealists seems to suggest that the Danish thinker plays a special role in the relation of these two traditions.

There is still no single-author monograph on Nietzsche's relation to German Idealism in general. However, there has recently appeared an anthology that seeks to establish connections along these lines: *Nietzsche, German Idealism and Its Criticism* (Hay and dos Santos 2015). Moreover, there are a few book-length studies on Nietzsche's relation to Hegel specifically (Houlgate 1986; Dudley 2002; Williams 2012). There is also a developed research area dedicated to Nietzsche's criticism of Schopenhauer (Janaway 1998).

There seems to be virtually a complete absence of studies on Martin Buber's relation to German Idealism. By contrast, there have been a few attempts to connect the theology of Tillich with some of the key figures of German Idealism, especially Schelling (Steinacker 1989; Neugebauer 2007; Loncar 2012) and Hegel (Cameron 1976). There are likewise no detailed studies of Karl Jaspers's or Hannah Arendt's respective relations to German Idealism.

Heidegger studies represents a large field, and there are individual works on Heidegger's use of German Idealism. Several of the articles in Tom Rockmore's collection are relevant to this topic: *Heidegger, German Idealism and Neo-Kantianism* (Rockmore 2000). In addition to several articles, there are also a number of books dedicated to Heidegger's relation to specific idealists, especially Kant (Declève 1970; Sherover 1971; Schalow 1986, 1992, 2013; Weatherston 2002). This cannot be regarded as too surprising given Heidegger's direct and explicit analyses of Kant. There has also been valuable research done on Heidegger's relation to Hegel (Ionel 2020) and Schelling (Yates 2013).

For the French existentialists, with the exception of Sartre, there is a surprising lack of research done in this area. For example, there is no extended work on the use of German Idealism by Jacques Maritain or Camus. Despite Merleau-Ponty's discussions of Hegel and other idealists there are no research monographs dedicated to this topic. With regard to Simone de Beauvoir, there are only a few scattered articles that attempt to connect her ethical thinking to Kant and Hegel (Altman 2007; Wilkerson 2012). Of the French existentialists, it is clearly Sartre who has attracted the most interest in

connection with the tradition of German Idealism. While there is no single monograph dedicated to this relation in general,<sup>4</sup> there are a number of works that link his thinking with individual figures of that tradition, such as Kant (Baiaşu 2016), Fichte (Waibel 2015), Schelling (Gardner 2006), and Hegel (Fry 1988).

Although Levinas is not usually included among the main thinkers of existentialism, he has been included here since he was in dialogue with the French existentialists about the key issues. Hegel's theory of self-consciousness and recognition clearly plays an important role in Levinas's thought, and this is reflected in the secondary literature. While there is very little about Levinas and the other German idealists, there are a number of works dedicated to exploring his use of Hegel (Bernasconi 1982, 1986; Fox 2007; Irwin 2007; Shuster 2019).

From this brief overview it seems clear that work on the relation between German Idealism and existentialism has only just begun. Apart from research on Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, there is no meaningful body of literature that explores the connections of the German idealists to existentialism or vice versa.

## 2 The Organization of the Present Volume

The present volume has been divided into two parts, reflecting two different perspectives on the relation between German Idealism and existentialism. Part I features individual articles on the leading figures of the German idealist movement. These articles are organized chronologically thus tracing the movement from beginning to end. The authors have been asked to identify elements of existential thinking that can be found in the work of these figures. In other words, how might these thinkers be conceived as anticipating existentialism in the same way that, for example, Kierkegaard or Nietzsche are often hailed as forerunners of it? This has been done based on a close reading of the primary texts of the German idealists themselves and independent of the actual history of reception of their thought by the existentialists. Thus the methodology employed here is that of comparative conceptual analysis.

Part II features individual articles on the best-known thinkers of the existentialist movement. As was the case in the first part, here the articles are organized chronologically based on the period of the individual thinkers treated. The authors in this section have been asked to do a kind of source-work study by identifying how these figures have been influenced by German Idealism. Thus, the focus is on the German idealists as *de facto* sources

of inspiration for existentialism. The goal of this section is to document that inspiration as carefully as possible, answering questions such as: When did Camus or Sartre read Hegel? What editions or translations did they use? How specifically did they incorporate the thoughts from Kant or Hegel in their own works?

With the focus on the individual figures of each tradition, this volume allows for the authors to treat their topic thoroughly with a minimum of overlap. Care has also been taken to avoid points of repetition with the other volumes in this series, as much as possible. The authors have been free to establish points of connection in a number of different fields and areas. Thus, the volume is interdisciplinary. The articles represent new research and treat many issues and connections that have traditionally been overlooked. The two parts of the collection serve to paint a broader picture of the development of the history of ideas, as concerns German Idealism and existentialism, than is usually given in standard overviews.

## 3 The Present Collection

### 3.1 Part I: German Idealism

As noted, Part I of the present collection treats the relation of German Idealism to existentialism with a close study of the potential existential features in the thought of the German idealists. The first article is Paolo Livieri's "The Stumbling Block of Existence in F. H. Jacobi," which outlines some key issues in Jacobi's critical assessment of German Idealism. Although his contribution has not been generally acknowledged, Jacobi can be seen as an important forerunner of existentialism with his criticism of the way in which he believes that German Idealism had lost touch with the real world in its attempt to explain things by means of abstract ideas. The idealists' zeal for explanation had led them to forget their immediate experience with the world. The actual individual objects that surround us remain outside their accounts since such objects cannot be captured by ideas. Jacobi proposes a return to our more immediate experience of the world by focusing on individual objects as the starting point. It is only when we abstract from these that we arrive at ideas. But the idealists have it the other way around, mistakenly believing that the ideas can be used to explain the particular things.

Roe Fremstedal's article explores the relation between the thought of Kant and existentialism. It is argued that there are a handful of key ideas in Kant

that can be seen as anticipating the existentialist movement. Perhaps most importantly, the issue of autonomy and freedom is central to Kant's thinking. Like the existentialists, Kant sees the awareness of human freedom as being a source of anxiety. Kant also develops a theory of self-deception which parallels some of theories among the existentialists such as Sartre's account of bad faith. Fremstedal also identifies Kant's focus on the finitude of the human condition and the limitations of human knowledge as anticipations of key existentialist motifs. Kant's notion of a transcendent and hidden God aligns with some of the dominant ideas in the tradition of Christian existentialism.

Steven Hoeltzel's article "Fichte and Existentialism: Freedom and Finitude, Self-Positing and Striving" focuses on Fichte's "theory of science" (*Wissenschaftslehre*). The author enumerates a number of points where Fichte's thought can be said to anticipate existentialism in some significant way. Perhaps most important is Fichte's understanding of the nature of selfhood or subjectivity as a central philosophical issue. This anticipates the existentialists' rejection of abstract forms of explanation and their focus on the primacy of the immediate lived experience of the individual. Like the existentialists, Fichte conceives of the self not as some fixed and static essence, but rather as an ongoing process, which involves self-actualization. For Fichte, the individual strives to realize him- or herself in actuality, which is a never-ending struggle. In this context, Hoeltzel also sees in Fichte an anticipation of the existentialists' preoccupation with the notion of authenticity.

Zoltán Gyenge treats Schelling's relation to the existentialist movement, arguing that the late philosophy of Schelling had a much greater impact on existentialism than previously thought. This influence came through the work of Kierkegaard, who attended Schelling's lectures in Berlin and was inspired by them. Despite previous views that claimed that Kierkegaard rejected Schelling's thought, with the exception of the latter's criticism of Hegel, Gyenge argues that there is a much more profound connection between the late Schelling and Kierkegaard. Specifically, Kierkegaard seizes on Schelling's focus on being and actuality. It is argued that this is the beginning of the existentialist interest in time, the lived experience, and the contingency of human existence. Here we can see the existentialist rejection of logic and abstraction. Gyenge thus claims that the missing link between German Idealism and existentialism is Schelling's late philosophy and Kierkegaard's *Notes to Schelling's Berlin Lectures*. This means that the idea of a radical break between these two traditions is overstated, and in fact in Schelling's late philosophy it is possible to see the smooth transition from the one school to the other.

C. Allen Speight's article treats Hegel's complex relation to existentialism. The article demonstrates that the less known writings of the early

pre-systematic Hegel contain important elements which can be regarded as anticipations of existentialism. Particularly striking here is the young Hegel's interest in the notion of alienation. Taking a hint from Merleau-Ponty, Speight, argues that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* contains in its methodology a theory of human experience that was of interest to the existentialists (Merleau-Ponty 1992). This focus on experience runs against the grain of the caricatured picture of Hegel as an abstract thinker lost in a fruitless meditation on the categories of metaphysics. In addition, Hegel's rich account of Antigone and the Romantic conscience can be regarded as relevant for existential topics. The early existential dimension of Hegel's thought is also carried over into his later social-political philosophy in the *Philosophy of Right*, where we can find a developed theory of human agency, conscience and responsibility that all find an echo in existentialist thinking.

Perhaps due to his merciless criticisms of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, Schopenhauer has often been regarded as the odd man out in traditional accounts of German Idealism. In his article Robert Wicks seizes on the elements in Schopenhauer's thought where his differences from his contemporary idealists can be seen as anticipations of existentialism. In particular Schopenhauer's pessimism in many ways seems akin to the existentialist conception of existence. Like the existentialists, he is concerned with the deeper issue of the meaning of life and the contingency or fragility of human existence. He sees suffering as a fundamental aspect of the human condition. Schopenhauer's focus on the will and the central role of human desire in a sense takes human beings down from the pedestal where they had been put by the earlier idealists with their lopsided focus on the faculty of reason. With these points of connection, Schopenhauer can be regarded as an connecting link between the traditions of German Idealism and existentialism.

Heiko Schulz's article attempts to uncover existentialist elements in the work of the late idealist F. A. Trendelenburg. It is argued that in order to claim that Trendelenburg is important for existentialism, one must identify authors who draw on him in the context of their own existentialist projects. If this is the criterion, then it seems that Kierkegaard is the only one who corresponds to the desired role since Kierkegaard does indeed heap praise on Trendelenburg in some of his works. However, the conclusion of the article is that, despite Kierkegaard's praise, there is nothing that can be found in Trendelenburg that can count as anticipating existentialism. Although he was perhaps the last of the German idealists, Trendelenburg cannot be properly regarded as building a bridge to the existentialist tradition.

### 3.2 Part II: Existentialism

Part II of the present volume examines the relation of German Idealism to existentialism from the side of the individual existentialist thinkers. The first article in this section treats the thought of Søren Kierkegaard who is often regarded as a leading figure in the existentialist movement. It is argued that Kierkegaard occupies a key position since German Idealism was still a living tradition during his lifetime, and he himself had first-hand experience with Schelling and formative members of the Hegelian schools. The article argues that the Dane can be seen as representing *in persona* the transition from German Idealism to existentialism. At first a detailed account is given of Kierkegaard's fairly extensive use of a number of different ideas from all the main figures of the tradition of German Idealism. This establishes that there can be no doubt that Kierkegaard was influenced by this tradition in many different aspects of his thinking. But this raises the question of whether there are any specifically idealist elements in his thought or if he was simply receptive to other things in the writings of the idealists. The article points out that a handful of key Kierkegaardian ideas, such as irony, despair or anxiety, can indeed be conceived as evidence of idealist thinking. Moreover, *The Concept of Irony* displays a Hegelian conception of history that develops in accordance with underlying ideas which appear in the world in the form of historical events. This conclusion calls into question traditional views of Kierkegaard as a great critic of German Idealism and by extension the notion of the great break in the development of Continental philosophy between German Idealism and existentialism.

Daniel Conway describes Nietzsche's ambivalent and changing relation to German Idealism. While the early Nietzsche was positively disposed towards Kant, as his own philosophical intuitions developed, he became more critical over time. Initially Nietzsche found attractive the Kantian distinction between appearance and reality or representation and thing-in-itself. This appealed to Nietzsche's skeptical side and appeared to him to be more satisfying than the more abstract idealism of Plato. However, as Nietzsche's thought progressed, he turned against the otherworldly promise of Christianity. Seen in this context, Kant's epistemology appeared to be yet another result of a culture of Christian decadence. Like the idea of heaven, the notion of the thing-in-itself from which we were forever cut off was just one more myth that served to diminish the value and meaning of the real world and to alienate individuals from themselves.

Peter Šajda's article treats the complex and varied reception of German Idealism in the thought of Martin Buber.<sup>5</sup> Buber's most intensive occupation with German Idealism can be found in his study of Kant. As a young man, Buber read Kant's *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* and was moved by the interpretation found there of space and time as human faculties. However, as Buber's own views began to emerge, he became more critical of Kant. Specifically, Buber rejects Kant's subordination of religion to ethics. Moreover, in his early thinking Buber was particularly interested in Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*. This work was surprisingly important in the revival of Jewish nationalism. Finally, Buber was also interested in Hegel's social-political philosophy and philosophical anthropology. He criticizes Hegel's philosophy of religion for offering an account of God that does not have an interpersonal character of the I and Thou. Although Buber seems to criticize idealism for its abstraction and to distinguish it from his own dialogical philosophy on this score, there are nonetheless undeniable points of positive influence.

Christian Danz traces Paul Tillich's engagement with German Idealism. Tillich learned about the specific thinkers of the German idealist movement when he was a young student at the University of Halle during the first decade of the twentieth century. In the wake of a general revival of idealism in German philosophy and theology at the turn of the century, he made a careful study of both Fichte and Schelling, but it was especially the latter who had a lasting influence on him. The degree of Tillich's interest is testified by the fact that he wrote both a philosophical and a theological dissertation on Schelling. He was particularly interested in Schelling for theological reasons. During this time theology was in a state of crisis due to the rise of historicist thinking which focused on the cultural and historical relativity of values and beliefs. Tillich believed that Schelling's philosophy had the resources to establish a firm new foundation for theology in this context. As an old man, Tillich openly acknowledged the important role that Schelling played for the development of his thought (Tillich 1987–1998, I, p. 392).

In his article István Czakó uses as the central motif a contemporary reference to Karl Jaspers as "the first and the last Kantian." Jaspers was profoundly inspired by Kant's transcendental philosophy and especially by Kant's epistemology that defined the limits of reason. Jaspers believed that Kant's successor Fichte misconceived Kant's basic principle and betrayed the critical philosophy. Although due to this Jaspers is consistently critical of Fichte, he is receptive to different ideas in the works of the other German idealists, Schelling and Hegel. This picture of Jaspers's quite positive assessment of German Idealism and contemporary neo-Kantianism clashes with received views about the alleged critical relation of existentialism to these traditions.

Matthew Wester's article investigates Hannah Arendt's critical assessment of the tradition of German Idealism. Arendt was consistently dismissive of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Yet, despite her critical disposition, she was interested in the theories of history in the German idealist tradition, which contained important implications for politics. She criticizes Hegel's philosophy of history for rendering insignificant the affairs of individual human beings since the true meaning of history can only be perceived at the macro-level. The modern view of history that she ascribes to him thus means that the specific goals and actions of individual political leaders are unimportant—a view that she strongly rejects. However, she is positively inclined towards Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which she also makes use of in the context of political philosophy. Like the post-Kantian German idealists, Arendt can be seen as trying to use Kant's basic insights and go beyond him. She was specifically attracted to Kant's account of the autonomy of the faculty of judgment, which she believed could be used as a model for understanding the specific nature of political speech and action as something different from cognitive or moral judgment. The author argues that Arendt can be seen as offering a modification or correction of Kant's theory by applying his concept of judgment in the political sphere.

Although Heidegger rejected the label of an existentialist, he is usually classified with the thinkers of that movement in histories of twentieth-century philosophy. Due to his own stature and his extensive study and use of German Idealism, the present volume dedicates two different articles to him. In the first of these David Espinet examines specifically Heidegger's use of Kant. The author notes the complex issue of the relation of Heidegger's thought to existentialism and argues that the moments when Heidegger appears to be most existentialist correspond to the aspects of his thought that appear most indebted to Kant. The article traces and documents three different stages in Heidegger's changing relation to Kant. It is argued that Heidegger's philosophy can be understood as a form of idealism, which bears a similarity to some of the basic ideas in Kant. In particular, Heidegger can be seen as developing further Kant's argument that time is not something objective in the external world but rather something subjective, constituting a faculty of the perceiving subject. Moreover, Kant's conception of objectivity as something constructed by the human mind is reflected in Heidegger's understanding of the history of being. Ultimately, Heidegger's philosophy can, it is claimed, be conceived as a kind of subjectivist idealism.

In the second article on Heidegger, Sylvaine Gourdain and Lucian Ionel explore Heidegger's use of the other major German idealists: Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. The article points out that Heidegger generally rejects idealism for

its claim that being is something produced by the human subject and not something that is revealed or disclosed about the world. In his attempt to get at our most primary experience and understanding of the world, Heidegger can be conceived as revising the conception of philosophy as primarily conceptual analysis. It is argued that Heidegger was particularly inspired by Schelling's *Freiheitschrift*, which he taught on three occasions. Heidegger discusses Schelling's distinction between being as "ground of existence" and "the nonground," in the development of the conception of the metaphysics of Dasein.

Lee C. Barrett examines Jacques Maritain's reception of German Idealism. Maritain has been traditionally characterized as a Catholic existentialist (Horton 1938, pp. 48–65; Herberg 1958, pp. 27–96), but his relation to his contemporary existentialists was by no means straightforward. Maritain's religious commitments led him to criticize the atheist existentialists for solipsism, arbitrary decisionism and relativism. Somewhat counterintuitively, Maritain claims that Aquinas is the true existentialist since he focused on the lived experience of the individual. Aquinas is thus used as the benchmark by which Maritain measures his contemporary existentialists. With regard to German Idealism, Maritain rejects the idealists' prioritizing epistemology over metaphysics. He is further critical of what he regards as the Hegelian attempt to conceive of ethical collectivities that undermine the value of the individual. Maritain claims that idealism ends in abstraction and neglects the concrete lived experience that can best be found in the thought of Aquinas.

Thomas Miles treats Camus's evaluation of German Idealism with a special focus on Camus's ethics of resistance in *The Rebel*. Camus was especially interested in Hegel, who was a common point of departure for many of the French existentialists. Camus made a careful study of Hegel, who appears repeatedly in *The Rebel*. Camus's evaluation of him is ambivalent. While he recognizes certain valuable insights in Hegel's philosophy, nonetheless Hegel is held responsible for providing the foundation for Stalinism and some of the atrocities of the twentieth century. This criticism should be seen in the context of Camus's critique of what he perceives as Sartre's hypocrisy. While Sartre is vehement in his criticism of the crimes committed by the Nazis and the collaborators, he turns a blind eye to those perpetuated by the communists. The author shows how, in spite of Camus's critique, Hegel is in fact important for Camus's attempt to develop an ethics of rebellion.

David Ciavatta explores Merleau-Ponty's engagement with the tradition of German Idealism, which seems to be generally limited to the figures of Hegel and Schelling. Merleau-Ponty gave a lecture course on Schelling, but this does not seem to have left any clear mark on his written work. By contrast, Hegel's

philosophy of history was a topic that exercised him in many ways. Merleau-Ponty appreciates Hegel's analysis of human beings as historically situated beings. He believes that this account of history could usefully supplement the existentialist focus on the lived experience of the individual. Merleau-Ponty also focuses on the important role of artistic creation which is able to give new meaning in specific historical contexts. Artists can thus lead the way into the future with their works. There is an analogy here to Hegel's account of the fruitfulness of specific key historical events which give rise to and determine subsequent events. Thus while Merleau-Ponty is critical of Hegel's notion of an abstract autonomous meaning in history in the form of world Spirit, there is much in Hegel's account that he believes can be usefully appropriated for the existentialist program.

Bruce Baugh treats Sartre's engagement with German Idealism. As was the case with Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's interest in this tradition of thought focused primarily on Hegel. Sartre was both inspired by Hegel and critical of him. In many ways, Sartre's theory of consciousness owes much to Hegel, although he rejects the notion of a group consciousness or spirit, which he regards as impossible. Sartre believes that Hegel's account of some final truth about consciousness or the totality of consciousnesses mistakenly characterizes human beings as fixed and static. Instead, it lies in the nature of human beings constantly to go beyond themselves into the future. Since the future holds an infinite number of possibilities, the human being is always unfinished and indeterminate. This is true not just for the sphere of individuals in the context of philosophical psychology and anthropology, but also for the sphere of nations and groups of people in the philosophy of history. Thus, history is never a complete or closed totality but instead constantly changing and developing every day with the passage of time. Sartre agrees with Hegel's systematic conception that a totality of relations that are mediated with one another would theoretically provide a kind of absolute truth; however, Sartre claims that this totality is forever out of reach and what we are left with is a picture that is incomplete and forever changing.

In the final article of the present collection Claire Katz jointly treats the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Simone de Beauvoir with respect to German Idealism. This might at first glance appear an odd approach, but in fact there are many parallels in the response of these two thinkers to this tradition and in their respective theories of ethics and social justice. Both Levinas and de Beauvoir were inspired by Hegel's famous theory of recognition and the relation of the lord and the bondsman in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. They both try to revise and supplement Hegel's somewhat negative picture of human relations that sees the other as a threat to one's own existence. Instead,

they try to develop a positive picture of ethics based on a fundamental responsibility of the individual to the other. De Beauvoir uses Hegel's account for her critical analysis of the struggle of women to win a meaningful form of recognition from their male peers. Similarly, Levinas develops a theory of Jewish identity and ethics that uses as its point of departure the relation of the individual to the other and their reciprocal obligation of ethical responsibility.

## 4 The Nature of the History of Ideas

This volume shows the complexity of the history of ideas and the history of reception. Although the standard picture about the relation of German Idealism to existentialism is one of discontinuity, every single article in this collection documents important connections. These concern both German Idealism's many anticipations of existentialism and the numerous points of reception by the existentialists of specific ideas and analyses from the idealist tradition. This suggests that the older picture of the history of the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental philosophy is largely a distorting cliché.

When we talk about the history of ideas, it is rarely the case that the one view is radically and utterly rejected, while a completely new one replaces it. Instead, the history of ideas can best be understood as one of appropriation, development, modification, and revision as new thinkers take the ideas they inherit from the past and apply them to new contexts from their own time. This new application demands that the ideas be revised to fit the new context. Ideas thus develop and evolve but rarely die out completely.

In the history of philosophy as in modern philosophy there is, of course, no shortage of posturing. Philosophy is by its nature a polemical discipline. Philosophers tend to overstate the differences of their views from that of their predecessors in order to emphasize the novelty of their own ideas. But we would do well not to take this kind of rhetoric so seriously since this can lead to the mistaken view that philosophical ideas are black and white, right and wrong. Instead, if we truly wish to understand the development of ideas, it is best to see such philosophical polemics as dialogues in which ideas are appropriated, revised and given new forms. But this is a complex process that has many aspects and can rarely be described as simply the replacement of one view with another. The articles in the present collection, although different from one another in various ways, all demonstrate this point about the

complex relation of the constellation of ideas that has traditionally been associated with the traditions of German Idealism and existentialism.

## Notes

1. It should also be noted that there are some valuable studies on the development of philosophy in the second half of the nineteenth century and in some cases into the twentieth century that attempt to discern the continuities and to see the long shadow cast by German Idealism (Schnädlebach 1984; Beiser 2013).
2. See, for example, the articles in Hay and dos Santos 2015.
3. With regard to Trendelenburg, there are (in addition to Come's book) also a number of valuable articles: Dietz 1992; Message 1997; Magri 2004; Purkarthofer 2005; González 2007.
4. Note that Sebastian Gardner's article points in the direction of a broader interpretation of Sartre vis-à-vis the entire tradition of German Idealism (Gardner 2005).
5. Šajda builds on his earlier works on Buber (see Šajda 2003, 2010, 2013a, b).

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