

KIRILL CHEPURIN AND
ALEX DUBILET, EDITORS

Nothing Absolute

*German Idealism and the
Question of Political Theology*

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Introduction

Immanence, Genealogy, Delegitimation

KIRILL CHEPURIN AND ALEX DUBILET

Across its recent renaissance, political theology has remained a notoriously multivalent term, a contested terrain defined by wide-ranging political and theological commitments. What political theology brings conceptually into play, what is theoretically at stake in this interdisciplinary site of inquiry, and what genealogical resources are pertinent to it—all of this is decided on anew with each political-theological investigation. New theoretical engagements repeatedly redraw the entire problematic: the debate is as much within a constituted field named political theology, as it is about the very existence and coherence of the field as such, as well as the status, scope, and significance of its fundamental concepts. There seemingly is no neutral space one could term political theology, concepts being always polemical and neutral space being always only a neutralized one. This instability of definition has made the field at once fecund and elusive, generative and highly contested. Why is the invocation of the name *political theology* significant today? And why invoke it alongside the post-Enlightenment—and also highly generative and debated—movement of thought known as German Idealism?

Political Theology and the Contemporary Moment

Within modern theoretical space, the term *political theology* came into prominence with Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (1922). There we find Schmitt's famous dictum: "All

significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred [*übertragen*] from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure.”¹ Already at this juncture, a number of key elements cluster around political theology as a problematic: the structural systematic analogy and historical transfer of concepts and operations between the theological and the political realms; the focus on problematizing the supposedly secular character of modernity; and the centrality of transcendence and sovereignty. Of course, the question of secularization, so central to political theology, was not exhausted by the Schmittian frame—it was a *topos* richly debated by such figures as Walter Benjamin, Karl Löwith, Jacob Taubes, and Hans Blumenberg.²

Aligning his project explicitly with the Enlightenment tradition, Blumenberg resisted the idea that modernity is the continuation of Christianity by other means, seeing in the idea of secularization an attempt to delegitimize the world of modernity, to reduce it to a cover-up operation of seizing the contents and structures that were originally Christian without acknowledging it. Instead, as the charged title of his groundbreaking study of modernity indicates, Blumenberg sought to legitimate the modern world as a distinct epoch, that of the “immanent self-assertion of reason.” In this, he also rejected the term *political theology*, associated by him with Schmitt’s delegitimation of modernity in the service of transcendence. And yet, from a broader standpoint, Blumenberg’s study itself engages with what may be seen as the central problematic of political theology: the interrogation of the continuities and discontinuities between theological pasts and the secular-modern world.

At one point in the book, polemicizing against Löwith’s thesis on the secularization of Christian eschatology in modernity, Blumenberg identifies the beginning of what Löwith sees as the specifically modern secularization process already in early Christianity’s neutralization of Jewish apocalypticism. Against the latter’s apocalyptic urgency and demand for the immediate end of the world, Christianity made, per Blumenberg, the move of *postponing* the end indefinitely, transforming apocalypticism into eschatology and granting new value to the world itself, precisely as the space between creation and redemption, as the not-yet in which we must live. At another point, Blumenberg traces in detail the emergence of the basic metaphysical structures of the world of modernity—alienation, contingency, self-assertion, the possibility of “immanently” mastering and altering reality—out of and in response to late-medieval nominalism. And, no less importantly, he sees the main task of modernity as the overcoming of

Gnosticism—a characteristic modernity shares, for him, with Christianity. In other words, the structural continuities between the Christian and the modern world are there for Blumenberg as well, even if their implications are distinctly different.³ The assessment of these structures and implications is precisely at the core of political theology, which continues to this day to interrogate the interactions and interchanges between the Christian and the secular—against any simplistic theories of overcoming, against any easy disburdenment.

The term *political theology* has also elicited fully countervailing understandings. For example, more explicitly theological—predominantly, though not exclusively, Christian—formulations of the problematic have arisen. Here, political theology begins to mean something different: it asks after the politics that form or should form within specific theological traditions, in other words, after the political dimension of the theological—explored under theological rubrics such as natural law, eschatology, justice, or faith. Such positions may disregard the previous debates, or be situated against them, pointing out how Schmitt and others have failed, in their political theology, to be properly theological in one way or another—and offering robustly theological constructions as a corrective and the supposedly more proper way of doing political theology. The politics that emerge as a result vary, but the fundamental questions of these investigations are different from the previously mentioned debates: What are the proper politics of a given theological tradition? What is a suitably theological vision of politics? And yet, these debates often remain provincially and dogmatically theological, failing to problematize the standing and standpoint of theology itself—and hence overlooking Christianity’s own imbrications, political and metaphysical, with secular modernity.

In opposition to both, a liberal and secular position has recently come into prominence. From its less sophisticated (Mark Lilla) to its more sophisticated (Victoria Kahn) variants, such a position sees political theology predominantly as the cunning deployment of theological supplements within the realm of the political—rendering political theology a question of transcendent authority and mystification, a question of legitimation, sanctification, and grounding.⁴ Equating political theology with the theological legitimation of political authority, as for example Kahn does, produces as its corollary the necessity of its critique: it is produced as a concept against which to polemicize. Kahn rejects wholesale the diagnosis of the political-theological underpinnings of modernity and sees this suggestion as entirely a retrograde “return” that must be resisted.

In positions such as Kahn’s, the secular is defended against theological supplements, but the critical purchase of political theology as a discourse

is lost. This critical dimension has always sought to reassess modernity, secularity, and politics: not in order to mystify them but in order to prevent them from all-too quickly disburdening themselves of their theological pasts and declaring themselves to be free from theology, enacting a sort of self-mystification through which they appear absolutely novel and free. Broadly liberal positions, whatever their scholarly merits, fail to register that the significance of political theology as a problematic and a discourse lies less in the way it transcendentally legitimates power or authority—thereby requiring a self-righteous secular critique that stages a reenactment of the Enlightenment critique of religion—and more in the way it undercuts the triumphalist narratives that secularized modernity produces of itself, shedding critical light on the claims of secular self-legitimation that occur through polemical dissociations from Christianity.

In other words, the task is never as easy as affirming a theological tradition to generate a politics or, by contrast, purifying the political of all theology—this is precisely what political theology as a discourse, at its best, disallows. This dominant binary—which in a way reproduces the Schmitt-Blumenberg opposition between conservative or Christian delegitimations of secular modernity and the quasi-Enlightenment legitimation of its specifically secular character—is not all that political theology offers. Over the last two decades, the field of political theology has reemerged as a fundamentally critical field for exploring the religious entanglements of secular modernity and for uncovering the theological underpinnings of philosophical and political concepts. Rather than a conservative project that seeks the reassertion of transcendent sovereignty, political theology, in this articulation, has entailed new ways of theorizing the status of modernity and secularity and also thereby of rethinking the very nature of the religious-secular binary.⁵ At stake is neither a theological grounding of political concepts nor a working out of the politics of specific theological traditions, but a calling into question of modernity's own secularist presuppositions.

What this means in practice is varied. The Italian trajectory offers one important version of such a practice: it carries out a theoretical diagnosis of the apparatus of political theology in order to better trace an exit out of it, but without thereby mistakenly defending a phantasmatic secular politics. On one side of this trajectory, we encounter Giorgio Agamben's retheorization of the relation of sovereign power, the state of exception, and bare life and an outlining of the providential machine of the West.⁶ On the other side, we see Roberto Esposito articulate such an exit through a critical reconstruction of the *dispositif* of the person, a theorization of

the exteriority of thought to the subject, and a novel rearticulation of the questions of community, life, and immanence vis-à-vis the political-theological paradigm.⁷ Broadly aligned with this theoretical trajectory is a general formation of political theology that includes Alain Badiou's and Slavoj Žižek's recuperation of St. Paul, Antonio Negri's investigation of Job, Catherine Malabou's work on Spinoza and the sacred and, earlier, Michel Foucault's elaboration of pastoral power.⁸ Whatever their difference, for all of these thinkers—across their various projects—the fundamental question is neither a theological legitimization of politics, nor the formation of a purely secular politics, nor a reactivation of a Christian paradigm, but the tracing of complex conceptual morphologies that counteract any easy separation between theology and secular thought.⁹ These projects inquire into some of the fundamental categories of modernity and its forms of self-relation in expansive assemblages and narratives that are not afraid of the powers of the theological and its archives.

Within this general critical orientation, there is a particularly compelling trajectory, one that pursues the delegitimation and ungrounding of the world of modernity without the saving grace of theological recuperation. It endeavors to diagnose the co-imbrication between—and to jointly subvert—the logics of transcendence in their secular as well as their religious forms. It seeks to unground the legitimacy of the world and all salvific and sovereign transcendences—thereby refusing the absolutization of either side of the duality. This kind of political theology from below had its twentieth-century precursors in Benjamin's explorations of divine violence, no less than in Taubes's apocalyptic questioning of the world and its legitimacy. Benjamin's messianism and Taubes's apocalypticism—precisely the kind of apocalypticism that, on Blumenberg's account, both Christianity and modernity foreclose—are irreducible to the Schmitt-Blumenberg opposition, broadly conceived, and delineate positions that remain crucial for ongoing articulations of political theology. Here, political theology amounts to a struggle against the combined interplay of secular and theological transcendences and legitimations, rather than merely the choice of one against the other in perpetual polemical oscillation. We are no longer talking about crises of legitimation, as though the world of which we were a part is coming undone, but rather about a discourse that acknowledges that perhaps this world never should have been granted any legitimacy at all. Or, as Taubes famously declared, in opposition to Schmitt: "Let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is."¹⁰

Rather than taking the secular world and what is transcendent to it as the central theoretical opposition, the dividing line must be located elsewhere: between immanence and the entire bipartite apparatus that unites the world and sovereign transcendence. Whatever exactly immanence indicates—and that is, as we will show shortly, a contested terrain—it is, significantly, decoupled from any easy adequation with secularity or the modern world and, as such, no longer serves as an index of its legitimacy. It becomes, instead, a fulcrum for the delegitimation of the world-whole and the subversion of all transcendence—with the remaining theoretical task being the novel articulation of this kind of immanence. To many, this attempt to think immanence as separate and separated from the world, in all of its entanglements with secularity and modernity, will undoubtedly sound foreign and paradoxical. After all, immanence has indexed and named the condition of the modern world, in various ways, for a variety of conflicting positions, from Schmitt to Blumenberg, from Charles Taylor to Radical Orthodoxy, and many others. It is one of the most common tropes in theorizing modernity. And yet, the morphology and thus the force of immanence is more complex than it might appear in the customary identifications of the framework of modernity with immanence and immanentization.

There are different approaches that make clear why, despite being commonly figured as such, immanence cannot be simply equated with secular modernity. First, we should recall the fact that modern secularity is indelibly tied with the rise of the modern nation-state. It was no lesser a figure than Thomas Hobbes that at the origin of political modernity established the conjunction of secular state power with sovereignty and transcendence. Perhaps, if we focus exclusively on the secular, as a domain of sensibilities, behaviors, and ways of knowing, we might think we live in an immanent age; but political modernity, with its ineluctable centrality of the state and sovereign power, has always been deeply imbricated with transcendence. As Hussein Ali Agrama, among others, has taught us to see, secularism—as a political doctrine and mode of statecraft that stresses the state's sovereign and transcendent power to continually produce and reproduce the charged boundary that separates the political from the religious—has been intimately entangled with and even productive of the lived reality of modern secularity.¹¹ One could not have the latter without the former. Nor is the transcendence of secularism only figured in its sovereign power. As Talal Asad has argued, the production of the citizen-subject—at the expense of other forms of attachment and identity—is based on transcendent mediation, and “in an important sense, this transcendent mediation *is* secularism.”¹² Modern secularity, necessarily entailing modern secular-

ism, remains in its core entangled with transcendence—not only through the operations of sovereignty, but also through operations of political mediation.

It is important as well to recall the ways the modern world remains linked with transcendence in its temporalized form, under the rubric of progress. In modernity, the world becomes a (supposedly immanent) field of projects and possibilities that the subject can make use of, actualize, master—and reality thereby becomes *producible*.¹³ The modern idea of progress, accordingly, sees the world as the process of such actualization, production, and mastery. This process functions within the horizon of an ideal end point where reality is supposed to be mastered and human life is supposed to be fulfilled or reconciled. Regardless of whether we take it to be attainable or merely regulative, this goal is at once immanent and transcendent, driving it from within toward an external telos. The entire process thereby turns into a process of constant self-transcending—of fixing humanity's gaze on a phantasmic telos of complete mastery, freedom, or fulfillment that is constitutively not-yet. The proliferation of images of utopian futurity in modernity are indicative of such a telos. Modernity structures its immanence with a view to a transcendent future and installs the figure of the subject as the one who masters this future; but the subject thereby is also subjected to and by that transcendent futurity, indeed, only becoming subject (and not a mere object on the path of progress) by means of striving toward the telos of absolute mastery and efficiency, an operation through which the world-process reproduces itself. In this “horizontal transcendence,”¹⁴ the subject is always in the process of self-transcending.¹⁵

State sovereignty and the not-yet of a transcendent futurity are hardly the only ways to expose the modern world as a transcendent structure. In its explorations of the way the modern world is constituted through coloniality and slavery—and the attendant logics of separation, otherness, enclosure, hierarchization, and exclusion—contemporary work in black studies and decolonial studies offers another. As Sylvia Wynter argues, the birth of the modern world coincides structurally with that of the (transcendent) figure of Man as the new model of being human, with its constitutive exclusion of the non- or sub-human (colonized and racialized) other—a model of the human that reoccupies, politically and theologically, the earlier figure of the Christian. Racialized otherness functions, from the onset of modernity, as the condition of possibility of the modern subject's seemingly immanent self-assertion and universalist self-description, forming “the non-supernatural but no less extrahuman ground,” the transcendent beyond to the properly human, “on which the world of modernity

was to institute itself.” This excluded ground is thereby inscribed into the “new grounds of legitimacy” of the modern world, and the “new notion of the world,” as at once the assumption and the production of separation, domination, colonial difference, and other forms of transcendence through which the world of Man goes on to reproduce and legitimate itself. In this, the earth becomes an immanent-transcendent racialized globe—a globality imposed, as it were, from above upon the degraded earth as well as upon the enslaved as the bare earth’s inhabitants and structural correlate.¹⁶

The logic of modern racialized transcendence is further explored in contemporary radical black studies, in the latter’s interrogation of the modern world as built on and perpetuating itself through the constitutive exclusion of blackness. Here, blackness indexes what is foreclosed from the modern (human) subject and its concomitant values and logics, including those of coherence, freedom, futurity, and possibility. In the overall distribution of race and the extra-human in modernity, blackness occupies the structural (non-)position of nothingness. As such, blackness becomes the zero point that remains beneath the binaries in and through which the world operates, as that over and against which, by way of obliterating its being, the modern subject and the modern world can assume their transcendent sovereign function.¹⁷ To affirm this nothing or zero point, as some of the central work in radical black studies suggests,¹⁸ is to refuse the regime of being of and in the world that is shown to be intrinsically violent, and to do so without any call for the world’s redemption or justification—without and against all attempts (whether religious or secular) to legitimate the world, a legitimacy that is violently imposed upon the excluded, the obliterated, and the enslaved.

Thus, while the modern world may appear as equatable with immanence when narrated by and from various perspective engaged in polemics about theology and secularization, it is exposed, across the spectrum of contemporary critical theory, as a violent transcendent apparatus. In a more abstract register (which should, however, be thought together with the explorations of the modern world’s transcendence considered so far), François Laruelle and those inspired by his thought have likewise worked to diagnose the world as a transcendent structure. For Laruelle, the world names the horizon of reality as coherent, rationally cognizable, and supposedly self-sufficient. The world, this transcendental illusion, as Laruelle terms it in a nod to Kant, operates by way of doubling and separation, by way of *dividing* the Real, creating the binaries that structure our thinking, such as light and dark, good and evil, human and nonhuman, which are then (to be) mediated into a coherent whole. This reality is not only divisive but also hierarchical, insofar as one of the binary terms is considered

to be higher than the other—and thus a structure of authority and domination, no matter the (philosophical, Christian, or secular) guise it takes. The Real, which is for Laruelle an ante-ontological reality that is prior to the imposition of a world thus understood, is thereby completely foreclosed: the world is, in fact, nothing but a complex apparatus of authorities and decisions that, as it were, colonize and impose themselves upon the Real—an apparatus of desire, exploitation, and conquest. The world is, significantly, a transcendent structure; by contrast, it is the Real, as preceding all division, that Laruelle associates with radical immanence. The philosophical and ethical task becomes, accordingly, to expose the world as an illusion: an imposed construction, an inherently violent demand for coherence and sufficiency, which obscures and excludes the radical immanence of the Real while feeding off of it.¹⁹

These lines of political-theological reflection put into question the legitimacy and beneficence of the world and its authorities—whether secular or religious—and, by insisting on the unredeemable perspective and role of (the world's) victims, reject the justifications found in theodicy and its secular counterparts. As such, this reactivates what may be termed a Gnostic perspective within the political-theological debate, one that refuses the world and its modalities of justification.²⁰ This refusal is, in fact, what Gnosticism indexes already in twentieth-century philosophy and political theology, including Blumenberg's characterization of Christianity as the first and modernity as the second overcoming of Gnosticism.²¹ In this sense, Gnosticism operates as a generic and transhistorical concept beyond its initial function as an umbrella term for early heresies that variously conceive the creator of the world (known as the demiurge) as malevolent and the world as illegitimate. It names an apocalyptic orientation that radically disinvests from the world and strips it of all legitimacy—an orientation in which all purposefulness of this world's reality, and all sense of this world as worthy of being upheld and invested in, disappears. It was Taubes who most unapologetically claimed the position of antiworldly Gnosticism, and by doing so disclosed an overlooked moment of coincidence between the two seemingly opposite sides structuring the political-theological debates: Schmitt and Blumenberg may have disagreed on everything, but they each display a strong anti-Gnostic tendency. This coincidence suggests that whatever their oppositional and polemical self-situating, sovereignty and the world form a single bipartite mechanism of legitimation.

No less significantly, even though Gnosticism, at least since the classic study by Adolf von Harnack,²² has been associated with radical transcendence, as soon as the (Christian-modern) world is exposed as an apparatus of transcendence, it becomes possible instead to associate Gnosticism

with that which simultaneously opposes the transcendence of the world and of God the creator, and thus with radical immanence. Such is, indeed, an important move performed in contemporary thought from Laruelle onward. In response to the bipartite mechanism of transcendence, the new Gnostic tendency is to immanently refuse the world and to insist instead on a dispossessed and dispossessive immanence, indexing not the way of the world or the subject in the world, but what refuses to take part in what the world declares to be the only possible existence: existence in the service of transcendence, be it God, the sovereign, or the world itself.

This Gnostic immanence may amount to “an eternally alien immanence” (to use Fred Moten’s turn of phrase)—a dispossessed nothingness, underneath and prior to any absolutes, that permanently opposes enlightenment and Western regimes of domination from the position of “a radical materiality whose *animation* . . . has been overlooked by masterful looking.”²³ For Moten, this immanence aligns not with the (secular, colonial) world of the self-possessed subject, but with the earth and the impersonal flesh, for it is “the flesh’s dislocative immanence” that contains the capacity to undo the modern imposition of property and the proper.²⁴ Moten’s discourse makes us attuned to “an irreducibly material immanence, of that which lies below”²⁵—and to the fact that this immanence not only ungrounds the world-whole, but is the underground, the improper, the underneath of the world, an “anoriginal dispossession . . . the undercommons.”²⁶

Moten’s thought suggests one avenue of exploration for what happens when immanence does not merely designate the secular world of modernity and the self-transcending, self-possessed subject acting in that world—but, freed from this adequation, immanence opens in a number of diverse directions. One could think here of Denise Ferreira da Silva, who theorizes a Deleuzian-Leibnizian immanence of “plenum” as a way of thinking the ultimate destitution of the world of subjugation, indeed its apocalyptic end, for the sake of a total reconstruction or the restitution of all value.²⁷ In a different vein, Daniel Whistler theorizes a Schellingian immanent indifference to the (Hegelian-modern) world of negativity and incessant differentiation.²⁸ Alex Dubilet articulates an immanence decoupled from the subject, a dispossessed life without a why, through a reconstruction of Meister Eckhart’s speculative experimentalism.²⁹ None of these configurations of immanence can easily be designated as merely religious or secular; they are critical and constructive tools that index what is foreclosed and violated by transcendence (be it divine or worldly) and explore novel theoretical pathways of thinking otherwise than through the religious-secular binary.

At stake is not only ungrounding modern forms of sovereignty and decoupling immanence from its equation with the secular world, but also the subversion of modernity's self-legitimizing conceptual narratives. This involves precisely a rejection of theoretically playing off the Christian and the secular against each other, a playing off that tends to yield a legitimation of the secular modern or a call for a return to the Christian against the secular. Instead, we must take seriously the insights of those scholars who have argued that, in important ways, secularism is another name for Christianity, that the fundamental operations of secularism and Christianity are not as opposed as they claim.³⁰ We should insist on the insight that the logic of conversion and universality, no less than the logics of possibility and mediation, fundamentally persist across the Christian-secular divide.³¹ We might also consider the way both the Christian and the secular are apparatuses of deferral and futurity, of distension and reproduction, generating subjection as their lot and foreclosing the radical utopian immanence of the Real.³² It is a question of rejecting the frame of secularity, but doing so without affirming Christianity as its supposed proper other—something that theological critiques of modernity have too often presumed. In this formulation, political theology is no longer a space for a reactivation of Christianity or theology against the secular, but a theoretical site for the speculative incubation of concepts that critically insists that the Christian and the secular form a unitary conjuncture essential to the ideological self-description of the world of modernity.

Cutting across and putting into question the religious-secular binary, this volume works political-theologically with concepts other than sovereignty—concepts such as immanence, nothingness, the world, the earth, utopia, indifference, justification, *tsimtsum*, or *kenosis*—in and through German Idealism. As such, this volume partakes in the kind of genealogical explorations that have always played a central role in the field of political theology. One only needs to recall the contestation over the role of premodern figures (e.g., Paul or the Gnostics) or early modern figures (e.g., Hobbes or Spinoza) to detect the importance that genealogy has played for the articulation of central elements of political theology. From Schmitt, Blumenberg, and Taubes onward, the genealogical dimension has always had a complex function: it has redrawn historical origins and recovered historical materials in unexpected ways in order to transform the structuring concepts of present-day political theology. Indeed, each significant genealogical investigation contains the capacity to transfigure the entire political-theological problematic, determining it anew for the contemporary moment and generating novel theoretical trajectories for its future.

Whereas the early modern moment grappled with the question of the political constitution of the state in the aftermath of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, German Idealism was the first speculative attempt to think the entanglement of modernity and religion in the philosophical register in the wake of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Put this way, it is clear that German Idealism should be no less important for the contemporary political-theological imaginary than its early modern counterpart—but this has hardly been the case.³³ By staging an encounter between German thought from Kant to Marx and contemporary reformulations of the political-theological problematic, this volume seeks to remedy this theoretical lacuna.

German Idealism and the Political-Theological Diagnosis of Modernity

Without much exaggeration, German Idealism may be called the first philosophical articulation of the political-theological problematic in the aftermath of the Enlightenment and the advent of secularity. The philosophies of history, philosophies of religion, and histories of philosophy in German Idealism were all sites for the historical and conceptual tracing of continuities and inheritances, of dislocations and transformations, connecting Christianity and modernity. Indeed, one might say that German Idealism advanced, for the first time, a comprehensive political-theological *genealogy* of modernity—of the modern subject, the modern world, the modern state or community, and even the modern colonial project³⁴—in its conjunction with Christianity and its various inflections. In German Idealism, we encounter a political-theological diagnosis of modernity as coimplicated and coimbricated with Christianity—a diagnosis guided by a set of questions: How does the project of *Neuzeit* relate historically and conceptually to Christianity, from its early to its late-medieval and modern forms? In what ways did Christianity lead to and remain constitutively at the heart of modernity? What makes modernity's structures of rationality, subjectivity, freedom, community, and universality Christian or non-Christian—an inheritance and transformation of Christianity or a deviation from it? What sort of Christianity was it that modernity inherited? In these lines of questioning, German idealist engagement with Christianity ceases to be a project of either secularization or resacralization—frameworks through which Hegel's philosophy in particular has often been interpreted—and becomes genealogical and conceptual.

Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling are all exemplary in the genealogical nature of their speculative investigations. In turning to them, we can make visible some of the ways German Idealism elaborates entanglement with Christianity as the fundamental condition of modernity and modern thought. For Hegel, modern freedom and subjectivity—as well as the very tripartite structure of thinking—are inextricable from Christianity and its structures of individuality, its ideas of hierarchy and universality, its eschatology and its justification of the world and of suffering, and the figure of Christ as the mediator and the notion of *kenosis*, with the result that Hegel's own historical moment constitutes for him the culmination of this Christian trajectory. More generally, Hegel's basic approach to philosophy of history may be seen as genealogical: in his analysis of how history has led up rationally to the present moment, Hegel begins from the actual in order to trace its origins, structures, and presuppositions. Of course, in the same gesture, Hegel also *idealizes* the actual and justifies the current point of world-history, but the genealogical aspect should not be obscured by this. The Owl of Minerva only begins its flight once the movement has been completed—flying back so as to trace how this movement came about and developed.

Theologically, it is the Lutheran line of Christianity—understood in a heterodox way that unites it with the eschatological tradition exemplified by the likes of Joachim of Fiore—that stands at the heart of Hegel's engagement with modernity as the culmination of the fundamentally Christian tradition.³⁵ From the standpoint of political theology, it is significant, however, that this line is reconfigured by Hegel not via the concept of faith but via a *critique* of religious sentiment and religious faith—concepts given theoretical weight at the time most prominently by Friedrich Schleiermacher. To faith, Hegel opposes the concepts of revelation and mediation: the revelation of the divine in and as the world, leading dialectically to the universal actualization of freedom. This results in understanding modernity as sublating or remediating traditional Christianity, conceptually (in philosophy) and practically (in modern ethical life and the state). For Hegel, modernity self-consciously becomes *the* epoch of mediation, actualization, and universality, but the origin of these operations always remains Christian. In this regard, Hegel himself may be seen as representing the high point of European-Christian modernity—a judgment that many essays in this volume share.

In Fichte's philosophy of history, modernity—as the epoch of alienation, individuation, religious wars, globalization, and colonialism—is shot through by the opposition of what he initially configures as two types of

Christianity, the Johannine and the Pauline, that structurally define subsequent religious and philosophical conflicts and positions. The Pauline trajectory determines, for Fichte, the mainstream of medieval and modern thought; while the Johannine names what the Pauline, with its investment in worldly power and sovereignty, forecloses. What is initially defined as Johannine Christianity turns out, however, to be not Christianity per se, but the ante-historical persistence of an originary religion that must be thought of as preceding the world and ungrounding the primacy of history—as the nondialectical, nonmediatable core of the dialectic of the implicit and the explicit; of past, present, and future; of immanence and transcendence; of the modern state and the true ethical community. Fichte attempts at once to critique and justify modernity—as a specific moment of this dialectic, an epoch of alienation and domination that is, nonetheless, necessary within the movement of history—but also, significantly, to diagnose modernity and trace the genealogy of its conceptual structures without falling into the modern myth of self-legitimation or orthodox religious critique. This is done, in other words, not as a defense of Christian faith but in order to manifest a certain systematic structure that undermines (and functions otherwise than through) the clear demarcation separating the religious and the secular.

Even Schelling—who in his late, so-called positive philosophy offered a “theistic” critique of Hegel’s thought as too immanentist and rationalist, instead embracing (at least according to the standard account) the transcendent God of Pauline Christianity—may be seen as wrestling, throughout his thinking, with the world of modernity and its genealogy. Already in his early metaphysics, it is the not-yet of the modern world—its negativity and alienation, its freedom as infinite striving for freedom in the future, its character of expansion and domination (over what is considered to constitute mere possibility for the subject of modernity), and the work of actualization it demands—that leads Schelling to think the absolute not as an absolutization of the world, but as an immanence that precedes the movement of negation and actualization as well as cuts through the world of mediation. For Schelling at his most subversive, the logic of the absolute and the logic of that which is *nothing* vis-à-vis the world, and which ungrounds the not-yet of the world, crucially coincide.³⁶ What Schelling diagnoses is the constitutive neediness and negativity of the modern world and modern rationality, the way modernity is permeated by both a nostalgic longing and the striving for a future of reconciliation, fulfillment, and bliss—and how it is precisely its most secular forms (e.g., modern morality, subjectivity, domination over nature) that are infused with this longing and striving. The secular world is defined constitutively as the structure

of lack and as the transition from an inaccessible past to a wished-for future that is, however, never *now*, but only endlessly deferred and foreclosed. In all this, modernity for Schelling at once inherits Platonic and Christian forms of temporality and intensifies them by making this negativity and lack, and not God, into the first, ultimate reality—an intensification by way of inversion.³⁷

The novelty of this line of questioning, which stands at the origin of nineteenth- and twentieth-century genealogical inquiry—including political theology and secularization theory—must not go unnoticed. This is not merely a return of religion: after all, it was thinkers such as Friedrich Jacobi and Friedrich Schleiermacher who represented, in the post-Kantian climate, the side of religiosity. Jacobi in particular consistently opposed the German idealists (first Kant, then Fichte, then Schelling), accusing them, and modern thought more generally, of pantheism and atheism. Lamenting what he saw as the loss of faith and transcendence resulting from philosophy's illegitimate use of religious archives, Jacobi sought to expose German Idealism's nihilistic perversion of true religiosity. In this, his position prefigured contemporary Christian critiques of modernity—and indeed proleptically contributed to the contemporary fixation of (and on) the religious-secular binary. By contrast, German Idealism sought neither to critique modernity from the standpoint of Christianity (although some, especially the late Schelling, participated in this as well) nor to defend secular philosophy or secular modernity against its religious opponents. Both positions merely reproduce the religious-secular binary, which German Idealism, across its array of speculative explorations, sought to question and undermine. Nor should German Idealism be seen as merely a post-Enlightenment synthesis of modernity and Christianity; instead, it is precisely the *original* interwovenness of the two that here, for the first time, becomes the subject of an all-encompassing genealogical analysis. In this, German Idealism contributes directly to the field of political theology, whose critical and analytical power has come in large part precisely from its recognition of this interwovenness and the resulting challenge it has posed to the self-congratulatory narratives, secularist no less than religious.

This is the constitutive reason why German Idealism has been the subject of both irritation and praise, in religious and secular camps alike. Obviously, German idealist critique of modernity *can* be used for explicitly religious or explicitly secularist goals, as has often been done, not least by German idealists themselves. However, significantly for this volume, it is its appreciation of the entanglements of modernity with Christianity, its attempts to trace these entanglements genealogically, and its grappling with what came to be known as the secularization thesis—that

marks German Idealism as a crucial political-theological archive and resource.

The decisive question is, *what is to be done* with this resource? If the intention here is not to draw on the archive of German Idealism for the sake of recuperating Christianity or shoring up secularist narratives, then what kind of use remains for this archive? We see two distinct trajectories of response, both proceeding from the fact of the originary political-theological entanglement of Christianity and modernity. Whereas one seeks to uncover, within German Idealism, resources for articulating conceptual paradigms that contribute to contemporary political theology by challenging the religious-secular binary, the other focuses on German Idealism as itself a high point of this entanglement—as itself a high point of modernity—in order to critique it. From both of these perspectives, it remains necessary that political theology revisits, and continues revisiting, the German idealist archive.

German Idealism between Nothingness and the World

In a post-Enlightenment and postrevolutionary moment, German Idealism proves to be important not only for its genealogical and diagnostic investigations but also for its capacity to speculatively articulate immanence as preceding (and thus putting into question) all transcendence. German Idealism creates varied conceptual frameworks of immanence that are irreducible to the (Christian-modern) world—this world of division, domination, and the incessant not-yet of universality and progress, a world that entices the subject with its seemingly endless possibilities and promises of the way it could be, thereby reproducing the way it is. Indeed, these frameworks, while being foreclosed by the Christian-modern apparatus of the world, index what has the power to delegitimize and subvert it. This is an unorthodox portrait of German Idealism, to be sure, one that resists reducing it to a philosophy of the subject alienated from the world, determined by structures of division and diremption that, in turn, necessitate the (conservative) logics of synthesis, reconciliation, and wholeness, characteristic of the Christian-modern paradigm. More orthodox readings miss the way that German Idealism attempts to think not only the overcoming of division into unity (an overcoming that is premised on the very fact of division and strives to subsume everything into the universal) but also, and more decisively, the various ways of questioning and undermining the very structure of division as the ultimate horizon of reality. At its most radical, German Idealism theorizes what is prior to and cannot be inscribed into the Christian-modern world—indexed by such concepts as nothingness,

chaos, bliss, indifference, and the earth. As shown by the contributions to this volume, these are all names for what is neither transcendent nor immanent to the world, but for a radical immanence that subverts the very amalgamation of immanence and transcendence. The resulting portrait of post-Kantian thought is one of *a series of experiments with immanence* in opposition to the logics that structure the Christian-modern world: division and unity, particularity and universality, futurity and transcendence.

To provide an example, Joseph Albernaz's contribution to the volume explores this ante-worldly immanence under the name of the earth, as thought by Friedrich Hölderlin and Karoline von Günderrode.³⁸ The earth is the first common, the Real-in-common which is then enclosed, divided, and segregated by the colonial regime of the world. The sovereign, transcendent character of this regime is evident already in what Hölderlin, Schelling, Hegel, and later Carl Schmitt consider to be its inaugurating act: judgment (*Ur-teil*), which combines the operation of division (into particular kinds, properties, and territories) with that of unification (where the divided particulars are subsumed under universals). The resulting process of possession, division, and appropriation is foundational for the modern colonial project and Christian in its origin and significance. The earth as the common, by contrast, allows us to think that which refuses and ungrounds division and exploitation (in particular, the exploitation of the earth by the Christian-modern apparatus of transcendence). As a result, the earth becomes a political-theological ruin—and yet, to inhabit this ruin (of the common) is to think the *ruination* of the universalizing, dominating order of reality. What results from this, is a movement of local and alien immanence that destitutes and collapses the world, revealing it to be imposed and exploitative, feeding on the immanence of the earth and the common while foreclosing it.

In a convergent fashion, James Martel's contribution exposes in Kant, the originator of the problematics found in German Idealism and Romanticism, a materiality that persists in priority to the transcendental order (of subject and object), revealing the latter to be secondary and imposed, to be promising salvation in the future by foreclosing material immanence in the now. By remaining with and within the ordinary and material, we can, for Martel, *an-archically* resist such an imposition—a resistance that carries with it a messianic aspect, a messianism of the ordinary in the Benjaminian vein. This messianicity saves us, immediately, from the transcendental structure of salvation itself—from the way the transcendental philosopher imagines the world is or ought to be.

This kind of immanence carries with it not just a refusal of the ways of the world but also a “nihilistic” threat of undoing the very structures that

uphold religious and secular authority or sovereignty. The absolute is, throughout German Idealism, intimately related to an affirmation of (the) nothing that seeks to escape any logic of the world's givenness or any absolutization of the world and its powers. This conjunction of immanence and the refusal to be subjected to the world did not go undetected by German Idealism's contemporaries. Jacobi, with his investment in transcendence, correctly sensed the German idealist threat (to transcendence) in his double identification of German Idealism with Spinozism and nihilism. Failing to grasp its metaphysical and political-theological innovation, he sought to reduce German Idealism to the simplistic fantasy of an "egotistic," merely subjective I, to a "will that wills nothing" and thus reduces all to nothing.³⁹ To this, Jacobi contrasted "the true" or God as "the outside," the transcendent reality sustained by faith—as, ultimately, a faith *in* the outside and thus in the world and its ontological priority over nothingness, ruin, and discontinuity. Relatedly, Jean Paul saw Idealism and Romanticism as "the lawless, capricious spirit of the present age, which would egotistically annihilate the world and the universe in order to clear a space merely for free *play* in the void."⁴⁰ Or, as Jacobi succinctly put it, "Man has this choice, however, and this alone: Nothingness or a God."⁴¹

German Idealism, indeed, often chose (the) nothing. That did not, however, necessarily entail choosing the *subjective* or making the capricious subject into an omnipotent God, as Jacobi tendentiously proclaimed. Not even early Romanticism, at the height of what is often taken to be its subjectivism, considered the logic of artistic creation to be subjective in this narrow sense.⁴² The conjunction of nihilism with Spinozism—the philosophy of impersonal immanence—remained not fully thought through by Jacobi, even if he was the one to accuse German Idealism of both.

The example of Schelling is crucial here. Already in 1795, several years before Jacobi's open letter on Fichte's nihilism, Schelling proclaimed the will that wills nothing—the non-will, without mediation or striving, without expansion or want, the will that is prior to and refuses all demands of the world—as the absolutely Real from which all thought must begin.⁴³ This non-will was for him not the subjective I but the full dissolution or annihilation of the subject *and* the object, in their inextricable relation—a relation in which the subject is opposed to the object, a *not-I*, and wants (mastery over) it. Without such relation, premised on the subject-object opposition, the subject cannot exist as the subject of (the possibility of) mastery, production, and freedom. The philosophy of Kant and the early Fichte were for Schelling representative of this logic—the logic of divisive relationality, the inside/outside, and the endless striving to overcome this originary division, as the logic through which the world is produced and

reproduced by the subject through synthesis, ultimately through the expansionism of finite reason. (Finitude marking here precisely the gap between subject and reality, proclaimed to be primary and ineliminable.) Schelling's radical move was to refuse this gap through which the subject and the world was produced and to think instead the absolute as immanent groundlessness, the void of the Real that is absolutely nonproductive and even annihilative of any possibility of division and relation—to think the absolute as what he would later call absolute indifference (*Indifferenz*), in which the very logic of difference, negativity, and care is voided.⁴⁴

The absolute, as absolutely groundless (*grundlos*),⁴⁵ was affirmed by Schelling as the only unconditioned point of beginning for any thought that seeks to not absolutize the world—the world as always not yet perfect, not yet moral, postponing fulfillment into an indefinite, transcendent future which only leads to reproducing the divisions and negativities of the way things are. Understood in this way, the world must be annihilated, if there is to be a way of thinking in terms other than those this regime of reality demands or proclaims to be the only terms possible. As Kirill Chepurin's essay in this volume points out, this *No* to the world was the atopic starting point not only for Schelling but also for (the later) Fichte and for Friedrich Schlegel—for whom this was an explicitly revolutionary operation, a decreation of the world toward chaos or nothingness, an immanent materiality from which indifferently to construct any world and any binary opposition without justifying the world under construction as the best possible. There was for them, furthermore, *bliss* to be found in this atopic operation—not a happiness *in* the world, but a joy at the annihilation of the world, at exposing the world as imposed and unfree. The world is ungrounded in order to inhabit a void without relation to or care for the world, a freedom from the world in which no world is possible or needed.

As Oxana Timofeeva argues in this volume, even Hegel, the idealist thinker most invested in the world as it is, knew the joy—and enjoyment—found at the end of the world. Reason joyfully inhabits this end as the ruin from which philosophy, in the figure of the Owl of Minerva, begins its constitutively belated flight. In this postapocalyptic political-theological situation of a world that has always already ended and a God that is always already dead—which must, however, be thought of as the *beginning* of thought—Hegel is joined by Kant and Sade. Together they form a transition through the catastrophic situation of solitude and death, ultimately rejoicing in this situation as at once apocalyptic, rational, and utopian, one in which a new collectivity, a new “we,” may be seen to emerge.

Thus, in German Idealism, Jacobi's pronouncement of nihilism is at once endorsed and reversed. As Schelling puts it in his 1806 *Aphorisms*,

polemically endorsing Jacobi's charge, "the doctrine of the absolute [is] a doctrine of the absolutely nothing." "Indeed," Schelling continues, deploying nothingness against the Jacobian outside but also against the Kantian-Fichtean logic of synthesis premised on the separation of subject and object, "[it is] a doctrine of the absolute nothingness of things," ungrounding what dogmatically "appeared to him [i.e., Jacobi] as the quintessential reality."⁴⁶ The structure of transcendence in which the Jacobian subject of faith (in God and in the world) exists is here dismantled in order to reveal an immanence that does not operate through the divisions that the world declares ineliminable. In this, Idealism becomes a Spinozism, not of the world, but of what, from the point of view of the world, appears as the void—the immanently Real that thought must inhabit. This absolutely Real is indexed by the collapse of all worldly structures and mediations. Starting from 1795, Schelling repeatedly insists that the absolute cannot be mediated (and so cannot be synthesized), and can only be a nothingness (*Nichts*), a "nothing at all (= 0)," from the perspective of the world. At the standpoint of this immanent nothingness, the finite world is completely *vernichtet*.⁴⁷

At moments like these, rather than fearing the nothing, as Jean Paul did in reaction to its perceived lawlessness, German Idealism embraces it in order to proceed immanently *from* the nothing, absolute bliss, or absolute indifference. As a result, the starting operation of Idealism is a total suspension and even annihilation of the world, its affirmative reduction to a nothingness or chaos, the a-position, the atopic standpoint that the speculative thinker must occupy. At this standpoint, any givenness of the world, any binary opposition through the lens of which we are accustomed to seeing the world (such as subject and object, but also higher and lower, possible and actual, particular and universal, finite and infinite), is refused. This standpoint needs to be affirmed as first in order to expose the world as secondary, imposed, and derivative, instead of taking the world dogmatically as a necessary and unsurpassable horizon. If to affirm the absolute is to reduce the world to nothing, then, one might say, *nothing is absolute*.

Even the figure of the finite subject, as alienated from the objective world which the subject seeks to master (and which in turn threatens to overpower the subject), only appears as foundational as the result of the constitution of objectivity as a realm severed from subjectivity. To think otherwise than through finitude does not therefore necessarily mean falling into the arrogance of subjectivity or supposedly overstepping the subject's limits. At issue is the refusal of the whole discourse of finitude, entrenched as it is in the constitution of reality that divides the subject from the object and encloses them in a circle in which they must endlessly struggle. Rather

than remaining within this circle by envisaging a universal whole which would sublate into itself all divisions—one can, instead, refuse (the legitimacy and inevitability of) the very act of setting up such a regime of reality in the first place. Doing so uncovers the beginning of speculative thought—as well as of bliss and joy—in the annihilation of the world.

The stakes of this annihilation, but also the paradoxes arising from it, are traced in Chepurin's contribution, which reconfigures the German idealist trajectory through the tension between two basic operations: annihilation and construction. These operations are central to German Idealism, from the early Schelling to Schlegel to Fichte, Hegel and even Marx, insofar as they attempt to think the conditions of possibility of the finite world—to narrate or construct a world (or *this* world)—without absolutizing the way it is, instead proceeding from the Real that must be thought of as preceding and irreducible to the world. To think the Real, therefore, requires annihilating the world. To think this annihilation, this inhabitation of the void without the world, however, is not enough. For what is to be done about the fact that the world, with its divisions and mediations, *is* there and the subject is always already in the world? The world must therefore be confronted and constructed, so as not to be made a ghost—but if to think the world is to think its conditions of possibility, then can the world be thought without justifying it as necessarily the way it is? This is what Chepurin calls “the transcendental knot,” a problem faced by German Idealism no less than by contemporary thought. Even in thinking the end of the world, there remains the danger of absolutizing the way the world is; to find ways of not doing so is a crucial task that German Idealism bequeaths to political theology.

One of the fundamental logics upholding the world is the logic of mediation, familiar to us from (the late) Hegel.⁴⁸ The way mediation joins with sovereignty is analyzed in Daniel Colucciello Barber's and Alex Dubilet's contributions to this volume. For Barber, the true function of Schmittian sovereignty is to uphold the world defined through divisive relationality and mediation, Christian (and Christocentric) in origin. In introducing the figure of Christ as the mediator, Christianity makes mediation itself into the horizon that is at once divine and worldly, directed toward the universal future (of salvation), the possibility of which is established by the mechanism of mediation. This structure persists into modernity. What is usually taken to be the immanence of the world, the way it remediates all positions into one universalizing world process and discards, suppresses, or sublates all that might remain outside of it (the way it happens, for example, in Hegel's philosophy of history), reveals transcendence as its condition of possibility. It reveals, that is, the sovereign act, the decision that

institutes it, to which Barber opposes Taubesian apocalypticism, while radicalizing it further toward a refusal of sovereignty without reliance on the world, a *nihil* without a care for worldly possibilities or the possibility of the world. In affirming this completely baseless negativity as the *now-here* of world-annihilation, coinciding with God understood as a term that is absolutely incommensurable with the logic of the world, Barber's paper joins others in the volume that bring together German Idealism, apocalypticism, and the atopic nowhere—positioning it, however, not with but against German Idealism, or, more precisely, against its trajectory that bears the name Hegel. What emerges from this analysis is the structural coincidence of the Christian mechanism of mediation that holds the world together and defers its apocalyptic end, on the one hand, and the modern primacy of mediation as the field of worldly possibility held together by the law (of the world) instituted by the sovereign act, on the other.

Dubilet's contribution turns to Marx's "On the Jewish Question" in order to diagnose the collusive interplay between mediation and sovereignty as modes of transcendence that, together, prevent real immanence from irrupting. It does so by recovering the logic of "the general secular contradiction"—the division between the state and civil society that materializes and secularizes the structure of diremption originally articulated in theological form, as the opposition between heaven and earth. In this analysis, the logic of Christianity is shown to be imbricated with the political form of secular modernity itself. Moreover, this account reveals that the modern secular state does not inaugurate the political theology of immanence; rather it constitutes a mechanism of transcendent mediation. The exception that mediates across the two realms renders transcendence livable, but it also reproduces the dirempted life, establishing it as the unsurpassable horizon and foreclosing all operations of dissolution or abolition that could collapse the structure of civil society and the state that governs "the order of the world." Although immediate transcendence (sovereignty) may be positioned, as it is in the Schmittian paradigm, as radically distinct from its mediational counterpart, in relation to real immanence the two operate as a collusive ensemble.

The topic of the secular state and its production of citizenship is picked up by Thomas Lynch in connection with the liberal doctrine of religious toleration. Lynch's essay traces the way the modern state relies on the Christian logic of universality as mediation in order to legitimate itself and its sorting out of religion into legitimate and illegitimate forms—into forms that support the universal (i.e., the state itself) and forms that potentially endanger it. For Lynch, this universalist logic underlies both Hegel and liberal theorists of toleration: only that difference can be tolerated which

promotes and upholds the universal. “Which religions are compatible with secularism?” This becomes the guiding question, and any failure to disentangle religion from politics is turned into the demand that we secularize better—which serves to obscure the way the very binary of the religious and the political is produced and reproduced from within the Christian-modern logic of the universal. Against this regime of difference to be mediated and transcended toward universality, Lynch positions the idea of indifference as refusing to negotiate between differences—as “negating those regimes by which difference is organized and rendered consistent.”

In this way, we circle back to the theorization of an indifference that refuses mediation—but which also, as Dubilet suggests in his essay’s conclusion, may refuse the universal name “human.” The work of Daniel Whistler is crucial here, insofar as it attempts to think a non-Hegelian trajectory within German Idealism, one that would refuse the primacy of mediation and human (transcendental) subjectivity in thinking the world. In a recent essay, Whistler has shown how Schelling seeks to exhibit reality indifferently from a utopic standpoint prior to all difference and particularity (which always already exist *within* the regime of mediation)—a standpoint that can only be grasped as nonhuman or even inhuman.⁴⁹ In his essay in this volume, Whistler shows indifference to be a way of rethinking the secular modern without being beholden to the understandings of secularization as the negation of particularity or its remediation into a universal. If one can think an immanence (here equated with indifference) that refuses the logics of mediation and universality—Christian in their origins and inherited by modernity—then perhaps this immanence can provide a different way of thinking the secular itself? To that end, Whistler theorizes abstraction as indifference, which results in a complete destitution of the transcendental, collapsing the subject-object dichotomy and refusing to mediate between particular possibilities. Instead of sublating them into a universality, this abstraction neutralizes and remains absolutely indifferent to them. In its indifference and nullity, it may also be said to be universal, but in a completely nonstandard sense—as an immediate imposition of a plane of immanence that operates, one could say, without relation to particulars. This imposition may carry with it a kind of violence, too, but this violence—and this logic of the secular—although modern, is no longer the Christian-Hegelian modern; as such, it offers a different conceptual apparatus for the political-theological understanding of modernity.

Saitya Brata Das continues the Schellingian polemics with Hegel in his essay, which instead of theorizing immanence anew articulates the late Schelling’s radical transcendence as the counter to the Hegelian

theodicy of worldly immanence. In Hegel, the world is understood as potentiality, as the world-historical possibility actualized by spirit as the subject of history. In this theodicy of history, the world is justified by its own movement, that of actualizing possibility. Indeed—to complement Das’s analysis—to see the movement of the world as one of progressive actualization of possibility, the way Hegel does, is itself quintessentially modern. As Hans Blumenberg has shown, the inaugurating move of modernity, the move that inaugurates the program of the subject’s self-assertion, is to make the world (and not God) into the totality of possibility. Faced with reality as possibility yet to be actualized, the task of the modern subject becomes that of producing reality, of mastering it by making use of it, exploring the possibilities inherent in it, and exploiting them to the fullest.⁵⁰ The subject becomes the subject of this process of actualization—the figure of possibility itself. This is, one could say, the way the modern world legitimates itself: by thinking of itself as open and producible, as making room for and enacting all the possibility. For Das, the significance of late-Schellingian political theology is, by contrast, to delegitimize worldly sovereignty by eschatologically emptying it out, by freely letting it pass away. In this Schellingian *kenosis*, the very logic of theodicy is refused, dissolved in the beatitude of an actuality without telos.

Agata Bielik-Robson’s contribution offers a different move against Hegelian *kenosis*. She opposes Hegel’s teleological-sacrificial logic of the death of God with the idea of God’s free self-withdrawal (*tsimtsum*) found in the Jewish tradition, from Luria to Derrida. Both concepts, *kenosis* and *tsimtsum*, may be said to lie at the foundation of modernity—an optic in which the death of God ceases to be a Christian monopoly. *Kenosis* and *tsimtsum* both open up the space of finitude in which the world can be affirmed, but in radically different ways. In Hegel, God may freely consent to die, yet his self-sacrificial death lays an infinite burden upon the world—a debt and guilt that can only be repaid at the end of history. History is thereby turned into a space of divine sovereignty even in God’s death. By contrast, what *tsimtsum* allows us to think is a gift *without* sacrifice, a self-contraction of God that simply lets finitude be, without reason or telos. The “religion of flowers” that Hegel criticized as not serious enough, here aligned with *tsimtsum*, turns out to be an immanently anti-Hegelian moment opening up onto a non-Christian, also future-oriented yet nonsacrificial, logic of modernity.

If the Hegelian dialectic is complicit with the Christian-modern world, then one move is to think the nondialectical as that which refuses this world immanently, as multiple essays in this volume do. Another move, however, which lies broadly within the Hegelian trajectory itself, would be to open

up the dialectical movement, to un-resolve it—perhaps transforming it into a spiral. This is suggested by S. D. Chrostowska in her contribution, which focuses on the so-called “Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism.” The basic gesture of the “Oldest Systematic Program” is messianic and revolutionary, forgoing the religious-secular binary in order to think an openness to the utopic that resists closure and mastery. As Chrostowska argues, an entire tradition of dialectical utopianism follows this gesture. The openness of the spiral resists the Schmittian closure of political theology—disclosing its alternative forms and perspectives, siding not with authority, but with the emancipation of the suffering and the oppressed. In this, Chrostowska endorses not the dialectic in its late-Hegelian form, but the earlier, Romantic-Hegelian revolutionary impulse and the liberatory political theologies to which it helped give rise.

The figure of an opening or gap is analyzed critically in Steven Shakespeare’s contribution. Shakespeare diagnoses the ambivalence of German Idealism as at once pointing toward an immanence that subverts the subject and its world *and* as foreclosing this immanence by way of the gap between the self and its reflected counterpart, the *I* and the *not-I*. Interrogating the constitution and failure of the subject and its world through Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, Shakespeare traces in these thinkers three different attempts to think the gap without resolving or dialectically unifying it, without appealing to any sort of transcendent authority that would serve to close the gap. Instead, these thinkers reduplicate and intensify this gap of subjectivity as a way of signaling the immanently fractured, nonunitary character of reality. Reduplication points thereby to the inevitable problem of expression inherent in theories of immanence, insofar as expression requires a minimal difference to be possible. In these thinkers, this minimal difference is transformed into the dialectical motor of life, which remains however (despite—or indeed precisely because of—its proclamations of universality) a fundamentally Christian logic, transforming others, most directly Judaism, into the embodiment of the unlife. It is through this investment in life, with the hierarchical and supersessionist logics it engenders, that Idealism ultimately forecloses immanence and reproduces transcendence. The resulting theoretical question, which Shakespeare leaves open, is whether reduplication, and thus the expression of immanence without appeal to models of truth from above, can be divorced from this structure of supersession.

The move of recuperation and subjugation is, of course, likewise at the heart of the Hegelian world history. In his contribution, Vincent Lloyd seeks to think that which is occluded by this recuperation—namely, Africa as, for Hegel, the continent *prior* to history—and to find in this

ante-historical origin resources for refusing the moves of dialectical recuperation, for pushing back against Hegel's methodical ambition to mediate everything from the normative world-historical standpoint. Africa and blackness index in Hegel that which is unspeakable and without recognition, whose functioning in and against Hegel's narrative Lloyd proceeds to trace—as the exteriority that *persists*, unassimilable to the dialectic. Africa can only be articulated by way of the complete dismantling of the apparatus of history, the absolute stripping-away of spirit or subjectivity. What results from this is a pure contingency of raw events and objects without a binding force, a life of immediacy without any sense of totality. In this, a different kind of sovereignty emerges, embodied for Hegel in the figure of the Congo queen, whose agency is despotic and immediate, secular in the sense of being driven wholly by materialistic concerns. In a different way than Barber and Dubilet, Lloyd also diagnoses the presence of sovereignty at the basis of the supposedly immanent movement of history. At the same time, to think immanent exteriority as embodied in the Congo queen is to complicate any celebratory idealizations of the figure of the non-sovereign—to see in it the obverse side of the same conjunction of sovereignty and mediation.

Two tendencies within German Idealism emerge across the volume's oftentimes diverging contributions. On the one hand, as a series of experiments in de-absolutizing and even annihilating the (modern, Christian-European) world—in affirmatively reducing it to nothingness, chaos, the earth, or indifference—German Idealism may be mobilized to think that which ungrounds and cannot be inscribed into dominant Christian-secular logics. On the other hand, even when German Idealism seeks to think the zero point that precedes the construction of the world, its next move is, all too often, to reconstruct the world as it is starting from this zero point, thereby justifying the (modern, Christian-European) world. In German idealist philosophy of history especially, the path of the absolute goes through world history, justifying it as an image of (and a necessary point of transition on the way to) the absolute. This trajectory points to the ways in which post-Kantian thought not only opens up a thinking of immanence but also, ultimately, forecloses it by realigning it with the modern world in the idealist philosophies of subjectivity, history, and the state.

Thus, in Fichte, the standpoint of the *Wissenschaftslehre* displaces the world totally, appearing as “the doctrine of nothing” to the dogmatist who would absolutize the way the world is—a standpoint that culminates, in the ethical register, in the idea of blessedness or bliss as refusing the logics of domination and the not-yet. At the same time, however, and from the

same standpoint, Fichte proceeds to think the *necessity* of the progress of history and its culmination in Christian-European modernity as the actualization of the divine in and as the world. The world, and with it the state, strives to dissolve in the life of the divine—and yet this striving necessarily traverses Christianity and modern European history as its contemporary culmination and the closest that humanity has come to its end goal. This is, one could say, the tension between Fichte's 1806 *The Way Towards the Blessed Life* and his *Characteristics of the Present Age*, published in the same year. The former thinks bliss, nonproductivity, non-sovereignty—just as the latter uses them to *justify* the evils of history (including colonial and state violence), as mere stages toward the final epoch in which bliss would be realized and all domination would cease.

This tension, and this overwriting of immanence by way of its inscription into a theodical project of justifying the world, is generally characteristic of the way German Idealism repeatedly forecloses the utopic immanence of nothingness or bliss by positioning it as the end goal of the world process, thereby, one could say, idealizing the world as it is. Schelling is guilty of this as well. One of his last works, *Exhibition of the Purely Rational Philosophy* (1847–1852), is particularly explicit in this regard. What the world is meant to do, for Schelling, is to actualize the totality of possibility until its full exhaustion—and what the philosopher is supposed to do is to trace the logic of this actualization in and as world history. The latter follows the natural logic of the *Stufenfolge* (succession of steps), in which the higher subsumes and builds on the lower, gradually getting closer to the all-encompassing “organic” unity. This naturalization of hierarchy and progress is extended by Schelling to European colonial history and thus becomes indicative of the modern logic of racialization, with Schelling speaking about “lower” races serving as mere possibility for the “higher”—a racialized logic endorsed by him as the way things simply and necessarily are. The lower is, according to this conception, destined to die out naturally as soon as it comes into contact with the higher (as illustrated by Schelling appealing to the disappearance of “the American natives”)—or to be put to use by the higher (as in the transportation of African slaves to America) thereby saving the lower from world-historical abandonment and giving it the possibility of becoming part of something higher—of becoming part of the logic of possibility itself.⁵¹ Not unlike in Fichte, the philosopher must refuse all divisions and think their all-dissolution in bliss, as refusing sovereignty and domination—and yet, in order to think this as the end goal of history, the philosopher must think the path *to* this nondomination as going by necessity *through* domination—and, furthermore, through domination in its historical forms, culminating in Christian-European modernity.

These two moves—thinking an immanence that refuses domination, sovereignty, or the not-yet, and positioning this immanence as the telos of the world that is not yet ethical, not yet free, not yet fully divine—need at once to be kept separate and grasped in their conjunction within German Idealism. This is, one could say, what happens when nothingness, bliss, and immanence are inscribed into the world’s logic of possibility, into the path of historical development, actualization, and progress: a folding back of immanence into the world of modernity. German Idealism is torn between wanting not to absolutize the world, by affirming that which refuses and even annihilates it—and to think the way the world is, identifying the logic of the world with the logic of ideality and thereby justifying the world. This tension is indicative of the post-Enlightenment, postrevolutionary moment as one in which modernity at once culminates and its cracks begin to show: the Christian-modern paradigm here at once reaches its peak and ceases to be self-evident, becoming a (theoretical and genealogical) problem for thought. This allows an unprecedented series of experiments in deconstructing or ungrounding the modern world, but it also leads to German Idealism’s holding on to the world of modernity that it inherited. In making the first grand attempt to self-reflectively think through the genealogical foundations of modernity, German Idealism ultimately ends up justifying them—and thereby justifying the project of modernity itself.

Can one ever think the world without justifying it? Is it possible to think an immanence that would immanently refuse the world, on the one hand, *and* the world as the regime of reality through which the subjects of modernity inevitably are required to pass, even as they assert an antagonism toward it, on the other? How is what is foreclosed by the Christian-modern to be thought? How does one think the enactment—the operativity or inoperativity—of this otherwise that would not fall back into the logics of restoration, fulfillment, actualization, or universality? How does one proceed from or out of the zero point of radical immanence—or how does one persist in it while also doing justice to the victims and exclusions of the world? The questions that German Idealism, in all its tensions and ambivalences, bequeaths to political theology are numerous—and remain absolutely central to its future.

Notes

1. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 36. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is particularly important for Schmitt’s understanding of both how the concept of sovereignty was *historically* transferred from theology to politics and how modern sovereignty was *structurally* the same as divine sovereignty. See

Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). More generally, Hobbes may be said to be determinate for Schmitt's entire project of political theology insofar as he defines for Schmitt the paradigm of modernity and modern sovereignty.

2. See Walter Benjamin, "On Violence," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 236–252; Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 389–400; Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949); Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

3. For Blumenberg's discussion of immanent self-assertion of reason and the overcoming of Gnosticism, see *Legitimacy*, esp. 125–226. For more on these implications for and in Blumenberg from a political-theological perspective, see Joseph Albernaz and Kirill Chepurin, "The Sovereignty of the World: Towards a Political Theology of Modernity (after Blumenberg)," in *Interrogating Modernity: Debates with Hans Blumenberg*, ed. Agata Bielik-Robson and Daniel Whistler (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

4. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2008); Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

5. For a useful critical genealogy of political theology, see Yannik Thiem, "Political Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael T. Gibbons (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 2807–2822.

6. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

7. Roberto Esposito, *Two: The Machine of Political Theology and the Place of Thought*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

8. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1997); Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Catherine Malabou, "Before and Above: Spinoza and Symbolic Necessity," *Critical Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (Autumn 2016): 84–109; Michel Foucault, *Security*,

Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Picador, 2009).

9. Another inventive example of this line of thinking is Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

10. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 103.

11. Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

12. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

13. See Albernaz and Chepurin, “Sovereignty of the World.”

14. For Jean Hyppolite’s description of the Hegelian movement of spirit in these terms, see his *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 544 and 557. For an account of the transcendent telos of the modern world, see also Albernaz and Chepurin, “Sovereignty of the World.”

15. One detects something similar—a structure of transcendence persisting in modernity under the guise of immanence—in the logics of self-organization that arise across the Enlightenment. Although in a sense breaking with theologies of salvation, discourses of self-organization generate knowledges that justify a faith not in God but in history and the world—thereby underwriting a secular form of providence and legitimating modernity. See Alex Dubilet, review of Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015), *Immanent Frame*, May 26, 2016, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/05/26/invisible-hands/>.

16. Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 264, 260, 296, 319. Relatedly, Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes, “It is as if the production of the ‘less than human’ functioned as the anchor of a process of autonomy and self-assertion.” Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 238. For a discussion of the way the modern logics of separation, otherness, and exclusion lead to hierarchical arrangements of the human, the less-than-human, and the non-human through a theory of racializing assemblages, see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). On the production of “colonial difference” in and as modernity, and on the conjunction of colonialism and the exploitation of nature/the earth, see Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), esp. chaps. 7 and 8. For an important analysis of the conjunction of globalization and racialization in modernity, see also Jared Hickman, *Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). What

Hickman, inspired in many ways by Blumenberg's association of modernity with immanence, calls the new "planetary" or "global immanence" of modernity is, however, what we analyze as fundamentally an immanent-transcendent structure.

17. On blackness as the nothingness that allows the modern world and the modern subject to emerge and affirm themselves as the universal being, see Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). On the relation between the human, the world, and the slave, see Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

18. See, for example, Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions*, no. 5 (2011): 1–47; Jared Sexton Interviewed by Daniel Colucciello Barber, "On Black Negativity, or the Affirmation of Nothing," *Society and Space*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing/>.

19. For an encapsulation of Laruelle's thinking of the world and the Real, see "A Summary of Non-Philosophy," trans. Ray Brassier, *Pli* 8 (1999): 138–148. For the ethico-political dimension of this conceptual dyad, see François Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

20. See Anthony Paul Smith, "Against Tradition to Liberate Tradition," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 19, no. 2 (2014): 145–159; Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. 153–160; and Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*.

21. For a useful intellectual-historical overview of the role of Gnosticism as an appellation and position, see Willem Styfhals, *No Spiritual Investment in the World: Gnosticism and Postwar German Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

22. Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. J. E. Steeley and L. D. Bierma (Jamestown, NY: Labyrinth Press, 1990; German original: 1923).

23. Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 67.

24. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 181. Of course, all discussion of the flesh, Moten's included, returns to the *locus classicus*: Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203–229.

25. Moten, *Stolen Life*, 113.

26. Moten, 27. For the full articulation of the undercommons, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2013).

27. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 81–97.

28. Daniel Whistler, "Abstraction and Utopia in Early German Idealism," *Russian Journal of Philosophy and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2017): 3–22. See also Whistler's essay in this volume.

29. Alex Dubilet, *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018). Dubilet further elaborates immanence as decoupled from the logic of the subject and the world, in dialogue with Harney and Moten's undercommons and Laruelle's non-philosophy, in "An Immanence without the World: On Dispossession, Nothingness, and Secularity," *Qui Parle* (forthcoming).

30. See Gil Anidjar, "Secularism," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 1 (2006): 52–77; Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). As Anidjar notes, secularism should be seen as "the means by which Christianity *forgot and forgave* itself" (63).

31. Daniel Colucciello Barber, "World-Making and Grammatical Impasse," *Qui Parle* 25 (2016): 179–206; Daniel Colucciello Barber, *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011). On the articulation of immanence decoupled from the secular, see also: Daniel Colucciello Barber, *Deleuze and the Naming of God: Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

32. Alex Dubilet, "The Catastrophic Joy of Abandoning Salvation: Thinking the Postsecular with Georges Bataille," *Journal of Critical Religious Theory* 16, no. 2 (2017): 163–178, and Dubilet, *Self-Emptying Subject*, esp. 173–178. On the figure of utopian immanence, see Kirill Chepurin, "Beginning with Kant: Utopia, Immanence, and the Origin of German Idealism," *Russian Journal of Philosophy and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2017): 71–90; for this question, in a different intellectual context, see Kirill Chepurin and Alex Dubilet, "Russia's Atopic Nothingness: Ungrounding the World-Historical Whole with Pyotr Chaadaev," *Angelaki* 24, no. 6 (2019): 135–151.

33. One might recall that Slavoj Žižek has offered innovative political-theological reinterpretations of Hegel through a Lacanian lens. Within Žižek's Hegelian reading, the true radicality of Christianity lies in its uncompromising affirmation of the death of God as the loss of all transcendent guarantees. Ultimately, Žižek's reading connects Christianity with radical atheism in a way that affirms the unity and singular trajectory of the West. See Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 234–303. The present volume points to a different set of theoretical directions. Neither ascribing primacy to psychoanalytic paradigms nor invested in recuperative gestures in relation to Christianity, it moves beyond the Žižek-Milbank polemics, as significant as those polemics may have been for political theology in the first decade of this

century. For a useful synthetic but critical account of Žižek's trajectory in relation to theology, see Marika Rose, "Slavoj Žižek," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology*, ed. Christopher D. Rodkey and Jordan E. Miller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 479–495.

34. Hegel's philosophy of history, Fichte's *Characteristics of the Present Age*, and Schelling's *Exhibition of the Purely Rational Philosophy* all variously inscribed colonialism into the project of modern universalism grounded in Christianity.

35. See especially Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

36. On the figures of refusing and even annihilating the world of mediation and history in Schelling, see Kirill Chepurin, "Indifference and the World: Schelling's Pantheism of Bliss," *Sophia* 58, no. 4 (2019): 613–630; "To Break All Finite Spheres: Bliss, the Absolute I, and the End of the World in Schelling's 1795 Metaphysics," *Kabiri: The Official Journal of the North American Schelling Society* 2 (2020): 40–67; and Chepurin's paper in this volume.

37. On the inversion characteristic of modernity—which makes the finite world (rather than God) into the exemplification of reality—and the theoretical implications thereof, see, for example, Schelling, *Aphorismen über die Naturphilosophie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2018), 61.

38. We should recall that German Romanticism is frequently read today within the broader post-Kantian ambit of German Idealism (and rightly so). Recent examples include Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), and Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795–1804* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).

39. F. H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 515.

40. Jean Paul, "School for Aesthetics," trans. Margaret R. Hale, in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982), 32.

41. Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 524.

42. For nonsubjectivist readings of early Romanticism, see, for example, Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), 116–200; Maurice Blanchot, "The Athenaeum," in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 351–359; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

43. F. W. J. Schelling, "Vom Ich als Princip der Philosophie," in *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), 1.2:104, 109, 122–123.

44. See Chepurin, “Indifference and the World” and “To Break All Finite Spheres.”
45. F. W. J. Schelling, “Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus,” in *Werke: Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982), 1.3:96.
46. Schelling, *Aphorismen über die Naturphilosophie*, 61.
47. Schelling, “Vom Ich,” 109, 119, 122; see also 101.
48. For a reading of the early Hegel, however, that aligns him with immanence and the annihilation of finitude, see Alex Dubilet, “Speculation and Infinite Life: Hegel and Meister Eckhart on the Critique of Finitude,” *Russian Journal of Philosophy and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2017): 49–70.
49. Whistler, “Abstraction and Utopia,” 7.
50. See Albernaz and Chepurin, “Sovereignty of the World.”
51. F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856), 2.1:509, 513–515.