

## **The Search for Being. Hölderlin on Thought and Unity**

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Date: 21-1-2015

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## Preface

This thesis is the product of the delight and relieve which were caused by reading a two-page fragment, and the subsequent astonishment that came with the discovery that ‘some German scholar’ had written an 856 page monograph about it. The evening in the *Fachbibliothek Philosophie* in München which brought these two events is now more than a year ago, and in the meantime I have managed to add quite some pages myself to the literature on this short unpublished note.

I started this research on what it means for Hölderlin to search for Being because the delight and relieve of my first encounter with Hölderlin were changed into suspicion and doubt. Now, at the end of writing this thesis, I am glad to say that the delight and relieve have returned – but in a different form, of course, as Hölderlin’s conception of what it is to reach maturity dictates. The process which made this result possible has benefited from quite some people and institutions. I would therefore like to say some words of thanks.

First of all, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Paul Ziche, who always manages to give feedback in a very comforting and motivating way. Later, at home, the realization kicks in that the feedback actually means that the chapters have to change completely. Without Paul’s observations and suggestions, this thesis would have been much weaker, and most of all much less clear. Moreover, his remarks provided the very inspirational feeling that a work like this can be improved infinitely. Furthermore, without Paul’s guidance, I would not have learned as much, and gained as much new insight into the meaning of Hölderlin’s search for Being as the past months of writing have provided. This is the main reason why suspicion could change into delight again.

Further, I would like to thank Timmy de Goeij for his teaching during the wonderful tutorial course which this master’s program allows. I feel like I have learned more during this one tutorial than in a whole year of regular studies. Moreover, our discussions on skepticism and Fichte have made it into the chapter on Fichte not merely by informing some of its theses, but instead more radically, by providing the structure of the dialogue between Fichte and Hölderlin which is depicted there (of course I performed Hölderlin). I hope we will work together again sometime.

I also want to thank the SSHU (Stichting Studentenhuisvesting Utrecht) for providing me such a nice place to write this thesis. For while the balcony with its great view so close to my desk caused a lot of procrastination, I am grateful for this very inspirational and peaceful working environment. Furthermore, the backyards, their trees, bushes and flowers – although changing over these autumn and winter months, withdrawing from my attention to sometimes reappear again – helped me to stay in touch with the object of my thought. Or I hope it did. Of course, this is not to forget about the beautiful university library at the Drift: your days sometimes proved too hectic, but your evenings remained as pleasant as they were five years ago. Thank you.

Finally, another force of very helpful distraction, which I would like to thank, has been music, and more specifically, hip hop. Somehow, over the course of the past few years’ studies on increasingly more abstract subjects, hip hop has always remained a force of inspiration and motivation to me. The past few months of writing this thesis have confirmed that it really can be very productive to put some good straight hip hop on in order to start writing. So let’s go.

Utrecht, January 21, 2015

*Da wo die Nüchternheit dich verläßt, da ist die Grenze deiner Begeisterung.*  
Friedrich Hölderlin, *Reflexion*, StA IV 242.

## Introduction

If you are searching for your world to be turned upside down, philosophy probably will provide the right experience. Yet at the same time, philosophy is a sober enterprise. In the search for absolute certainty – or if this idea is out of fashion, at least maximum consensus – philosophers are prepared to give up many of the pre-theoretical intuitions<sup>1</sup> that they used to take comfort in. If the argument against such an intuition is convincing enough, the audience will simply have to put up with this loss. For example, Kant's thing in itself: does his transcendental idealism really *theoretically require* this presupposition?, Jacobi asked. The answer was no. Fichte agreed, and did away with this quasi-realism on the transcendental level. However, Jacobi's question was not genuinely motivated by a philosophical quest to exchange pre-theoretical intuitions for solid theoretical foundations. By contrast, the answer to his question was meant to show the daunting consequences of consequent idealism. It was to show that this conclusion cannot be the goal of the activity which we call philosophy.

What should then be the goal? Bearing some similarity to Jacobi's leap of faith, one might simply try to accept some 'dogmatic' or realist assumptions, and follow Hyperion in one of his searches for the unity of all that is called Being (*Seyn*), e.g. in a quiet autumn night, surrounded by trees and the sea:

*Da ward ich, was ich jetzt bin. Aus dem Innern des Hains schien es mich zu mahnen, aus den Tiefen der Erde und des Meers mir zuzurufen, warum liebst du nicht MICH?*

Von nun an konnt ich nichts mehr denken, was ich zuvor dachte, die Welt war mir heiliger geworden, aber geheimnisvoller. Neue Gedanken, die mein Innerstes erschütterten, flammten mir durch die Seele. Es war mir unmöglich, sie festzuhalten, ruhig fortzusinnen.

Ich verließ mein Vaterland, um jenseits des Meeres Wahrheit zu finden.

Wie schlug mein Herz von großen jugendlichen Hoffnungen!<sup>2</sup>

In the tumult of theoretical discussions about Kant, this sense that philosophy can provide a new perspective or insight, a radical change in the evaluation of the aims of philosophy, even a new value, or a truth "jenseits des Meeres", as Hyperion names it in the quote, is what attracted me to Romanticism. However, (youthful) hope is an unreliable emotion, especially in Hölderlin's oeuvre.<sup>3</sup> So following Hyperion in his letter to Bellarmin in this 1794 *Fragment*

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<sup>1</sup> This term used in contemporary analytic philosophy seems to resemble pretty close Hölderlin's intellectual intuition, at least qua function: it is the 'content' in our brain/spirit we accept to be there before we start reflecting. When it is compared what Hölderlin held to be intuitive, and what contemporary philosophers accept as intuitive, then of course the question comes up why we hold these intuitions to be intuitive. But at this point, philosophical reflection has already started, so that the answer to this question is not about pre-theoretical intuitions anymore.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke. Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe* [StA], eds. Beißner, F., Beck, A. (Stuttgart 1943-1985) III 189-190.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. in the poems *An die Hoffnung*, StA II 59, or *Ermunterung*, StA II 33-36.

von *Hyperion*, doubt returns, and the pre-theoretical intuition of Being, that is searched for in philosophy, is again questioned:

*Ich fand nichts, als dich. Ich sage das dir, mein Bellarmin! Du fandest  
ja auch nichts, als mich.  
Wir sind nichts; was wir suchen, ist alles.*<sup>4</sup>

In the search of everything, the sober activity of philosophy is better equipped to present negative results. Still, the goal of search means everything to *Hyperion*, as the ambiguity of his last sentence exhibits. The necessity of finding the unity of all implies that no philosophical or conceptual problem should stop the attempt to find Being, or make us give up our pre-theoretical intuition of it. That is, even though so far, nothing had been found, and even though the possibility of really finding Being were estimated as nihil, still the search must go on. This tension, between theoretical impossibility and existential need, motivates Hölderlin to continue the search for Being, and is central to the course of the search. In the next letter to Bellarmin, *Hyperion* hence simply continues where he left off:

*Noch ahnd ich, ohne zu finden.  
Ich frage die Sterne, und sie verstummen, ich frage den Tag, und die  
Nacht; aber sie antworten nicht. Aus mir selbst, wenn ich mich frage,  
tönen mystische Sprüche, Träume ohne Deutung.*<sup>5</sup>

So, what remains to inspire search is *Ahnung*.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, the search for Hölderlin's conception of Being will have to be philosophical, i.e., some rules and consequences are attached to this path. For example, when the philosophical search incites to give up pre-theoretical convictions, it must explain why this should be done. And when it advises to persevere in the search, it must legitimate why this search is still meaningful. Preferably, of course, it should also explain what this search is about.

Then *what* is this search about? At first sight, this could be the main question which a thesis on Hölderlin and Being should attempt to address. Already six options for describing the nature of Being have passed in the *Hyperion* text quoted above: nature, the holy, truth, everything, mystical incantations, and dreams without explanation/interpretation. So it seems that Hölderlin was not in lack of concepts for what he was searching for, and was trying to express. Yet, as Hölderlin makes *Hyperion* experience, every answer seems to bring new problems and questions and, in the end, disillusionment. In fact, in most of Hölderlin's literary work, the problem of reaching or expressing the goal of the search is addressed, as already can be seen in the used quote.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the situation which this problem leaves

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<sup>4</sup> *StA* III 190.

<sup>5</sup> *StA* III 190.

<sup>6</sup> An older manner of writing 'Ahnung' which was also used as a philosophical/poetological term in this period. In the case of *Hyperion*, the definition of 'ahnen' on *Duden* seems rather to the point: "ein undeutliches Vorgefühl von etwas Kommendem haben".

<http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/ahnen#Bedeutung1> (16-1-2015).

<sup>7</sup> That is why in this thesis, no strict distinction between 'the poet' and 'the philosopher' will function in the analysis, since I will show that they both face the same problem. Cf. Gerhard Kurz's attitude towards Hölderlin's thought: "Hölderlins Poesie hat Reflexion derart in sich aufgenommen, daß die überkommene Behandlung der Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Philosophie und Dichtung bei Hölderlin obsolet geworden ist." Gerhard Kurz, *Mittelbarkeit und Vereinigung. Zum Verhältnis von Poesie, Reflexion und Revolution bei Hölderlin* (Stuttgart 1975) 1.

to us is mourned over. In this thesis, I will attempt to explain why such disappointment necessarily is a recurring element in the search for Being. Therefore, the first question, on the nature of the goal which Hölderlin searches for, is not a good candidate to guide the start of the investigation of Being in Hölderlin's thought. Instead, first, the problem which we face with respect to even starting a meaningful pursuit of this goal must become clear. For, without an analysis of what it means for Hölderlin to philosophize about Being, no meaningful philosophical exploration of his thought on this topic can be conducted.

A new group of three progressive questions will therefore replace the earlier question. Its first and foremost concern will be to provide a precise explanation in answer to the question: what is the problem that we face when we search for Being? Answering this question will take the lion's share of the work, as not only Hölderlin's understanding of the problem must be assessed, but also the broader query should be tackled of what it even means to search for Being. In order to learn about this issue – the nature of the search, rather than the nature of the goal – philosophers contemporary to Hölderlin will be invoked, to gain a better understanding of the significance of searching for the holy/nature/everything after Kant's Critical project.

Subsequently, the second important question is concerned with Hölderlin's reaction to, and manner of dealing with, the result of answering the first question. It asks: if the goal of search cannot be reached, and even the search itself is theoretically problematic, what kind of options and attitudes does this leave *us* in search, and furthermore, what does this tell us about ourselves? Only after this question has been answered, we could possibly move on to an answer to the earlier question: what does this tell us about our goal? As a result of the perspective of this group of questions, an interpretation of Hölderlin's conception of Being should be carried out that focuses on what it means for us to keep on searching for Being, even though we are fully aware of the limitations, difficulties and impossibilities that accompany this search. Hence, the main question of this thesis will be: How should Hölderlin's search for Being be understood?

The following chapters will provide answers to this question by considering a theoretical framework and a group of considerations and problems that were important to Hölderlin and his intellectual vicinity. Before an outline of the structure of this thesis can be presented, therefore, first a brief sketch of Hölderlin's ideas on Being will now be presented in order to formulate the precise questions that will guide the progression of the chapters. On the basis of this sketch, the direction of this thesis' answers will become more clear, as well as the manner in which its chapters are apt to provide these answers.

### **Urtheil und Seyn**

In *Urtheil und Seyn* Hölderlin very explicitly and carefully distinguishes that which is the ground of all judgment (*Seyn*, unity) from the grounded activity (*Urtheil*, separation).<sup>8</sup> This activity, judgment, connects predicates to subjects by distinguishing between different elements and subsequently judging "this is (not) that". In reflecting on the distinction between the difference which characterizes the structure of judgment, and the complete unity of Being, a problem arises that may or may not have been actual before it was thematized.

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<sup>8</sup> *StA* IV 216-217. For other short summaries of the fragment, see Dieter Henrich, "Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein. Eine Studie zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Idealismus", *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 14 (1965/1966) 79, Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge 2002) 389-391, and Manfred Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main 1985) 62-63.

For, the unity of Being that we might have felt (e.g. in our immediate self-awareness or in nature), and that we presuppose as ground of judgment, cannot be expressed in judgment. This is because as ground of judgment, it by definition transcends judgment. The element of unity of the identity-statement  $A=A$  is no complete unity, because for it to be a judgment that expresses something (A, subject) about something (A, object), the identity-statement first separates the two before it synthesizes them.

In philosophical theory, the only way to accept this unity as a presupposition for judgment therefore is to define it as that which escapes definition, yet makes definition possible, because it is the necessary condition of being able to say that A is identical to B. All other more substantial postulations of it – e.g. as ontological category, or as rational principle – are made impossible by the structure of judgment. However, when something is defined as escaping definition, has it then been defined, or not, or both at the same time, or none of these options? Still, the identity in the judgment  $A=B$  cannot be understood without necessarily presupposing a whole of which A and B are parts, as Hölderlin states.<sup>9</sup> Even the concept of judgment (*Urtheil*) already presupposes this whole, because otherwise nothing could be separated.<sup>10</sup>

If this definition of Being lies at the heart of the structure of judgment, and if this structure is the structure of our consciousness and knowledge<sup>11</sup>, then it becomes hard to see how we can either say something about ‘Being’ or adhere to ‘it’. The robust distinction between Being and judgment implies that the unity of Being can ‘no longer’ be identified with the forms of identity that we find in consciousness, since these presuppose reflection, difference, synthesis.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, we cannot know ‘anymore’ whether there was a ‘before’ at all, because when *we* are conscious, we experience identity only in the sense of an identity made up out of parts. Complete unity only figures as a necessary presupposition. If descriptions are at all applicable to it, they should better express the distance of this unity to us: the Absolute, (pure) (absolute) Being, primal unity. The question “What is Being?” might on this account be rejected as a misguided and impossible question, or only answered like Buddhist monks seek to answer the question “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” – by becoming silent.

### **Being as infinite, as self-governing organization, and as beauty**

Nonetheless, if Hölderlin’s work at large is taken into account, silence on this matter is hard to find. As for example the main character of Hölderlin’s only novel already has been seen to express above, the unity of all is sought for in every aspect of life and receives a wide range of names. I will attempt to broadly categorize the descriptions of Being into (1) types of goals of human conduct, (2) Being as some sort of substance, and (3) variations of forms of harmony, unity and Oneness. These categories can be identified with (1) ideas on postulating ideals and infinite approximation contemporary to Hölderlin, (2) Spinozism and the influence of

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<sup>9</sup> *StA* IV 216.

<sup>10</sup> And clearly, *nothing* cannot be separated, so Being intuitively is a better candidate, after all. *StA* IV 216.

<sup>11</sup> These are premises that must be considered more closely below. For now, they are granted. Further, the focus on definition and formulation in this paragraph stems from the presupposition that the description of the structure of judgment itself makes uses of the same structures that it tries to define in order to define them. This circle is addressed by Fichte, for example in *Über den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre*, and will be important in chapter three.

<sup>12</sup> *StA* IV 217.

Jacobi<sup>13</sup>, and (3) Platonism. Although not all of these descriptions may be dealing with the Absolute (perhaps even none of them), they all figure in the thought of Hölderlin that is directed towards this issue.

1. The infinite, posited as an ideal towards which we, finite beings, infinitely strive, is often invoked by Hölderlin when he describes our relation to what we search.<sup>14</sup> As finite beings, however, we are not truly capable of striving infinitely, even though nothing seems more important than continuing the search. Therefore, besides a drive towards the infinite, we also have a drive that makes us hold on to the conditions and limitations of our finite situation. Since these two drives are in contradiction, they need to be reconciled. The power which unifies the two contradicting drives in us goes by the name of love.<sup>15</sup> Reaching the infinite, however contradictory, seems to be connected to states of rest, peace, and freedom from pain and earthly nuisances.<sup>16</sup> Further, the ideal is clearly connected to Christian redemption.<sup>17</sup>
2. Being as an organized whole, an energetic complex that vibrates and is self-governing, and in which man, nature and God interact, probably is the main theme of Hölderlin's poetry. For an example of nature as such a unity of all, in which man and the holy are unified, we only need to read as far as the second letter of the final version of *Hyperion*:

*Eines zu sein mit Allem, das ist Leben der Gottheit, das ist der Himmel des Menschen.*

*Eines zu sein mit Allem, was lebt, in seliger Selbstvergessenheit wiederzukehren ins All der Natur, das ist der Gipfel der Gedanken und Freuden, das ist die heilige Bergeshöhe, der Ort der ewigen Ruhe, wo der Mittag seine Schwüle und der Donner seine Stimme verliert und das kochende Meer der Woge des Kornfelds gleicht.*

*Eines zu sein mit Allem, was lebt! Mit diesem Worte legt die Tugend den zürnenden Harnisch, der Geist des Menschen den Zepter weg, und alle Gedanken schwinden vor dem Bilde der ewigeinigen Welt [...]*<sup>18</sup>

The object of this ideal – *Eines zu sein mit Allem* – is no Kantian object in experience. In Hölderlin's poetry, it may be represented by/present in a specific object (a tree, a river), but only to the extent of a relation of part to whole, or better, as a combination of disclosure and concealment of a transcendent Being.<sup>19</sup> The specific object points toward

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<sup>13</sup> This might be a weird combination, since Jacobi was the self-proclaimed anti-Spinozist. Yet Jacobi's transcendental realism and his Spinoza interpretation can both be discovered in Hölderlin's concept of Being and nature, scholars agree. Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge 2002) 384-386, Manfred Frank *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt am Main 1997) 662-667.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. *Hyperion, Vorletzte Fassung, StA III* 236-237.

<sup>15</sup> *StA III* 194.

<sup>16</sup> *StA III* 169.

<sup>17</sup> And/Or Platonic: the fall of our souls, and their striving to return.

<sup>18</sup> *StA III* 9.

<sup>19</sup> This last characterization was advocated by Martin Heidegger as essence of Hölderlin's poetry: the "sparende Nähe" in "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten", and "anfängliches Rufen, das vom Kommenden selbst gerufen" in "Wie wenn am Feiertage...". Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main 1963), 23-24, 74. To me, these characterizations seem to be transportations of what I will consider to be the paradox of Hölderlin's philosophy to the relation



the ‘All’, which itself seems not apt for further determination. This seems to fit Spinoza’s substance, or at least Jacobi’s interpretation of it, as understood by Hölderlin in his notes.<sup>20</sup> This All is a substance that is the whole of everything, and that is present in everything, but that cannot be (further) determined, since it cannot have an object outside of itself that it can relate to.<sup>21</sup>

3. Finally, another model may be added to the first two, although it is quite similar to them, because it contains both the striving for an ideal and the self-governance of intelligible structures. The description of Being, or of the metaphysical structure in which the Absolute has a function, can be connected to Hölderlin’s Platonism.<sup>22</sup> That is, the unifying function of the Platonic ideas is akin to the function of Being in judgment: for the soul to recognize unity in multiplicity, it must previously already have experienced this unity, so that the soul can recollect it. More specifically, the idea of beauty and the striving *eros* in the *Symposium*, and the myth of the fall in the *Phaedrus* are important elements to be found back in *Hyperion*. In Hölderlin’s idea of beauty, the Platonic argumentation is specifically related to Being:

*Wir hätten auch keine Ahndung von jenem unendlichen Frieden, von jenem Sein, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, wir strebten gar nicht, die Natur mit uns zu vereinigen, wir dächten und wir handelten nicht, es wäre überhaupt gar nichts (für uns), wenn nicht dennoch jene unendliche Vereinigung, jenes Sein, im einzigen Sinne des Worts vorhanden wäre. Es ist vorhanden – als Schönheit; es wartet, um mit Hyperion zu reden, ein neues Reich auf uns, wo die Schönheit Königin ist. –*

*Ich glaube, wir werden am Ende alle sagen: heiliger Plato, vergib! man hat schwer an dir gesündigt.*<sup>23</sup>

This quote is very significant, and will receive its due attention in the conclusion. For now, the claim that Being is present as beauty is sufficient: it hints at the beyond that is characterized by the ideal of a Beauty which we might once reach, and simultaneously claims that Being is ‘vorhanden’. Thereby, it shows that this Platonist model is a combination of the first two models. Furthermore, what this focus on the presence of Being seems to have in common with the second (Spinozist) model of Being as the whole, is that the moment of unity of this whole is presupposed not primarily because of epistemological considerations, but rather because this complete unity makes the metaphysical structure work. Admittedly, these different considerations strongly overlap and are hard to distinguish in many cases, and the conditional verbs suggest a form of argumentation that was quite fashionable in Hölderlin’s time. Yet in this context, where idealism and realism, or *dogmatism*, were heavily polemical modes of practicing philosophy, choice of method and perspective is essential.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the comparison of the theory of *Urtheil und Seyn* to other more positive claims on

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between reader and poem: the poem cannot directly communicate its content, because this content is not to be communicated.

<sup>20</sup> *StA* IV 207-209.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*. This understanding of Spinoza returns in Hölderlin’s critique of Fichte in a letter to Hegel, *StA* VI 155.

<sup>22</sup> See Beiser on the importance of Platonism for Hölderlin, *German Idealism* 382-384.

<sup>23</sup> *StA* III 236-237.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hölderlin’s suspicion of dogmatism on Fichte’s part in the earlier cited letter to Hegel. *StA* VI 155.

Being must be guided by the question how the Absolute as conceived by Hölderlin can be argued for: whether the argumentation is still transcendental, or takes a different shape, or what his perspective implicates for the status of argumentation at all.<sup>25</sup>

Basically, this question comes down to asking how Being can be both elements of the “Romantic notion” presented by Manfred Frank (in translation): “the proof that we assume something unconditioned in human thought and that this must, at the same time, be explained as the consciousness of a transcendent being.”<sup>26</sup> Here, the unity of all is not just a necessary condition of consciousness that we have to postulate in order to explain our activity, it rather seems to be the other way around: Being is the basis of reality, and our postulation of it is accidental to it. In other words, the Absolute is not postulated in virtue of explanatory power; it is not in need of external justification, because it is in virtue of its own essence. What does need to be explained – and justified – is *our* own finite situation as derived from Being, and why we think that *we* would be able to postulate Being.<sup>27</sup>

As a philosophical position put forth in Kantian surroundings, this is problematic. Moreover, Hölderlin himself understood this to be problematic. For, to recapitulate: when we accept *Urtheil und Seyn*’s description of Being as that which escapes judgment, then it should be clear that the concept ‘Being’ is nothing more than a placeholder for something that (in judgment) is only very problematically something substantial. However, the Absolute as described according to the three models laid out above – as infinite, substantial, and present – is overly present in all of Hölderlin’s writing, and genuinely part of his worldview and self-understanding. So, a tension exists between these two tendencies of Hölderlin’s thought.<sup>28</sup> The main strategy of this thesis is to see this tension as essential to the existential situation which Hölderlin saw himself confronted with, and indeed, to the situation we ourselves face.<sup>29</sup>

It is not a goal of this thesis, therefore, to point at discrepancies between individual statements in the various contexts of Hölderlin’s oeuvre at large. Furthermore, the aim is not to explain these discrepancies away in virtue of their appearance in different genres or discourses. By contrast, part of the implications of the argument developed here is that genre differences are irrelevant to the problem that thought and language face. Instead, the tension between theoretical impossibility and existential need should lead to asking what kind of options can remain. This should lead to a discussion of what Being could *be*, and what we could *do*.

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<sup>25</sup> This will be the main focus of chapter three.

<sup>26</sup> Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, transl. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (New York 2003) 57. I have to be honest here: in the German, Frank turns out to say something differently, i.e. “ein dem Bewußtsein transzendentes Sein”, which is much more intelligible to claim. I have been stunned by the claim in the English translation, on the consciousness of a transcendent Being, as this thesis will elaborately exhibit, and therefore chose to quote it. The weakened claim – a Being which is transcendent to consciousness, *Dativ!* – still functions in the paragraph though. Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 665.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 667, Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (New York 2007) 55.

<sup>28</sup> Tendencies which Hölderlin both considered to be essentially human. *StA* III 194.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ernst Cassirer, who started his historical interpretation of the relation between Hölderlin and Fichte and Schelling from the hypothesis that Hölderlin’s development always stayed true to “bestimmter Lebens-elemente und Lebensprobleme.” This is to say that even though solutions and ideas changed, Hölderlin’s “*Grundeinsicht*” remained continuous. I hold this insight to be the awareness of the tension at issue here. Cassirer, “Hölderlin und der deutsche Idealismus”, in: *Idee und Gestalt* (Berlin 1924) 128.

Before this can be carried out, however, first it should become clear what exactly the problem is that results in the tension that I have stressed. In the first chapter of this thesis, therefore, the problem of adhering to Being will be analyzed in more detail by presenting an interpretation of *Urtheil und Seyn*. The main question in this context has to be what kind of contradiction Hölderlin's philosophy precisely accepts or diagnoses. Furthermore, the cause of the irresolvable nature of this contradiction should be explained, that is, the reason why the cause of the contradiction is a necessary part of the structure of thought.

In order to better understand the significance of Hölderlin's 'diagnosis', the second chapter will introduce Kant's approach to reason's metaphysical tendency<sup>30</sup>, and his understanding of the situation of the subject in the world as the starting-point of philosophy. The Kantian objects of our ideas, his *noumena* or pure beings of thought, have in common with Hölderlin's notion of Being at least the combination of not being an object of knowledge/experience, and nevertheless object of a necessary human/rational tendency. Quite a number of differences can be found too, but of more interest here is to note that Kant saw irresolvable self-contradiction as one of the results of the (dogmatic) pursuit of reason towards the unconditioned. In Hölderlin, I will argue, contradiction is accepted as a necessary element of the relation between human consciousness and that which precedes it *and* which it seeks, too.

In the first two chapters, two conceptions will be presented of the situation of the human subject in the world, and of the functions and limitations of difference and unity that are available to this subject. In the third chapter, difference and unity will be brought to the center of discussion, by focusing on the distinction between One and many. Here, Fichte's understanding of the possible function of the Absolute in philosophy will be explained by showing how Fichte distinguishes between a possible role of the One, and the necessity of the many. This distinction, which is already important in the first chapter, will serve to interpret Fichte, and to show that Hölderlin and Fichte agreed more than Hölderlin was aware of. In addition, it will provide the means to acknowledge Hölderlin's understanding of our limitations with respect to the One, and his expression of this in the context of poeology and tragedy.

Before conclusions can be drawn on the basis of these chapters, Hölderlin's search for Being should be provided with a more robust example of a positive understanding of the Absolute in a fourth chapter (in contrast to the problematization that will be conducted in the other chapters). I will invoke the early Schelling to give prove of such an understanding, and to show how the perspective of the Absolute affects Hölderlin's interpretation of our existential situation. Finally, with this theoretical framework in place, *Hyperion* must be returned to in order to re-assess how Hölderlin related to the problem, how he dealt with its

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<sup>30</sup> Was is not Kant's aim to secure the use of reason by blocking any transcendent use? And is not such a metaphysical tendency a human mistake, to be classified as 'irrational' rather than as the concern of pure reason? In chapter two, I will point at the necessity and naturalness of transcendental illusion, and show that for Kant, reason naturally and inevitably searches for the unconditioned. For now, the following passage on dialectical inferences may provide a hint, because these inferences, "aus der Natur der Vernunft entsprungen", "sind Sophistationen, nicht der Menschen, sondern der reinen Vernunft selbst, von denen selbst der Weiseste unter allen Menschen sich nicht losmachen, und vielleicht zwar nach vieler Bemühung den Irrtum verhüten, den Schein aber, der ihn unaufhörlich zwackt und äfft, niemals völlig loswerden kann." So these inferences are no human mistakes, but rather inevitable activities of the human being under Kant's definition of her as a finite rational being. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [KrV], ed. Schmidt, Raymund (Hamburg 1976) A339/B397.

implications, and to conclude on what sort of positive view(s) on Being can be said to remain in Hölderlin's thought.

### **External help to understand Hölderlin's search**

As may be noticed in the outline of this thesis presented above, the following chapters will focus more on other philosophers' understanding of what it means to ask Hölderlin's question, and to pursue Hölderlin's quest, than on his work itself. This may be a bit odd for a thesis on Hölderlin. However, I think that the interpretations of the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Schelling from the perspective of Hölderlin's problem will really do good as regards understanding what Hölderlin's search for Being was about. Furthermore, the comparison of these interpretations with theses and texts of Hölderlin – which is central to every chapter – will show that his thought was a sensible reaction to this philosophical context, and that it should be taken seriously.<sup>31</sup> I will briefly state why Kant, Fichte and Schelling play such major roles in this thesis on Hölderlin, before the first chapter on *Urtheil und Seyn* will commence.

First, why the focus on Kant and Fichte, and not on lesser known philosophers that allegedly were more influential to Hölderlin? For two reasons: first, they stress most elaborately the limitations of thought in respect to the unconditioned or Being, and I expect to find in their work the best options for thinking about difference and unity, as well as for understanding the negative result of *Urtheil und Seyn*. Secondly, between Kant and Fichte a step is made – under the influence of some of the more interesting 'minor figures'<sup>32</sup> in the debates about Kant's philosophy – that is crucial to grasp Hölderlin's perspective on reason, and to justly evaluate some of the moves that seem incredibly bold from a Kantian perspective.<sup>33</sup>

The most important reason to invoke Kant, Fichte and Schelling, however, is the productivity of their ideas to understand the necessary functioning of human thought, and its contrast to complete unity. In the first chapter, Hölderlin's conception of judgment as *Ur-Teilung* will be pivotal. In the succeeding chapters, this conception will be underpinned, motivated and appreciated by all three of the invoked philosophers: respectively, (1) by Kant's conception synthetic judgments, in which a subject and a predicate are connected according to certain rules, as the way in which the subject processes the manifold which she is confronted with, (2) by Fichte's second and third principle in the *Grundlage*, and his law of reflection, and (3) by Schelling's interpretation of Kant's quest for synthetic *a priori* judgment as a way to express and deal with the primal contradiction between the Absolute and our existential situation. In this way, Schelling's interpretation nicely brings together the technical accounts of judgment of Hölderlin, Kant, and Fichte. On top of that, Schelling performs this interpretation from the perspective of the Absolute, as I will explain in the

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<sup>31</sup> A perspective like this has made Henrich claim that Hölderlin genuinely remained a Kantian throughout his life, which is rather idiosyncratic to say. Still, the chapter on Kant will demonstrate Hölderlin's text-based Kantian legitimations for making some unKantian claims. E.g. Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 113.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Salomon Maimon, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and Gottlob Ernst Schulze.

<sup>33</sup> Another question might be why I subject Hölderlin's thought to the very technical philosophy of two philosophical giants, instead of doing justice to Hölderlin's alleged main inspirations, e.g. Schiller and Jacobi. This is because I hold Hölderlin's understanding of the problem of the Absolute to be of autonomous philosophical interest. Instead of asking the historical question of who actually influenced who, therefore, I attempt to tackle a systematic problem which Hölderlin diagnosed, and which he struggled with. In this attempt, Kant and Fichte will (hopefully) prove to be of more use than others, because their reflections on the problem are more subtle.

chapter. Thereby, much insight is gained into both the existential need to pursue Hölderlin's search for Being, and the theoretical problem which accompanies it.

Nevertheless, despite the ample presence of these other philosophers, many texts across Hölderlin's oeuvre will be consulted, such as theoretical fragments, literature and letters, in order to assess how the tension between theoretical impossibility and existential need informs Hölderlin's philosophy. The main texts that will be addressed are *Urtheil und Seyn* and *Hyperion*. The letters that *Hyperion* writes, and in which he expresses and reflects on his place in the world and his attitude towards unity and thought, will be interpreted as different options that Hölderlin envisaged in the situation that he considered actual. This means that the ideas that this piece of fiction contains are by no means less relevant philosophically than Hölderlin's theoretical fragments.<sup>34</sup>

Besides *Urtheil und Seyn*, some other theoretical fragments will be turned to that can help to assess Hölderlin's understanding of the problem. For example, the claim that the meaning of tragedy can best be understood by means of the concept of paradox may prove very relevant.<sup>35</sup> And the definition of intellectual intuition in *Über den Unterschied der Dichtarten* is also pretty telling on what Hölderlin wanted this experience to encompass.<sup>36</sup> In general, Hölderlin's notion of tragedy as laid out in his remarks on Oedipus and Antigone, may contribute to the analysis of intellectual intuition, as well as its limits, and the limits of human existence, and their possible transgression in tragedy.

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<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the novel has the benefit that Hölderlin saw it fit for press, which cannot be said of any of the theoretical fragments.

<sup>35</sup> *StA* IV 286.

<sup>36</sup> *StA* IV 279.

## 1. Hölderlin's problem: oppositions, infinite regress and contradiction

In order to understand what it means for Hölderlin to search for Being, the first question which should be answered is what the problem consists in which we face when we search for Being. What kind of contradiction does Hölderlin's philosophy precisely accept or diagnose when it introduces Being as ground of judgment? Since some opposed terms are very common in philosophy – subject and object are the basic tools for doing philosophy in Hölderlin's surroundings – and are frequently not considered to be mutually exclusive, it has to become clear why the opposition between Being and judgment may be more radically problematic. In this way, both the positive function and the limitations of opposition or difference should be laid out, to make explicit what changes necessary opposition (e.g. of subject and object in judgment) into the problematic contradiction of thought and unity, or of the many and the One. This contradiction will form the problem or theoretical impossibility which was announced in the introduction, and which will be of major importance throughout this thesis. It comes to light as soon as judgment spells out its own transcendental preconditions.

Since my interpretation of *Urtheil und Seyn* will focus on the paradoxical relation of judgment and Being, many concepts that express some sort of contradiction will appear in the text. While I employ these concepts loosely, the main groups that have to be distinguished are the group of notions like separation, division, opposition and difference, that express the operation of judgment, and the group of concepts that refer to the performative contradiction, self-contradiction or paradox that Hölderlin diagnoses (also in judgment). The different concepts within a group are more or less synonymous, with differences in stress on particular features.

However, as I hope to demonstrate, these groups are intimately related. In fact, the confrontation with performative contradiction entirely depends on the application of the operation of judgment to the object that is purportedly Being. This will have to be shown below, as it is the main result and merit of Hölderlin's fragment.

### 1.1. Necessary opposition

According to Hölderlin, the manner in which judgment operates is captured in the (false, but at the time common) etymology of its German word, *Urtheil*, which comes down to a primordial division, an *Ur-Teilung*. This separation needs elements that it can separate from another, that is, it needs difference, and therefore it is "diejenige Trennung, wodurch erst Object und Subject möglich wird, die Ur=Teilung."<sup>37</sup> So, in fact, subject and object first can be thought through judgment, because of their separation and subsequent synthesis in a judgment 'subject – predicate'. This can be conceived according to the progression of the second and third paragraphs of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*: the positing of the absolute negativity of that which is different from the subject would lead to mutual cancellation of subject and object, and therefore requires their mutual limitation in order to make it possible to think their synthesis.

The possibility of this synthesis already is implied by the concept of separation, Hölderlin states: "Im Begriffe der Teilung liegt schon der Begriff der gegenseitigen Beziehung des Objekts und Subjekts aufeinander, und die notwendige Voraussetzung eines Ganzen, wovon Objekt und Subjekt die Teile sind. »Ich bin Ich« ist das passendste Beispiel zu diesem Begriffe der Urteilung [...]"<sup>38</sup> The concept of separation suggests that a whole that can be

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<sup>37</sup> *StA* IV 216.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

separated has to be necessarily presupposed. *Ich bin Ich* shows this: subject and object are here understood as standing in a relation of identity, because intuitively, we would say that their separation is only an instrument for us to think ourselves as being one I, one person, one consciousness. Furthermore, if this whole, which I am, was not presupposed, it would be hard to be sure that subject and object really are the same, because I have no other criterion to recognize the object as myself than *myself*. If this self was not the whole of the subject-object relation, then the subject could never recognize the object as herself.<sup>39</sup> The only way to guarantee the certainty of the identity *Ich bin Ich* then seems to accept that in fact, I already was present to me before my acts of distinguishing a subject and an object and subsequently thinking their identity. This pre-reflective unity is a necessary condition of the identity reached in self-consciousness.

However, in the identity that is the product of the synthesis of subject and object in judgment, the difference between its two components does not vanish, because they are still separated as subject and predicate in the judgment. Without this separation, no judgment would be possible, and without judgment, we would not be able to think *Ich bin Ich*. In this way, our pre-theoretical intuition<sup>40</sup> is called into question:

*Wie kann ich sagen: Ich! Ohne Selbstbewußtseyn? Wie ist aber Selbstbewußtseyn möglich? Dadurch daß ich mich mir selbst entgegensetze, mich von mir selbst trenne, aber ungeachtet dieser Trennung mich im entgegengesetzten als dasselbe erkenne. Aber in wieferne als dasselbe? Ich kann, ich muß so fragen; denn in einer andern Rücksicht ist es sich entgegengesetzt. Also ist die Identität keine Vereinigung des Objects und des Subjects, die schlechthin stattfände, also ist die Identität nicht = dem absoluten Seyn.<sup>41</sup>*

Self-consciousness is arrived at dialectically: judgment separates within the subject an I (subject) from a me (object), opposes the me to the I in order to form a presentation of it, and subsequently synthesizes the two into *Ich bin Ich*. Or, more correctly, these steps are the necessary conditions of self-consciousness, so that before the action of opposition, no 'me' is possible, and before the act of synthesis no identity between I and me can be thought. This means that recognizing myself (as object) to be me loses its self-evidence when I reflect on how I reach it. For self-consciousness first emerges when I oppose myself as an object to me. Yet this is problematic, because the only way to learn in judgment whether this consciousness truly is a consciousness of *me*, is to again oppose it as an object to me, and ask whether I recognize this object to be a consciousness of me, and answer by turning it into an object, and so forth in infinite regression.<sup>42</sup> In his reflection on the opposition between I and me just

<sup>39</sup> For a clear exposition of this problem, see Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel. Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David Pacini (Cambridge 2003) 241.

<sup>40</sup> Here used to refer to the commonsense conviction that we are one, in a loose sense, i.e. that our self is no chaos of shattered fragments, but something that we understand to be us.

<sup>41</sup> *StA* IV 217.

<sup>42</sup> This is a problem which Fichte's *Thathandlung* attempted to solve by delineating a moment of absolute self-consciousness, and which Hölderlin likewise solves by accepting Being as necessary precondition of judgment. As Hölderlin understood it, and as I will show below, the Absoluteness of this condition is much more important than the question whether it is objective or subjective. In fact, this latter question might turn out to be nonsensical. In this I depart from Beiser, *German Idealism* 391, and connect to Henrich's analysis of Fichte's original insight, Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* 242-245, 250-262.

quoted, Hölderlin further mirrors this unease, depicting how in judgment I oppose a ‘me’ to me that I even name an ‘it’ that is opposed to ‘it’ when I reflect on ‘it’.<sup>43</sup>

So, in self-consciousness, we note that the identity *Ich bin Ich* reached in judgment contains a necessary difference nevertheless: the difference on which judgment is based. An undifferentiated (pre-reflective) ‘*Ich!*’ therefore becomes questionable: in judgment, it can and must be asked whether such a thing be possible, and the answer seems negative. This is because our faculty of judgment is not capable of transforming the identity of self-consciousness into an absolute identity. In our pre-theoretical intuition, our alleged immediate consciousness of ourselves, however, this is what we want to express: the fact that we are one, not two.<sup>44</sup> Yet unfortunately: “Wenn ich sage: Ich bin Ich, so ist das Subjekt (Ich) und das Objekt (Ich) nicht so vereinigt, daß gar keine Trennung vorgenommen werden kann, ohne, das Wesen desjenigen, was getrennt werden soll, zu verletzen; im Gegenteil das Ich ist nur durch diese Trennung des Ichs vom Ich möglich.”<sup>45</sup> According to Hölderlin, we would like to hold our selves to be unified in a sense that is non-separable; yet the opposite is true in reflective self-consciousness, because we need the separation of a subject I and an object I to be conscious of ourselves. Furthermore, since we need self-consciousness to be able to say ‘*Ich!*’, this expression is not a good candidate to function as the complete unity that nonetheless has to be presupposed in order to make consciousness possible.<sup>46</sup>

The complete unity, then, which cannot be separated without violating its essence, Hölderlin calls Being. As quoted above, it is the necessary presupposition of a whole of which subject and object are parts; a presupposition that lies in the concept of separation, and without which no separation could take place. Further, we could not synthesize separated elements in judgment either, since a concept of unity is necessary for us to understand that a subject and a predicate are (at least partly) the same or in relation.<sup>47</sup> If this were not the case, an endless regress of opposing objects to subjects would block even the possibility of self-consciousness at all, because in such an infinite chain, no definitive state of (or ground for)

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<sup>43</sup> *Ich kann, ich muß so fragen; denn in einer andern Rücksicht ist es sich entgegengesetzt. StA IV 217.*

<sup>44</sup> Yet the quote has shown that in judgment, no such immediate consciousness can be spoken of. The question of immediate consciousness and mediation is definitely related to the problem at issue here; it has to do with Fichte’s attempt to attribute to us an immediate first contact with ourselves in order to escape a circle of reflexivity in self-consciousness that Hölderlin points at here as well: How can the subject be sure that she is aware of herself (S) when she reflects on herself (O) without already presupposing this identity? And how can this original contact be accounted for in a system of human knowledge? Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* 233-237, 241-245, Frank, “„Intellektuale Anschauung”. Drei Stellungnahmen zu einem Deutungsversuch von Selbstbewußtsein: Kant, Fichte, Hölderlin/Novalis”, in: Behler, Ernst, Hörisch, Jochen (eds.), *Die Aktualität der Frühromantik* (Paderborn 1987) 113-114. For the record, I disagree with Beiser’s Fichte interpretation when he states that “[T]his is a point that Fichte would resist to the last, because it implies that complete self-consciousness is impossible.” Beiser is right that infinite regress is to be avoided, but Fichte’s solution is more subtle. Beiser, *German Idealism* 390. Fichte’s solution will be discussed below in order to ask what kind of absolute and what kind of consciousness of it, if at all, is necessary to avoid the two problems of infinite regress and of contradiction.

<sup>45</sup> *StA IV 217*. This also means that what Hölderlin understood to be Fichte’s absolute I, cannot be the Absolute, because a conscious I needs an object to direct its consciousness to, which means it needs opposition. In my interpretation of Fichte below, I will show that Fichte would agree, and that Hölderlin misunderstood the function and status of the absolute I.

<sup>46</sup> For Henrich, this is the reason to consider Hölderlin critical of Schelling’s early thought and already ‘beyond’ the absolute I of Schelling and Fichte. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* 62-66.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Fichte’s seventh remark after the formal deduction of the third principle, on the necessity of thesis for anti-thesis and synthesis, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Fichtes sämtliche Werke [SW] I*, Fichte, Immanuel Hermann (ed.) (Berlin 1845) 115.



self-consciousness is ever arrived at.<sup>48</sup> A suggestion of unity therefore has to accompany every 'is-statement' as transcendental condition. This suggestion, of Being, is the necessary precondition that makes the *expressed* unity in judgment intelligible, by relating it to a complete unity, which itself cannot be thought.<sup>49</sup>

However, can subject and object really be *parts* of this necessary precondition? Hölderlin makes clear that they first truly arise in the primordial division, and are not possible before this *Ur-Theilung*. This is why Hölderlin says that Being should not be equated with identity: the identity that we think when we say *I am I* is no complete unity, because this judgment is a synthesis of different parts that are recognized in the judgment as identical, but not as absolutely unified. So even though the absolute whole is a necessary premise, subject and object cannot really be thought of as parts of this whole. The limitation of judgment therefore lies in this: it needs an absolute unity as precondition to do justice to self-consciousness, and it necessarily cannot express this unity in a judgment, because the complete unity by definition transcends judgment or comes before it.<sup>50</sup> The necessary distinction between two of the main transcendental conditions of thought – the complete unity of Being, and the separation of the elements of a judgment – i.e. between the *One* and the *many*, thereby forms a strict limit with respect to naming or expressing the first precondition of thought. Expressing Being is what judgment in principle cannot do, because *Vielheit* is necessary to perform judgments. Attempting to refer to complete *Einheit* by means of *Vielheit* is impossible, because the two are radically different: the attempt to express complete unity in a judgment contradicts the condition that all judgments are based on separation of elements. This stricture to judgment, which is a necessary condition of reflected life, cannot be crossed in reflection, its transcendence cannot be thought. Both Being and primordial division are necessary conditions of conscious life, and they necessarily are in contradiction.

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<sup>48</sup> In some cases, infinite regress is accepted as characteristic of self-consciousness. In Hölderlin's surroundings, however, it was seen as an unacceptable consequence, as becomes apparent in (1) Jacobi's argument for the necessity of belief in the unconditioned, and in (2) the search for a first principle for philosophy to prevent regress, by e.g. Fichte and Schelling, and in (3) Early Romanticism's *Zwischenstellung* between anti-foundationalism and longing for the unconditioned, as Manfred Frank contends. See Frank's explanation in *Unendliche Annäherung*, 664-665. In general, I agree when Henrich states: "The very fact that the sequence of reference is infinite *means* precisely that there is *no* state at which we can arrive and declare it to be *the* state in which self-reference occurs." Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* 257.

<sup>49</sup> Manfred Frank formulates the argument for the necessity of postulating Being very convincingly in his chapter on Hölderlin in *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main 1985) 62-63, and again more condensed in *Unendliche Annäherung*, e.g. the following passage, in English translation: "The material unity of that as which we experience ourselves in self-consciousness is [...] contradicted by the duality of the form of the judgment we use to express this unity. But there *is* such an experience of unity (and not only the duality of judgment). And so we *must* presuppose a unified Being, and we can render the epistemic self-*relation* as self-relation comprehensible (and it is indeed self-evident, with Cartesian certainty) only if we think of it as the reflex of this unified Being." Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* 107.

<sup>50</sup> Even the temporal order is hard to argue for: Being has to be non-reflective, but that it has to be pre-reflective hardly follows from the fact that we reflect and presuppose non-reflective unity – the logical order does not need to imply a temporal one. Note that this interpretation is much closer to Dieter Henrich than to Frederick Beiser, who denies the transcendence of Being altogether. Beiser, *German Idealism* 393, Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewusstsein* 106-108.

## 1.2. Problematic contradiction

What does this contradiction amount to? In the following, the main passage in which Being comes to the fore in *Urtheil und Seyn* will be assessed in order to explain the kind of contradiction that is involved in accepting Being as a necessary condition of judgment, and in suggesting the possibility of contact with 'Being' by referring to intellectual intuition. In this way, Hölderlin's negative insight into the impossibility of reaching Being through judgment will be stressed first, before more nuanced and positive implications of the claims in *Urtheil und Seyn* can be discerned. In relation to the previous paragraph, it should especially become clear that the constitution of judgment as a separation of elements immediately leads to the diagnosis of contradiction when Being is thematized in thought, as is the case in Hölderlin's fragment:

*Sein – drückt die Verbindung des Subjekts und Objekts aus.*

*Wo Subjekt und Objekt schlechthin, nicht nur zum Teil vereinigt ist, mithin so vereinigt, daß gar keine Teilung vorgenommen werden kann, ohne das Wesen desjenigen, was getrennt werden soll, zu verletzen, da und sonst nirgends kann von einem Sein schlechthin die Rede sein – wie es bei der intellektualen Anschauung der Fall ist.<sup>51</sup>*

Complete unification, as expressed by absolute Being, means unification to the extent that no separation (i.e. no judgment) at all could be executed without changing Being into something else, which is not Being anymore, and could not become it again, since its nature is violated. I think this is the most fascinating and appealing claim that Hölderlin has made, mainly because of the strong demarcation of complete unity from the identity that can be expressed in judgment, and therewith from judgment in general. According to this definition of Being, its essence is completely foreign to judgment: as soon as subject and object are separated, this essence is violated. So, Being completely transcends the domain of judgment according to this claim. However, this makes the quoted statement very problematic too, because it is stated that Being expresses something (the unification of subject and object) which by definition cannot be expressed in judgment, while the statement itself clearly is a judgment.<sup>52</sup> That is, the question is whether this passage really can be *about* Being, because for a judgment to be about Being, it should refer to some reified object that can be described. The whole of the quote will be important in the following paragraphs, but I will first focus on its first sentence.

According to the rules of judgment, this sentence is contradictory in at least two ways. First, the sentence differentiates between a subject and an object, and thus does not express connection in the strong sense Hölderlin aims at, i.e., the impossibility to differentiate its parts – it should not even have parts, because it should be completely *One*. Secondly, Being is not meant to *express* anything at all, because it is defined as defying the rules of expression.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *StA* IV 216.

<sup>52</sup> Again, this will depend on the range of the 'sphere' of judgment for human activity/consciousness, which in turn depends on the functions that Hölderlin attributes to judgment and Being in epistemology, and will be important in the comparisons below.

<sup>53</sup> At least in the discursive mode of expression. Yet part of what motivates this thesis is the conviction that even when typical logical discourse is abandoned, as in most of Hölderlin's poetological fragments, there is no communicable way to solve the problem of speaking the unspeakable. This seems to stand in strong contrast to what has been heralded about Romanticism by postmodern philosophy: the overcoming of philosophy by literature in the quest of presenting that which reason

The first sentence of the quote expresses distinctions which it claims should not be made. The performance of the sentence therefore contradicts its content. Either *Verbindung* is accepted in its strong sense, and differentiation between subject and object/predicate is refrained from, or subject and object are distinguished, and their real connection is not made. Again, similarly, either we say that we reach Being, and refrain from saying it *is* Being, or we say Being *is* *Being*, but then we should acknowledge not to have reached Being, and we would not be telling the truth. Or we say the concept 'Being' is not Being; if it is true, we accept a contradiction, and if it is not true, we would again not have reached Being, and we would not be telling the truth. This is why it is paradoxical to adhere to Being in philosophy.

So firstly, it is clear that the contradiction has to do with the performance of accepting or expressing Being as part of philosophical theory, since this performance takes place in judgment. As has been explained in the previous paragraph, there are philosophical arguments and considerations for accepting Being as a necessary precondition of thought. Yet the problem or question is how to reason from or to the 'category' of Being, because its complete unity does not allow us to delineate it through judgments. That is, the judgments that describe it either not really capture its 'meaning', or they violate their transcendental condition of containing difference, and thereby contradict their own constitution.

Because of this performative contradiction that is involved in judging what Being is, the status of these judgments becomes problematic, and it has to be determined what their precise aim is. For these judgments should avoid attempting to perform the unperformable, while they at the same time still need to improve our understanding of the necessary precondition of thought that is named 'Being'. I will give two examples of such judgments, and then examine two ways in which Hölderlin could deal with this situation.

- In the judgment 'Being is the unification of subject and object' subject and object are not unified, because if subject and object were unified, then it would not be a judgment. And since they are not unified in this judgment, the judgment does not express what Being is.
- If the judgment 'Being is a necessary condition of thought that cannot be thought' is true, then this judgment does not express what Being is, because it is now affirmed that Being cannot be thought. If it is false (i.e. if Being can be thought, and is expressed in this judgment), then this judgment would lack a necessary condition, because as precondition of judgment, Being should lie beyond the conditioned. And without the necessary precondition of Being, this judgment could according to its own rules not have been made. So if it is true, we still not know what Being consists in, and if it is false, it is no valid judgment at all, and so we still not know what Being consists in.

So, the difficulty lies in seeing how Being can be proposed as necessary condition of a philosophical theory, since this will have to happen in language, that is in thought/judgment. The second option makes apparent this discomfort: as it satisfies the requirement that the condition lies beyond the conditioned, and therefore is unconditioned, in order to escape

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cannot present. However, this contrast may fade to some degree during the course of this thesis, as the aim of this chapter is to first diagnose the problem, or crisis, as postmodernists like to call it. The positive implications and possibilities can only be assessed later. Cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute. The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, transl. Philip Bernard, Cheryl Lester (New York 1988) 31-37 and the "Translators' Introduction" VIII-X.

infinite regress, it makes perfect sense to adopt Being as precondition in order to secure the certainty of judgment. Nonetheless, adopting it and arguing for it seems impossible: asserting Being in philosophy, and thinking it as not to be thought, is a performative contradiction. Every attempt to introduce Being in philosophy is bound to perform this contradiction, and still it is necessary to introduce Being as transcendental condition of judgment. That is why the relation between judgment and Being can be called paradoxical. It is also why a continuing search for Being has to be undertaken, which accepts the theoretical impossibility of reaching Being through judgment, but at the same time never abolishes this ground of judgment.

Now, if Hölderlin's problem is to be called a paradox, then it is necessary to distinguish two moments in dealing with it: the first the moment of its formulation and/or acknowledgment, the second the situation that is the case when this formulation is accepted, but cannot be accepted. The first moment represents what could be seen as the general accomplishment of Hölderlin's theory on judgment and Being: the absolute Being that is propounded in the fragment cannot be absolute Being, because the performance of the fragment would contradict its own content: the unspeakable would be spoken. To call this its accomplishment is to explain the constitution of the theory as precisely aimed to raise the awareness of this impossibility, as referring to the transcendent category *ex negativo*, and as accepting its consequence as brave as Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the theory can be seen as useful in virtue of the contradiction it contains: it gives negative insight through its clear presentation of the paradox, and teaches us to stop pushing this boundary of our consciousness.

A clear example of referring to Being *ex negativo* is the passage on self-consciousness which I already cited.<sup>55</sup> Hölderlin introduces it by stating that Being should not be equated with identity.<sup>56</sup> Yet he really explains it the other way round: why identity should not be equated with Being, as his last sentence affirms. He has good reasons for going about in this way, in fact, there is no other manner to differentiate the two: by describing the identity-statement of self-consciousness, it is possible to at least explain why this identity cannot be absolute identity. However, defining what precisely is missing in the weak form of identity already is impossible. Choosing the other way to differentiate identity from Being would therefore be impossible: no positive account of Being can be *presented* in order to differentiate it from identity – the only contrast that can be made explicit in judgment is one from an account of identity to the conclusion that *something* is missing in this account, something that can be given names (whole, Being, absolute, etc.), but whose names cannot refer to what it should *be*.

Then wasn't this what Hölderlin did in the sentence before, in which he defined when it would be possible to speak of Being?<sup>57</sup> Yes, and that is why in this sentence either no real

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<sup>54</sup> Or as Fichte seems to do in some of his texts, as I will argue below.

<sup>55</sup> *Wie kann ich sagen: Ich! Ohne Selbstbewußtseyn? Wie ist aber Selbstbewußtseyn möglich? Dadurch daß ich mich mir selbst entgegenseetze, mich von mir selbst trenne, aber ungeachtet dieser Trennung mich im entgegengesetzten als dasselbe erkenne. Aber in wieferne als dasselbe? Ich kann, ich muß so fragen; denn in einer andern Rücksicht ist es sich entgegengesetzt. Also ist die Identität keine Vereinigung des Objects und des Subjects, die schlechthin stattfände, also ist die Identität nicht = dem absoluten Seyn. StA IV 217.*

<sup>56</sup> *Aber dieses Seyn muß nicht mit der Identität verwechselt werden. StA IV 216.*

<sup>57</sup> *Wo Subjekt und Objekt schlechthin, nicht nur zum Teil vereinigt ist, mithin so vereinigt, daß gar keine Teilung vorgenommen werden kann, ohne das Wesen desjenigen, was getrennt werden soll, zu verletzen, da und sonst nirgends kann von einem Sein schlechthin die Rede sein – wie es bei der intellektualen Anschauung der Fall ist. StA IV 216.*

definition of absolute Being is given, or the definition of judgment as “diejenige Trennung, wodurch erst Object und Subject möglich wird, die Ur=Theilung” is not adhered to.<sup>58</sup> The definition of judgment should be adhered to if this fragment is to make any sense, so the first must be the case<sup>59</sup>: the definition of Being proves its point by presenting itself as impossible – by presenting Being as not-Being. The definition shows that any such definition will therefore be true and false at the same time, and that no real definition of Being is possible.

If this definition is affirmed as necessary, it would make sense to further stay away from enquiry into Being. Instead, judgment could now be recognized as grounded in a transcendent foundation that, despite its contradictoriness in relation to judgment, works as its necessary condition. An object of subsequent focus could then be which results this foundation of judgment in Being yields: how (a system of) knowledge and action can be deduced from it, and how this foundation helps to ensure the certainty of the rules of thought that are (at least in part) its results.

However, this does not seem to be Hölderlin’s concern.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, a second moment in the confrontation with contradiction must be distinguished from the (negative) result of the first. It involves a performative notion of having accepted the consequence of the theory – that further philosophizing about the ‘essence’ of Being faces performative contradiction, and thereby either becomes impossible or cannot really add to our understanding of Being – and not being able to accept it. Now, the paradox consists in accepting the pure unity as beyond the reach of consciousness, and still attempting to reach it. This attempt to reach it then is mistakenly seen as an attempt to solve ‘the problem’: reaching blissful unity, and ideally restoring it on earth. The suggestion of such attempts is that the subject faces a dilemma between leaving intact her (pre-theoretical) sense of the whole and communicating it.<sup>61</sup> However, the problematic contradiction that *Urtheil und Seyn* diagnoses makes it hard to see what kind of sense of the whole possibly could be understood. The consequence of *Urtheil und Seyn* is that no determinate sense of Being is possible without giving up the limitations that secure consciousness. At the same time, self-consciousness cannot do without the precondition of complete unity. Moreover, Hölderlin’s search is nonetheless still after absolute Being, so saving communication by giving up Being definitely is not an option. In this way, both options of the dilemma are equally impossible to accept: either give up consciousness, or give up the One thing that really matters. Both sides are of equal necessity to human life, *and* mutually eliminating.<sup>62</sup> No true dilemma therefore

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<sup>58</sup> *StA* IV 216.

<sup>59</sup> That is, this first moment I distinguish would collapse if the second is meant. A mystic’s attempt to break the rules of thought clearly can be read into the fragment and Hölderlin’s thought in general as well, and will be discussed below.

<sup>60</sup> This can be concluded from the lack of any attempt to present such (system of) results, from the skepsis of *Hyperion* towards knowledge and action (e.g. *StA* III 7-9), and from Hölderlin’s personal (1) disappointment with philosophy and (2) recurring plans to transcend the limitations of judgment and reach Being, e.g. in art, or even theoretically, in intellectual intuition. These plans can be found in letters to Schiller and Niethammer (*StA* VI 181, 203). They can be used to point at the fertile crescent of a whole new direction for philosophy, culminating in Schelling and Hegel, as Beiser does, or ignored, since Hölderlin never executed them. I will at least take into consideration this tendency of Hölderlin (a tendency he himself considered crucial to being human), but first I will ask how such transcendence could be possible (if at all), before presenting a positive account of (contact with) Being. Beiser, *German Idealism* 393-397.

<sup>61</sup> For example Beiser, who frames this dilemma as the dilemma of the poet, who tries to express in determinate terms his aesthetic sense of the whole. Beiser, *German Idealism* 396-397.

<sup>62</sup> Maybe it seems as if Being is evaluated over judgment in Hölderlin because it is the main object of his *Sehnsucht*, but the importance and indeed necessity of the limits and borders of judgment is

remains actual, in the sense that none of the choices offers a way out – not even a very unattractive one.

From the perspective of Fichte, the philosopher whose lectures were Hölderlin's main object of attention at the time when he wrote *Urtheil und Seyn* (purportedly on the cover of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*), this would be a very unwelcome result.<sup>63</sup> For Fichte, it would be the result of the misunderstanding of a theoretical presupposition that he had asserted, and which merely was one among many of the necessary conditions of knowledge. Holding this presupposition to be 'lost', and to be the most sacred treasure that must be found or restored, would be a misinterpretation of a philosophy that is above all interested in providing the sciences with a certain foundation, as it is the science of science.<sup>64</sup>

### 1.3. The limitations of our existential situation

The main question that this interpretation of *Urtheil und Seyn* has to answer, though, is whether the negative result of *Urtheil und Seyn* really vindicates the pre-theoretical intuition that plays an irreducible role in it, as it does in the argument of this interpretation, too.<sup>65</sup> For even though in judgment, the result of the formulation of its precondition is clear – the formulation runs into contradiction and thereby gives proof of the stricture to judgment –, the question remains whether the pre-theoretical intuition that started the reflection which led to this conclusion is fully left behind after it, since judgment still is in need of 'Being', even though it cannot account for it. So it seems that the contradiction which judgment runs into proves most of all the limitation of judgment, and only adjacently the awkward status of Being.<sup>66</sup>

Because of this, it can at least be asked whether the contradiction that we encounter when we reflect on this necessary condition of judgment really makes us reject it as unintelligible, hence impossible, or whether we can accept contradiction as *our situation*. In other words, does this contradiction necessarily imply a dilemma between hunting down an intelligible way to solve this matter and abandoning the whole project, or can we also

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recognized very explicitly as well, as for example in the early *Entwurf* to the *Metrische Fassung of Hyperion*: "Wir können den Trieb, uns zu befreien, zu veredeln, fortzuschreiten ins Unendliche, nicht verläugnen. Das wäre thierisch, wir können aber auch den Trieb, bestimmt zu werden, zu empfangen, nicht verläugnen, das wäre nicht menschlich. Wir müßten untergehn im Kampfe dieser widerstreitenden Triebe." *StA* III 194.

<sup>63</sup> Beißner suggests this origin of the fragment in *StA* IV 402, Henrich does not dismiss it, "Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein" 78.

<sup>64</sup> As the conclusion of the interpretation of *Urtheil und Seyn*, Hölderlin's heralded "Systemskizze", this Fichtean denunciation is pretty cynical. However, it might still be of use to spell it out, as the search for Being in this thesis attempt to find a balance between the cynical adage "the search for the Absolute is nonsensical" and the fanatical "discursive reason *Entzaubers* the world and alienates us from it and from ourselves". Sometimes, one of these extremes will be approximated. Then, the only right thing to do is to bring nuance – as happens here in the following paragraph.

<sup>65</sup> E.g. Our urge to express the 'fact' that we are one, not two, and our agreement that before elements can be separated, they must first have existed unseparated, in 'something' that is a whole.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Günther Zöllner's constructive account of the role of limits and bounds in Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer their attempts to protect their philosophy from accusations of one-sided idealism/rationalism. According to Zöllner, in all three (in very different ways), "the apparent self-sufficiency of reason is complemented, in fact completed, by being traced back to a dimension of ultimate origin or being that is beyond reason but without which there would be no reason." Günther Zöllner, "German Realism: the self-limitation of idealist thinking in Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer", in: Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge 2000) 202.

acknowledge the limits to our perspective on ‘this matter’ and search for other or more modest methods to deal with this situation?<sup>67</sup>

Dieter Henrich opens up the possibility of incorporating Being in philosophy in more positive ways by speculating that Hölderlin “hätte sagen müssen, daß das ‘Seyn schlechthin’ *nur vom Wissen her* als innigste Vereinigung von Subjekt und Objekt gedacht werden muß.”<sup>68</sup> I will not go about in this manner: the comparisons with Kant and Fichte will show that the analyzed contradiction is not restricted to the perspective of theoretical knowledge. Moreover, the acceptance of the essentiality of this contradiction may in itself open up possibilities similar to Henrich’s suggestions, without being tempted to speculate on what Hölderlin *should* have said, and what *would* consequently have been possible.<sup>69</sup>

To return to the posed question: for Hölderlin, it is definitely the case that the described relation between judgment and Being is actual, even though it is contradictory. This means that, indeed, it is accepted, even though this seems to effect a regress of mutually eliminating theses. However, it also suggests that, contradiction being the case, a severe limitation of judgment is diagnosed, which we have to deal with.<sup>70</sup> If this situation is ours, then we must ask what kind of methods are available to still endeavor a sensible pursuit of the Absolute, or at least, to ensure meaningful activity between the two (impossible) extremes of (exclusive) judgment and (Absolute) Being.<sup>71</sup> First, though, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of what this situation encompasses, why the contradiction must be accepted instead of solved, and whether this contradiction in judgment is really so fundamental to reflective human life. Therefore, Kant’s conception of our situation will now be invoked. Further, Kant’s explanation in the *Dialectics of Pure Reason* of reason’s natural tendency to become trapped in contradictions will be contrasted to the contradiction that has been analyzed in this chapter. In the comparison of the paradoxical relation of judgment and Being with Kant’s analysis of the antinomies, which reason faces in its pursuit of the unconditioned, it should become clear that Hölderlin’s problem is connected to what Kant called a natural tendency of reason – although Hölderlin radicalized this tendency, and thereby became more skeptical of reason than Kant.

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<sup>67</sup> The metaphor of hunting down is derived from a distinction that Schlegel saw between Kant and Fichte, as between the *Spürhund* and the *Jäger*, to distinguish their attitude in their search for the unconditioned. The suggestion is that the sniffer dog is more humble than the hunter, because he is only on the trail of the unconditioned, and does not attempt to capture it. See Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel* 33-34 for this interpretation.

<sup>68</sup> Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 371.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, 371 – the stresses on the modal verbs paraphrase Henrich’s argumentation in this passage.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Cassirer, who acknowledges much more than e.g. Beiser that Hölderlin is strict in his determination of the boundaries of our finite situation. Cassirer, “Hölderlin und der deutsche Idealismus” 121, 125, 148-151.

<sup>71</sup> In her discussion of Schlegel, Millán-Zaibert likewise suggests that the unknowability of the Absolute poses new tasks to the philosopher “to help us find our way in the darkness, to give us a method for dealing with the opacity of the Absolute.” She counts Hölderlin among these (Romantic) philosophers. Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel* 36, and 33-34.

*Nehmet an, die Natur sei ganz vor euch aufgedeckt; euren Sinnen, und dem Bewußtsein alles dessen, was eurer Anschauung vorgelegt ist, sei nichts verborgen: so werdet ihr doch durch keine einzige Erfahrung den Gegenstand eurer Ideen in concreto erkennen können (denn es wird, außer dieser vollständigen Anschauung, noch eine vollendete Synthesis und das Bewußtsein ihrer absoluten Totalität erfordert, welches durch gar kein empirisches Erkenntnis möglich ist), mithin kann eure Frage keinesweges zur Erklärung von irgend einer vorkommenden Erscheinung notwendig und also gleichsam durch den Gegenstand selbst aufgegeben sein. Denn der Gegenstand kann euch niemals vorkommen, weil er durch keine mögliche Erfahrung gegeben werden kann. Ihr bleibt mit allen möglichen Wahrnehmungen immer unter Bedingungen, es sei im Raume, oder in der Zeit, befangen, und kommt an nichts Unbedingtes, um auszumachen, ob dieses Unbedingte in einem absoluten Anfange der Synthesis, oder einer absoluten Totalität der Reihe, ohne allen Anfang, zu setzen sei.* Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* A482/B510 – A483/B511.

## 2. Kant and reason's natural tendency towards the unconditioned

Today, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is mainly still praised for its rigorous criticism of what Kant called 'dogmatic metaphysics'. The more positive positions which Kant defends in the book are less quickly accepted, especially regarding his aim to create a system of reason, or a science of metaphysics. One could argue that despite the idealistic systems that rose to fame and typify the historical period of German Idealism, and that prevent many contemporary philosophers from getting engaged with the period, the appreciation of the *Critique* was not that different in Kant's own time; the time when Hölderlin read Kant. For one, dogmatism became an insult. For another, Humean skepticism was revived in order to radicalize Kant's *Critique*, and to perform so-called *Meta-Critique* (a critique of Kant's *Critique*).<sup>72</sup> Subsequently and on top of that, skepticism towards the attempts to counter the Humean troubles arose in the form of anti-foundationalism, that is, skepticism regarding first principles and solid grounds for philosophy.<sup>73</sup>

In relation to Hölderlin, this shows that his intellectual surroundings were just as fertile to destruct illusions as they were to construct the grand speculative systems that now appall many.<sup>74</sup> In Kant, both sides are represented, and are present for his readers to appreciate and to criticize; to adopt and/or (partly) reject. I will show by systematical comparison – in contrast to the historical search for evidence of influence – that Hölderlin has done both: he has accepted and even radicalized the criticism of reason, and he has radicalized the necessary tendency towards the unconditioned, too, which Kant had located in pure reason. This means that Hölderlin's search for Being leads to a thorough analysis of reason's limitations, but subsequently does not stop at the boundary of reason's capability.

<sup>72</sup> Aenesidemus, Maimon. Well documented in Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy Between Kant and Fichte* (Harvard 1987), Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* 140-156.

<sup>73</sup> Maimon, Niethammer. Cf. Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 91-132, 405-456 respectively.

<sup>74</sup> Basically, this is just my own justification for spending so much of my time studying these old folks. But clearly, I am not alone in this, and found great inspiration for approaching this period in this way in (for example) Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 17-25 (*Vorwort*), Günther Zöller, "German Realism", Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy Between Kant and Fichte* (Harvard 1987), Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, "Borderline Philosophy? Incompleteness, Incomprehension, and the Romantic Transformation of Philosophy", in: *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 6 (Berlin 2009) 123-144, and idem, "Review of "German Idealism. The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801", " *Essays in Philosophy* 5 1 (2004), <http://commons.pacificu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1137&context=eip> (18-01-2014).



How can the radicalization of Kant's criticism of reason have this transgression of Kant's strictures to reason as a result? And what is the meaning of the continued search for Being in relation to pure reason's tendency towards the unconditioned, which according to Kant results in transcendental illusion?

To answer these questions and execute the comparison between Kant and Hölderlin, first Kant's basic attitude towards difference and unity will be delineated. Subsequently, his critique of metaphysics will provide insight into three important elements of Hölderlin's quest for Being: (1) the necessity of the human attempt to extend the use of reason beyond the limits that guard the certainty of the results of this use, (2) the irresolvable nature of the contradiction that we (then) face, and (3) the possible ways out of this situation that we may nevertheless endeavor.

### 2.1. Processing the manifold

For Kant, a judgment expresses the relation between a subject and a predicate.<sup>75</sup> Even if the judgment is analytic, it still connects at least two representations – a subject and a predicate, whether empirical or conceptual – in a consciousness. The real goal of Kant's epistemology, of course, is to secure judgments in which the predicate adds something to the subject. The pivotal type of such synthetic judgment is experience: the unification of representations stemming from both intuition and understanding in a consciousness in general according to *a priori* principles.<sup>76</sup> This unification or synthesis that the human mind imposes on the (given) manifold is the key move and motive in generating knowledge.<sup>77</sup> It returns in Kant's theory of transcendental apperception, and in his general view of the (different) functions of imagination, understanding, judgment and reason.

However, what this unification, that ultimately has to lead to a complete system of reason, never purports, is that the manifold 'actually' *really* is a unity, or that we ever will be able to know the unity towards which the ideas of reason lead our use of the understanding.<sup>78</sup> Compared to Hölderlin, this is an important difference: while Kant identifies judgment with the activity of thought which *brings* synthetic unity, Hölderlin regards judgment as the primordial separation of pre-reflexive unity into two elements or *relata*, the synthetic unity of whom only partly resembles the primordial unity.<sup>79</sup> In this way, the activity of judgment that functions well in Kant's epistemology, becomes problematic because of the presupposition of primordial unity, since in relation to this, the result of the activity (identity, or Kant's synthetic unity) falls short.<sup>80</sup>

For Kant, however, the basic, or pre-theoretical intuition, is that the human subject in the world and in his own mind is confronted with a manifold; of appearances, of concepts, or better: of representations of these. The mediation of manyness, through which we eventually find 'objects of experience' in experience, is the basic operation of the human mind in order to process the manifold.<sup>81</sup> Kant's theory of *Erfahrung* attempts to ensure certainty by

<sup>75</sup> *KrV* A6/B10.

<sup>76</sup> The aim here is not to get into the technicalities of Kant's concept of experience, but merely to show that it contains many elements that are different from another.

<sup>77</sup> *KrV* A77/B103-A78/B104.

<sup>78</sup> Kant's conception of systematic unity of reason is clearly demarcated from a unity of objects on pages A680/B708 – A681/B709.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 62.

<sup>80</sup> In the chapter on Schelling, this interpretation of Kant's epistemology will receive more attention.

<sup>81</sup> E.g. at the start of the *Transcendental Analytic*: "Da keine Vorstellung unmittelbar auf den Gegenstand geht, als bloß die Anschauung, so wird ein Begriff niemals auf einen Gegenstand unmittelbar, sondern auf irgend eine andre Vorstellung von demselben (sie sei Anschauung oder selbst

demonstrating how we need to synthesize representations under logical conditions and rules. However, this process starts from the presupposition of the opposite of order: the (empirical) matter of the manifold, the undetermined object that is called appearance. Form, rule and unity are brought to this matter by us, since they are the necessary conditions under which we are able to make sense of it.<sup>82</sup> The manifold of the subject's sensation simply is the starting-point of the process of knowing. As long as experience is possible according to its necessary conditions, the 'dualism' between sensibility and understanding is nothing but a well-functioning cooperation.

As is well known, Kant did not endorse the attempts of some of his followers to deduce his philosophy out of higher principles to overcome the dualisms diagnosed in his philosophy.<sup>83</sup> To understand why, his critique of metaphysics must be rehearsed. This will help to locate Hölderlin's contradiction, and to appreciate the difference between Kant's solution of it and the solutions that Hölderlin and Fichte could possibly accept. In order to accomplish this, first Kant's explanation will be presented of what it means to use reason transcendentally. Subsequently, it will be explained how such a transcendent use of reason leads into a situation of irresolvable contradiction. Next, the similarity between this contradiction, as described in the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*, and the contradiction between judgment and Being will be argued for. Finally, I will explain why Hölderlin cannot follow Kant in his solutions to the antinomies, and instead has to continue his search.

Kant's critique of metaphysics is focused on distinguishing different fields in which judgments are performed, and to which specific human capacities belong. In the field of experience, judgments order objects according to *a priori* concepts of the understanding. In the field of reason, the judgments of experience are ordered according to rational principles – the ideas of reason – that unify these judgments by thinking them as ordered in the whole of possible experience (according to the specific rule which the principle expresses, e.g. "all change is caused in a complete infinite series of cause and effect").<sup>84</sup> The 'objects' of the ideas, *noumena*, transcend the field of experience because of this function of expressing the unity of all possible experience. Therefore, Kant makes clear, "dieses transzendente Ding ist bloß das Schema jenes regulativen Prinzips, wodurch die Vernunft, so viel an ihr ist, systematische Einheit über alle Erfahrung verbreitet."<sup>85</sup> As is the case when the thing-in-itself, the most famous *noumenon*, is considered, it is therefore quite hard to determine precisely what kind of objects the ideas represent, and how we can think them. For example, in the *Prolegomena*, Kant seems in two paragraphs to first say that reason does not point to particular objects at all, and subsequently that it searches *noumena* beyond experience.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, in the *Critique's* chapter on *Phaenomena and Noumena*, Kant makes explicit that the ambiguity that he introduces could cause grave misunderstandings. From hindsight, however, it is easy to conclude that his effort in this chapter to avoid the misunderstanding did not really help: "Wenn wir unter Noumenon ein Ding verstehen, so fern es nicht Objekt unserer sinnlichen

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schon Begriff) bezogen. Das Urteil ist also die mittelbare Erkenntnis eines Gegenstandes, mithin die Vorstellung einer Vorstellung desselben." *KrV* A68/B93. Wayne Martin calls the necessity of manyness "Kant's synthetic construal of judgment", Martin, "Fichte's Logical Legacy: Thetic Judgment from the *Wissenschaftslehre* to Brentano", in: Waibel, Violetta, Breazeale, Daniel, Rockmore, Tom (eds.), *Fichte and the Phenomenological Tradition* (Berlin 2010) 383.

<sup>82</sup> *KrV* A20/B34.

<sup>83</sup> Besides the mentioned one between sensibility and understanding, the most notable one of course is the thing-in-itself/appearance dualism.

<sup>84</sup> *KrV* A306/B362. For a precise categorization of all sorts of representations, see A320/B377.

<sup>85</sup> *KrV* A682/B710.

<sup>86</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant's gesammelte Schriften, Akademieausgabe* (Berlin 1900-) IV 332, 333.

*Anschauung* ist, indem wir von unserer Anschauungsart desselben abstrahieren: so ist dieses ein Noumenon im *negativen* Verstande. Verstehen wir aber darunter ein *Objekt einer nichtsinnlichen Anschauung*, so nehmen wir eine besondere Anschauungsart an, nämlich die intellektuelle, die aber nicht die unsrige ist, von welcher wir auch die Möglichkeit nicht einsehen können, und das wäre das Noumenon in *positiver* Bedeutung.”<sup>87</sup> While Kant dismisses the positive meaning, his elaborate discussion of its possible possibility does not completely match his strong conclusion that we cannot have the least representation of this possibility of an intelligible object.<sup>88</sup>

Traditionally, the main candidates for *noumena* are pretty clear: the soul, freedom<sup>89</sup>, and God. According to Kant, the main fault of traditional/dogmatic metaphysicians is to not recognize the distinctions between the fields of reason and understanding.<sup>90</sup> Because they ignore this, they hold their transcendent application of concepts of the understanding to objects of ideas to be a basis for knowledge. This is what Kant calls transcendental illusion. To avoid this mistake, and to protect a regulative use of the ideas of reason – a tendency inherent in human reason, i.e. unavoidable<sup>91</sup> – Kant examines the ideas that stem from this faculty, and more specifically, the wrong types of judgments we make when we conflate objects of reason with objects of the experience.

## 2.2. The antinomy of reason

The fallacy that the inferences of reason commit is considering the ‘object’ of the idea to be an object of knowledge. The necessary ‘as if’ that guides the regulative use of reason is ignored. Because of this, the dogmatic metaphysician presents a result that cannot be tested in experience, and that therefore can be neither falsified nor proven. More interesting in the context of the comparison with Hölderlin, however, is the type of inference that leads to results that stand in contradiction; a result which Kant calls an antinomy. To compare *Urtheil und Seyn’s* result with the *Antinomy of Pure Reason* does not imply that Hölderlin’s concept of Being is exclusively tied to cosmology (the Ideal of reason in theology is as apt for comparison), or that the postulation of Being as precondition of judgment is of the same nature as the kind of inference which leads to the antinomy of reason (it could as well be a paralogue, and is closer to the substantial than to the complete series of conditions). Nonetheless, the result of the reasoning in rational cosmology that comprises the *Antinomy of Pure Reason* seems very akin to the problem expressed in *Urtheil und Seyn*. The contradiction that reason falls prey to in this section of the *Critique* will therefore be scrutinized.

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<sup>87</sup> *KrV* B307-309. Note that this passage was added in the 1787 version, to address the “Zweideutigkeit, welche großen Mißverstand veranlassen kann”.

<sup>88</sup> The historical career of Kant’s “unbekanntes Etwas überhaupt” can be understood from this ambiguity, which is reflected in Kant’s practical philosophy and in his attempt to unite his critical system. It furthermore bears at least some resemblance to the tension in Hölderlin’s thought central to this thesis. *KrV* A254/B310-A256/B312. Cf. Karl Ameriks on the ‘poison’ of Kant’s *Critique* and its historical reflections, Ameriks, “The critique of metaphysics: The structure and fate of Kant’s dialectic”, in: Paul Guyer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge 2006) 285-295, or Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 171.

<sup>89</sup> Listed here in order of appearance in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, it would be more correct to call the object of the *Antinomy* the totality of conditions of all appearances, were not freedom (or determinism) the most imaginative object discussed in this section of the *Critique*.

<sup>90</sup> And respectively, the distinctions between idea and concept, *noumenon* and *phaenomenon*.

<sup>91</sup> *KrV* A339/B397. See Michelle Grier, “The Logic of Illusion and the Antinomies”, in: Bird, Graham (ed.), *A Companion to Kant* (Malden 2006) 196-199 for why transcendental illusion is unavoidable.

In the antinomy of reason, the infinite regress of the series of conditions of a conditioned object of experience is a central problem.<sup>92</sup> In its quest of searching for the absolute completeness of such a series of conditions, reason seems to have two options: it can either attempt to accept that the series is infinite and nonetheless think it as a whole, or it can think an absolute beginning and end of the series to prevent the infinite regress, so that the completion of the series becomes comprehensible. The theses that reason thinks in either of these attempts can have no object in experience. Yet reason has no less come to contradiction, and cannot but accept that the reasoning that led into this situation is valid.

What kind of reasoning precisely is this? First I will shortly explain how reason comes to form the four cosmological ideas, and then I will assess what it is for the theses concerning these ideas to be antinomical. The four antinomies that Kant distinguishes are based on the four classes of categories (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) being subjected to the main principle of reason, which underlies the whole of the *Dialectic*, i.e.: “If the conditioned is given, the entire series of all conditions, and consequently the absolute unconditioned, is also given, whereby alone the former is possible.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, if the conditioned is given, reason searches for the condition which makes it possible, and the condition of the condition, in infinite regression. Since the conditioned is given to us in intuition, as an appearance in space and time, the antinomies follow from applying the main principle of reason to these “ursprünglichen quanta” in which the conditioned is given to us, and their relation to the sensible objects represented in them.<sup>94</sup> For each of the four classes of categories, one cosmological idea is found in this way.<sup>95</sup>

I will present the antinomy that is connected to the first of these ideas to exhibit reason’s dialectic. In this antinomy, reason demands absolute totality of the chain of conditions in space and time.<sup>96</sup> In the search for this, a thesis is posited that claims that the series has to have a beginning, and an antithesis that says the series has to be infinite. To be able to conclude that their claims must be right, both positions argue indirectly, by assuming the opposite thesis and deducing a contradiction, showing the result to be absurd. Hence, the negation of the conclusion must be adopted – yet then, this antithesis performs the same *reductio ad absurdum*, concluding the correctness of what has just been proven false.<sup>97</sup> The result is a balance of mutually eliminating theses that are both true; a skeptical equipollence that, if no fallacy can be exposed, traditionally leads to a suspension of judgment. In the example of the set of theses of this antinomy:

Thesis: The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space. For if there would be no such beginning or limit, then an infinite amount of time must have preceded the present moment, and an infinite amount of space must have been intuited as a whole. Both of these corollaries is contradictory and hence impossible: if

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<sup>92</sup> KrV A411/B438.

<sup>93</sup> KrV A409/B436. Cf. Grier, “The Logic of Illusion and the Antinomies” 196-199, and Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven 2006) 329-332 for the contention that this principle is basic to reason, and Kant in the introduction to the *Transcendental Dialectic*, section C, “Of the pure use or reason”, KrV A305/B362 – A309/B366. I will return to the meaning of this principle in the context of the comparison with Hölderlin.

<sup>94</sup> KrV A411/B438.

<sup>95</sup> KrV A412/B439 – A415/B442.

<sup>96</sup> KrV A413/B440.

<sup>97</sup> Roy Sorensen explains vividly this dynamic, and its similarity to Sextus Empiricus’ method of equipollence. Roy Sorensen, *A Brief History of the Paradox. Philosophy and the Labyrinths of the Mind* (Oxford 2003) 288-295.

an infinite amount of time has to be elapsed, the present moment would never be reached; if an infinite amount of space has to be intuited, the intuition would never be finished. Both aspects must thus be rejected for the same reason: the impossibility of an infinite series to be complete. Therefore, a beginning or limit has to prevent the world from being infinite.<sup>98</sup>

Antithesis: The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space. For if the world would have a beginning in time, then a nothing in empty time must be presupposed in which the condition for the beginning of the world would lie. And if the world would have a limited space, then an empty space would limit this space. Both are contradictory, however: in an empty time, no condition for the beginning of the world could be present, and so the world would not begin, and an empty space would be nothing, and so nothing cannot possibly limit anything. Therefore, no beginning or limit can be accepted, hence the world must be infinite as regards time and space.<sup>99</sup>

So, the thesis and the antithesis both effectively prove of their own truth from their opposite's falsity. That is, they are both true and false: true because the other is false, and false because they are inherently contradictory, hence impossible. In this way, the contradiction inherent in the object of this cosmological idea (the totality of an infinite series) leads to two sound arguments that stand in contradiction. The result is that we can affirm nor reject the thesis that the world is infinite as regards space and time. When we affirm it, we fall in contradiction, and when we reject it, likewise. This sounds familiar: when Being is affirmed in judgment, the result is a judgment that contradicts the conditions of its own possibility<sup>100</sup>, hence is impossible, and when Being is rejected, the result is a judgment that lacks the first of its necessary conditions<sup>101</sup>, and hence is contradictory and impossible. So, we can affirm nor reject the thesis that Being is a necessary precondition of thought. The reasoning that leads to this conclusion is very akin to that of the presented antinomy: the proof of the thesis lies in the impossibility of the antithesis and vice versa. That is:

Thesis: Being is a necessary condition of judgment. For if there would be no ground for the unity expressed in synthesis, then no separation nor synthesis would be possible. Furthermore, the main fact of reflected life, self-consciousness, could not be explained, because infinite regress would make it impossible for judgment to find identity between subject and object. Therefore, Being has to be postulated.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Partly summarized, partly paraphrased version of *KrV* A426/B454 – A429/457, making use of English presentations by Sorensen, *A Brief History of the Paradox* 288-289, and Grier, "The Logic of Illusion and the Antinomies" 200-201.

<sup>99</sup> Same proceeding as thesis; Ibidem.

<sup>100</sup> I.e. it attempts to express complete unity through difference, One through many.

<sup>101</sup> I.e. it lacks the concept of unity that makes synthesis possible.

<sup>102</sup> A reminder on the impossibility of denying the necessity of Being can be found in the fragment *Über den Unterschied der Dichtarten*: "jene Einigkeit mit allem, was lebt, die zwar von dem beschränkteren Gemüte nicht gefühlt, die in seinen höchsten Bestrebungen nur geahndet, aber vom Geiste erkannt werden kann und aus der Unmöglichkeit einer absoluten Trennung und Vereinzelung hervorgeht [...]". *StA* IV 278.

Antithesis: Being cannot be postulated. For if Being could be accepted, then judgment would be able to postulate that which is defined as impossible to reach in judgment, and hence is impossible to postulate, which is contradictory.<sup>103</sup>

Kant's solution to the antinomy of reason is well-known: transcendental idealism distinguishes between the world in-itself as 'object' of an idea, and the phenomenal world as standing under the conditions of the two pure forms of intuition, space and time. In experience, we may therefore very well search for an infinite continuation of series of conditions, but our own finite situation does not allow us to know whether this series *really is* infinite or not – this is a matter of things-in-themselves, which reason thinks as *noumena* to lead the understanding towards completion of series of conditions. However, as the antinomies show, reason may very well guide the understanding in this quest, but cannot constitute knowledge on this matter on its own.

Totality can therefore only be an idea that regulates our rational conduct, by representing it as if it were an object of knowledge, in order to attempt to rationally order as much as possible our knowledge in the idea of a complete system. The first two antinomies show that we can make no *a priori* decision between an absolute beginning of a series, or an absolute totality of a series. Even though reason is able to think the unconditioned and complete infinite series, the result of its reasoning when it is applied to the conditions of experience proves uninformative.<sup>104</sup> As Kant argued in the opening citation of this chapter: "Denn der Gegenstand kann euch niemals vorkommen, weil er durch keine mögliche Erfahrung gegeben werden kann. Ihr bleibt mit allen möglichen Wahrnehmungen immer unter Bedingungen, es sei im Raume, oder in der Zeit, befangen, und kommt an nichts Unbedingtes, um auszumachen, ob dieses Unbedingte in einem absoluten Anfange der Synthesis, oder einer absoluten Totalität der Reihe, ohne allen Anfang, zu setzen sei."<sup>105</sup> The principles of pure reason and the concepts of the understanding are both instructive in their particular domain, but run into error when conflated. In the case of the first two antinomies, judgment on their theses and anti-theses should therefore truly be withheld; the question which they try to answer turns out to be misguided. In the case of the second two, thesis and anti-thesis are referred to their particular domain, and may both stand. As long as reason does not conflate the domains in which they are lawful, the antinomy of these theses proves illusory, and thereby disappears.

### 2.3. Judgment and Being; antinomy of pure reason?

Is Kant's solution applicable to the contradiction that lies at the heart of judgment? Is this contradiction an antinomy, and can it be resolved in one of the two ways? In the *Antithetic of*

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<sup>103</sup> While Manfred Frank acknowledges the radicalness of this position, which entails that immediate contact with Being cannot be made in consciousness, and that intellectual intuition has to be opposed to consciousness, his argument for the necessity of Being still shows that this argument itself is contradictory as well: "[...] es kann nicht gedacht werden (denn denken ist urteilen, urteilen ist unterscheiden); und doch kann ich mich seiner nicht entschlagen, weil, ohne eine gründende Einheit der Bezugsglieder zu *postulieren*, die tatsächliche und evidente Erfahrung des >Ich bin Ich< – also die Ichidentität – unerklärt bleiben müßte." Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 63. The stress on "postulieren" is mine; it exhibits the paradox of postulating that which cannot be thought.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Karl Ameriks for a strong interpretation of the role of the unconditioned in Kant's account of reason. Ameriks, "The critique of metaphysics" 285-291.

<sup>105</sup> *KrV* A483/B511.

*Pure Reason*, Kant defines the conditions which a principle has to satisfy in order to lead into antinomy.<sup>106</sup> At least two of these conditions Hölderlin would definitely agree to:

*Ein dialektischer Lehrsatz der reinen Vernunft muß [...] dieses, ihn von allen sophistischen Sätzen Unterscheidendes, an sich haben, daß er nicht eine willkürliche Frage betrifft, die man nur in gewisser beliebiger Absicht aufwirft, sondern eine solche, auf die jede menschliche Vernunft in ihrem Fortgange notwendig stoßen muß; und zweitens, daß er, mit seinem Gegensatze, nicht bloß einen gekünstelten Schein, der, wenn man ihn einsieht, sogleich verschwindet, sondern einen natürlichen und unvermeidlichen Schein bei sich führe, der selbst, wenn man nicht mehr durch ihn hindergangen wird, noch immer täuscht obschon nicht betrügt, und also zwar unschädlich gemacht, aber niemals vertilgt werden kann.<sup>107</sup>*

To Hölderlin, the question of Being definitely is no contingent question, but instead the main metaphysical question and task which humanity faces.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, the necessity of the appearance of the contradiction has already been satisfyingly pointed at. The difference regarding this second condition, however, is that for Kant, the contradiction is accompanied by a necessary *illusion*, while for Hölderlin, it is necessary *and real*. That is, in Hölderlin's theory of judgment, the contradiction cannot be recognized as an illusionary result of a wrong use of reason, because it is the product of the postulation of judgment's very own transcendental conditions. So, no therapeutic *Critique* can help us to stop being tricked by the contradiction, and to disarm it. In the following, this point must be further explained in order to understand and rightly evaluate the (rather bold) moves that succeed the acceptance of contradiction.

Besides the second of the above mentioned conditions for being a *dialektischer Lehrsatz*, other conditions that Kant mentions do also not apply to Hölderlin's contradiction. These help to appreciate its difference from Kant's *Antithetic* of reason. One is the capacity of reason to think the unconditioned, despite the contradictions this results in; Kant never denied to reason this capacity. While he attributed the flaw of dogmatic philosophy in conflating the domain of reason with the domain of the understanding, he did not hold reason to be incapable to think the mysterious objects of the ideas as *noumena*.<sup>109</sup> Another

<sup>106</sup> *KrV* A420/B448 – A425/B453.

<sup>107</sup> *KrV* A421/B449 – A422/B450.

<sup>108</sup> Many claims in different contexts exhibit this attitude of Hölderlin, e.g. his drive towards the infinite in the *Entwurf* of *Hyperion*, which is displayed by Hyperion throughout the story. Another source would be *Über die Verfahrungsweise des poetischen Geistes*, where the destination of mankind is announced to free oneself from the “notwendigen Widerstreite” and find at least some form of harmony – “welche darin besteht, daß er sich als Einheit in Göttlichem-Harmoniscentgegengesetztem enthalten, so wie umgekehrt, das Göttliche, Einige, Harmoniscentgegengesetzte, in sich, als Einheit enthalten erkenne.” *StA* IV 265, 269. What this precisely amounts to cannot be assessed now, but the task we face, connected to reaching mature humanity, is clear enough.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Ameriks, who claims that “Kant is not only saying that the “unconditioned” is demanded by reason “with right,” but he is also immediately and explicitly indicating that it is present within his own system. He does not refer merely to a spurious unconditioned in the thoughts of other systems or in the mistakes of some kind of totally suspect faculty. The issue he focuses on, remarkably, is *not* the mistake of affirming the unconditioned as such but instead that of treating what is sensible as if it could be unconditioned.” While Ameriks' interpretation may be a bit too strong, he does point at a tendency which I hold Hölderlin to further criticize. Ameriks, “The critique of metaphysics” 286.

(related) condition is the absence of criteria for reason's activity when it is used transcendently. This gives rise to principles, "die in der Erfahrung weder Bestätigung hoffen, noch Widerlegung fürchten dürfen, und deren jeder nicht allein an sich selbst ohne Widerspruch ist, sondern so gar in der Natur der Vernunft Bedingungen seiner Notwendigkeit antrifft, nur daß unglücklicher Weise der Gegensatz eben so gültige und notwendige Gründe der Behauptung auf seiner Seite hat."<sup>110</sup> The most dangerous characteristic of reason, according to Kant, is its power to *think anything* without being restrained by empirical evidence. This is a critique of rationalism that focuses on the dangers that come with the wrong use of the *strength* of reason.<sup>111</sup> It stands in stark contrast with Hölderlin's critique, which diagnoses the *weaknesses* of our human capacities. Hölderlin's account of judgment should therefore be strongly contrasted to this, so that his amplification of Kant's *Critique* of reason comes in full view.<sup>112</sup>

Hölderlin's amplification of Kant's *Critique* can be described by mentioning three connected elements. First, as already mentioned, the contradiction which judgment finds itself in when it postulates the conditions of its possibility is no chimera of pure reason, but a problem that is indissolubly connected to our existential situation. Secondly, and in extension to this, reason is confronted with a more severe limitation during the search for the conditions of its possibility: the capacity which Kant granted it, to think the unconditioned as *noumenon*, actually proves defective. Although Kant addressed something similar in the *Dialectic*, the scope of Hölderlin's diagnosis has widened radically. For, thirdly, the distinction which Kant drew between *noumena* and *phenomena* to secure reason's immanent use, and to regulate its transcendent use, does no longer help when the conditions of judgment are investigated. This is because in this investigation, it becomes clear that the Kantian distinction is traced back to a more radical opposition: between what we are able to think, and that which is inaccessible to thought. Being is referred to a completely transcendent realm, not merely inaccessible to the sensibility, but also to reason.

So, Hölderlin's problem is not solved by saying that reason can think the unconditioned as a *noumenon*. His distinction is not the Kantian distinction between what can be experienced, and what can 'merely' be thought.<sup>113</sup> It distinguishes between what can be thought, and what escapes thought. In other (more Kantian) words: Hölderlin's point is that while Kant suggested a regulative use of reason in the field of *noumena*, in reality no judgments can even be executed in this field, because the unconditioned escapes any performance of judgment. According to Hölderlin, the transcendent application of concepts

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<sup>110</sup> *KrV* A421/B449.

<sup>111</sup> A clear example of this positive perspective towards reason characteristic of Kant is the opening paragraph of *Von der Endabsicht der natürlichen Dialektik der menschlichen Vernunft* in the *Methodenlehre*, *KrV* A669/B697.

<sup>112</sup> From a Kantian perspective, it might be responded that Hölderlin's theory precisely leads to contradiction because he is not aware well enough of reason's limitations while doing philosophy. However, as will become clearer below, I hold Hölderlin's theory to be relative to a Fichtean way of starting philosophy, which understands a more extensive part of reason's apparatus as in need of justification than Kant did. Because of this more foundational perspective, our limitations with respect to the unconditioned are more problematic. So indeed, the aim of philosophy has extended beyond what Kant granted possible, but only to diagnose more drastically reason's incapacibilities, including capacities of which Kant thought that they are possible.

<sup>113</sup> That this is indeed Kant's solution is argued by Michelle Grier, who interprets the conflict of the antinomies as "the clash between different norms for thinking the unconditioned demanded by reason", and not the problem inherent in even attempting to think this, as Karl Ameriks confirms. Grier, "The Logic of Illusion and the Antinomies" 203-204, Ameriks, "The critique of metaphysics" 286-289.



of the understanding in the field of *noumena* is not possible at all, so suggesting a regulative use of reason in this field does not help. Moreover, the lack of performable judgments in this field makes it hard to conceive whether there even is a field of *noumena*. In contrast to Kant's *Critique*, the application of the distinction between what can be thought, and what escapes thought, has no room for positive results beside the negative implications; concerning what transgresses the distinction, no positive claims can be made. To support this claim, I will point out why the Kantian solution to the *Antinomy* does not work in Hölderlin's case.

In the mathematical antinomies, the thesis and anti-thesis are recognized as stemming from a contradictory concept (the totality of the world of sense), and can thereby both be dismissed as objects of knowledge, since we could never check in experience their truth or falsity. In the case of the concept of 'Being', this is not an option: Being is a necessary condition of judgment, so however contradictory it is in judgment, it cannot be thereby dismissed.<sup>114</sup> So, judgment on this matter cannot be postponed, because both the thesis and anti-thesis are necessary – as judgment cannot be postponed.

In the dynamical antinomies, reason shows the contradiction to be an apparent one, because the two theses operate on different levels: the first is valid on the level of the *phenomena*, the second can be thought by reason on the level of the *noumena*. May Hölderlin's problem be solved in a similar manner, so that the paradox turns out to be an apparent one as well? One could say that the impossibility of transcending the many holds on the level of judgment, while it does not need to hold on the level of (some kind of) feeling. The problem, however, is reinforced when it is acknowledged that the theory on judgment is a theory on the possibility of consciousness in general. Arguing for a Kantian distinction would therefore imply that a level of non-consciousness is argued for. Granting the subject a faculty to be active on this level would therefore be as self-contradictory as granting that absolute Being is the complete unity of subject and object.

This is not to say that Hölderlin's contradiction does not fit the structure of the antinomies. It has in common with the *Antinomy* the mutual incompatibility of theses, and the aim of providing insight into our limitations.<sup>115</sup> And certainly, the solution to the dynamical ones does hint at routes that were chosen to explain our contact with the absolute: accounts of intellectual intuition, aesthetic sense or immediate feeling that in some way provide a field and a capacity to be active in this field, like Kant saw reason active in the field of the beings of reason (*Vernunftwesen*).<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, when the result of *Urtheil und Seyn* is accepted, a solution cannot lie in merely distinguishing between *fields* or *capacities*; the one field in which we are really interested, that of Being, is necessarily contradictory to us.

So, Hölderlin extends Kant's critique of metaphysics, since he shows that in the area that he considers the core of metaphysics, the one thing which we cannot do is avoid self-contradiction. While Kant presented theses and anti-theses which, when considered in isolation, cannot be refuted, Hölderlin presents *the thesis* of metaphysics (in which the Absolute is posited) as essentially self-contradictory. Furthermore, even though Kant made

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<sup>114</sup> This might be considered a shame, since many modern/analytic philosophers would like to see this problem solved in the manner of the mathematical antinomies: forget about Being, it is unintelligible as a goal or starting point.

<sup>115</sup> Kant calls this the instrumental use of the 'skeptical method'; *KrV* A424/B452: "Die Antinomie, die sich in der Anwendung der Gesetze offenbart, ist bei unserer eingeschränkten Weisheit der beste Prüfungsversuch der Nomothetik, um die Vernunft, die in abstrakter Spekulation ihre Fehlritte nicht leicht gewahrt wird, dadurch auf die Momente in Bestimmung ihrer Grundsätze aufmerksam zu machen."

<sup>116</sup> *KrV* A681/B710.

clear that no knowledge could be the result of the transcendent use of reason, he still held reason to be able to think absolute completeness by making transcendent use of the logical concepts of the understanding. Hölderlin, by contrast, showed that such generalization is inherently impossible, i.e., that the concept of absolute unity cannot be thought.

From another perspective, equally justified and probably regarded as much more genuinely 'Romantic', the metaphysical 'dogmatism'<sup>117</sup> is extended too in Hölderlin, because the self-contradiction is affirmed, that is, accepted; *as real*. From a Kantian perspective, this may be considered as a step that even the rational dogmatists did not dare, since they too treasured the principle of non-contradiction. Moreover, no illusion of reason is needed to trick us into this metaphysics: we at once recognize the thesis to be impossible and true. Surely, reason stops at the self-contradiction. Yet this is no reason for Hölderlin to reject this result. So, this is how the 'praeter-rational', the non-discursive, the aesthetic, the intuitive, the pre-reflective, or even the irrational is arrived at that dominates the historical studies on Romanticism.<sup>118</sup> While it is recognized that reason cannot continue the search for Being after our confrontation with its limitations, this cannot mean the end of the search.

In the above, I hope to have already partly shown that the route to this result is far from unreflective or whimsical. Further, my aim is to make intelligible the effect of the vigorous analysis of, and focus on, the limitations which we face in the quest for Being. As Kant claimed to be the objective of his Critical enterprise, *Urtheil und Seyn* can on my view be considered an attempt to criticize judgment, in order to make room for faith. To illuminate what kind of 'faith' this would be, and what the object of it would amount to, however, first the difference between Hölderlin and Kant has to be appreciated; a difference that arose in the battle of Kantians and skeptics, and that focused on the first decisions which philosophy has to take in order to secure certainty.

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<sup>117</sup> In the sense that it goes beyond the Kantian strictures to knowledge.

<sup>118</sup> Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 67, Beiser, *German Idealism* 373, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, *The Literary Absolute* 7-15, Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel* 37-38.

### 3. Fichte on the function of the Absolute in a system of knowledge

In the debate on how to continue the Critical project, an important issue consisted in whether the results of Kant's philosophy should be further worked out, or if this philosophy first needed a more solid basis of certainty before these results could be used. The reason to demand such a more solid basis was the presence of the earlier mentioned revived form of Humean skepticism. While the previous chapter started and closed by referring to the skeptics, I will now introduce the demands of e.g. Schulze/Aenesidemus and Maimon a bit more explicitly, in order not again to have to close the chapter by paying them attention; i.e., in order to explain why they are important with respect to what I have called the amplification of critique in Hölderlin, and to understand their role in the debate on the aims and capacities that would be appropriate for philosophy and rational thought in general. For, between Kant and Fichte, an abyss appears that separates their understanding of the task of philosophy, and that affects radically which elements of philosophy can be *presupposed*, and which cannot, i.e. which are in need of justification, and demand *deduction* out of higher and absolutely certain principles.

Furthermore, as I will attempt to demonstrate, Hölderlin mainly adopted the Fichtean understanding of philosophy, so it would help to assess the implications of the result of the previous chapter if Fichte's response to the skeptical charges became clear. That is, Hölderlin's perspective on the limitations of our cognitive capacities with respect to finding Being is informed by Fichte's explanation of the structure of judgment. Therefore, Fichte's reaction to skepticism will be explored in order to present his understanding of the problem of searching for Being, and his take on the meaning of such a search. Meanwhile, the Kantian maxim not to violate the strictures to knowledge remains intact, and so the question arises how the tasks imposed on philosophy by the new wave of skepticism can be answered without relapsing into metaphysical dogmatism.<sup>119</sup> In the words of the previous analyses: how, if at all, can the operation of judgment be secured without accepting the problematic self-contradiction which arises when the unconditioned is postulated as first principle for philosophy?

In this chapter, the invocation of Fichte hence has two aims: to show the change in requirements which philosophy has to satisfy in order to secure human consciousness from skeptical doubt, and to present an indication of how Fichte can be interpreted as having attempted this without claiming knowledge of the Absolute (I). Subsequently, the systematic relation of Hölderlin's theory of judgment and Being to this interpretation of Fichte will be assessed in order to show the great resemblance of his theory of judgment to Fichte's, and to mark the point of divergence between the two. Specifically, the systematic resemblance lies in the effect of the necessity of opposition (as explained in 1.1) on the possibility of incorporating absolute unity in philosophical theory (1.2). This comes down to the problem

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<sup>119</sup> For Hölderlin's awareness of this danger, see his letter to Hegel, where he comments on Fichte: "Anfangs hatt ich ihn sehr im Verdacht des Dogmatismus; er scheint, wenn ich mutmaßen darf, auch wirklich auf dem Scheidewege gestanden zu sein, oder noch zu stehn – er möchte über das Faktum des Bewußtseins in der Theorie hinaus, das zeigen sehr viele seine Äußerungen, und das ist ebenso gewiß, und noch auffallender transcendent, als wenn die bisherigen Metaphysiker über das Dasein der Welt hinaus wollten". *StA* IV 155. Beiser frames the whole of Early Romanticism, or what he calls 'Absolute Idealism', as a response to the task of saving philosophy from skepticism *and* meeting Kant's maxim. However, on my view, he does so by overemphasizing (or even projecting his own) interest in building grand theories to *solve* big problems on part of the Romantics, while at least in the case of Hölderlin, this will on my interpretation not be the main strategy to deal with the problem that I have laid out above. That is, no redeeming theoretic solutions as Beiser portrays will so easily present itself. Beiser, *German Idealism* 368-374, 391.

that the One cannot be reached through the many. I will therefore interpret Fichte as distinguishing strictly between these two categories, and I will claim that this helps to understand that Hölderlin and Fichte agreed on fundamental matters. The divergence, though, mainly consists in their attitude towards this result: should the absolute unity nonetheless be implemented, with the necessary caveats, in a deduction in which it functions in relation to the results which it grounds? (Fichte) Or should the Absolute rather be upheld as non-relative unity of all, and of sublime value in itself? (Hölderlin)

Again, similar to the previous chapter, the comparison between the two thinkers will be of systematic nature, in this case because of a hermeneutic hypothesis which I wish to defend: that Hölderlin misunderstood Fichte, and therefore wrongly accused him of defending a position which Fichte would agree is not possible. Furthermore, on my interpretation of Fichte's philosophy, Hölderlin's argument in *Urtheil und Seyn* was closer to Fichte than Hölderlin was aware of. However, let's now stop the warming-up announcements and anticipations, and argue for this later.

### 3.1. From Kant to Fichte

In reaction to Kant's endeavor to secure the certainty of experience, to deduce the actuality of *a priori* knowledge as necessary condition of the possibility of experience, and to protect human reason from the errors that are the result of its transcendent use (i.e. by developing transcendental idealism; distinguishing between appearance and thing in itself), some different strategies were employed to prove that Criticism was not yet rid of skepticism. I have already mentioned a few of them in my discussion of Hölderlin on self-consciousness in chapter one; now, I will (non-exhaustively) enumerate them while referring to connected authors in the footnotes. These strategies are: (1) asking by what justification reason has the capacity to criticize *itself*, (2) doubting whether the *a priori* principles of Kant's transcendental deduction are applied during our actual cognitive activity, (3) demanding proof for the correspondence of our knowledge to the world (from a transcendental realist perspective), and (4) pointing at the infinite regress that we fall victim to in the search for certain, first, or 'original' grounds for our knowledge. In general, this last strategy most skeptical attacks have in common: the awareness of problematic circularity, of the impossibility of absolutely certain points of reference, and of philosophy as an infinite task to nonetheless find such milestones in order to not lose all of our orientation in this world. This last strategy may be more aptly called anti-foundationalism, but I consider it the most relevant form of skeptical doubt in the context of Fichte and Hölderlin, and therefore treat it as an important element of the challenges of post-Kantian skepticism.

I will briefly expound the problems which the four strategies raise. However, I cannot extensively discuss here all these strategies and the ways in which they can be countered. Much literature has been written on these topics; I will merely mention the new tasks they forced philosophy to take up, in order to mark the difference between Kant and Fichte.<sup>120</sup>

1. If philosophy acknowledges that its activity is rational, and that it first has to thoroughly criticize reason to ensure certainty, then the activity of Kant's *Critique* faces the problem that it cannot be sure of its results, since these results depend on

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<sup>120</sup> Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, first and second part of the lecture series, 67-661, Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* 96-112, 140-156, Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* 37-43, 266-326, Paul Franks, *All or Nothing. Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge 2005), Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 83-116.

reason, which is not yet criticized before the execution of the *Critique*.<sup>121</sup> This either is one of the circles which philosophy faces, and it is hard to see how we can ever escape it. Or, it issues the ironical idea that *Critique* is in need of *Meta-Critique*, although the advocates of *Meta-Critique* understand very well that if this move were based on (pure) Reason (alone), it would itself be in need of *Meta-meta-Critique, ad infinitum*.<sup>122</sup>

To counter this challenge, philosophy has to reflect more on its own method.<sup>123</sup> That is, it has to make explicit the relation between its own activity, and the object which it attempts to ground or describe. In this way, metaphilosophical considerations become more important in epistemology. Furthermore, for Fichte, the self-awareness of the philosopher indeed leads to the acknowledgement of the earlier mentioned circularity in the transcendental deduction, and to a reflection on how we can accept circularity in philosophical theory without thereby abiding that all arguments and proofs always merely beg the question.<sup>124</sup>

2. If Kant held it to be the task of the *Transcendental Deduction* to solve the *quid juris?* question on experience while presuming a positive answer to *quid facti?*, then the rational principles which are the result of the deduction are not indisputably applicable to the actual empirical content of sensation.<sup>125</sup> This is because the correspondence between factual experience and the deduced rational principles is not warranted. The skeptic therefore only has to again ask the Critical philosopher, *quid facti?* How can you be sure that experience, in the (very complex) manner in which you have thought it, is in fact the actual way in which we really experience things?<sup>126</sup> If this question cannot be answered satisfyingly, then Critical philosophy still has not shown that its principles are the principles of *our* actual experience.

To respond to this, philosophy must not only explain our ordinary realism, i.e., the common-sense belief that we live in a world in which we are surrounded by objects that are external to us. In addition, philosophy should prove the necessity and exclusivity of the deduced transcendental principles for actual consciousness, and it should also prove that actual consciousness is the basis of all knowledge which could be of interest *for us*. The latter is to prevent charges that stem from some domain of 'ordinary reality' (i.e. transcendental realism): transcendental philosophy has to prove

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<sup>121</sup> Surely, there are ways to counter this challenge while holding on to Kant, and many have attempted/succeeded in explaining how the *Critique of Pure Reason's* argument satisfies this requirement. Yet the aim here is merely to present the new challenges; this one has been carried out by e.g. Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Salomon Maimon.

<sup>122</sup> That is why Hamann suggests to give up the trust in pure reason, and accept the necessity of history, tradition, common sense and most of all language for philosophy. Johann Georg Hamann, "Metakritik über den Purismus der Vernunft (1784)", in: Josef Simon (ed.), J.G. Hamann. *Schriften zur Sprache* (Frankfurt 1967) 219-227. See Beiser on the *Metakritik's* content and historical significance, *The Fate of Reason* 38-43.

<sup>123</sup> See Daniel Breazeale, "Die synthetische(n) Methode(n) des Philosophierens. Kantische Fragen, Fichtesche Antworten", in: Jürgen Stolzenberg (ed.), *System der Vernunft. Kant und der Frühidealismus* (Hamburg 2007) 81-102, 86 for an exposition of the contrast between Kant and Fichte in their awareness of philosophical methodology, and for Fichte's expression in a letter to Reinhold, that Kant had not philosophized enough about philosophy.

<sup>124</sup> E.g. in presuming logic in order to start the deduction, and in being aware that the philosophical description already applies results of the chain of conditions that are not yet derived when the first principles are posited.

<sup>125</sup> *KrV* A84/B116.

<sup>126</sup> Salomon Maimon, *Salomon Maimon's Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie* (Berlin 1793) 50-53, 57-58.

that all reality is confined to the consciousness which it grounds.<sup>127</sup> The former prevents cognitive capacities from becoming castles in the sky: their reality is grounded in their necessary and exclusive function in the only domain which is real to us: human consciousness.

3. If experience ensures the certainty of knowledge by confining judgment to objects as they *appear to us*, while granting that they remain unknown to us in themselves, then we are still not sure whether our knowledge corresponds to ‘the real world’, since the causal link between the thing in itself and the appearance is no object of experience.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, from a transcendental realist standpoint it can be claimed that, since none of our cognitive capacities that function in guaranteeing experience are themselves objects of experience, they must be things in themselves, i.e. entirely unknown to us, and not apt to understand or ensure anything.<sup>129</sup>

A similar answer applies to these accusations: there is no real world but the world that we experience; no thing in itself but the thing in itself that we think; no sense in which we can philosophize on these ‘matters’ but the sense of our consciousness and its transcendental conditions.<sup>130</sup> Transcendental realism appears as a naïve form of philosophy that conflates ordinary realism with the transcendental standpoint, which merely has as its task to ground our ordinary belief in the external world; its grounds themselves are necessarily no objects of experience, and hypostazing them as objects in the world is based on a conflation of the two standpoints.

4. The main response to post-Kantian skepticism has not been mentioned in these three approaches: it was to secure the results of Kant’s philosophy by deducing them from higher principles. The problems that have been raised against this strategy, however, are numerous and precarious, and closely related to Hölderlin’s problem. For it can be asked: how to be sure of principles that can themselves not be grounded, as this would commission infinite regress? And how to then decide which principle is the first, since any presentation of reasons for this, or activity of searching for it, would again involve applying the very cognitive apparatus that has to be deduced out of it, leading to the earlier mentioned problematic circularity?<sup>131</sup>

To these questions, the answer is complex: first, some form of immediate certainty of the first principle is necessary, but then secondly, to make the circularity less problematic, this principle can only first be proven when the whole of the transcendental deduction of the system of human knowledge has been successful. This means that, in the end, the first principle is established more in virtue of its effectivity in relation to the results of the deduction (e.g. a system of human

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<sup>127</sup> Timmy de Goeij, “Fichte’s Doctrine of Intellectual Intuition within the Kantian Strictures to Knowledge”, *forthcoming* 12.

<sup>128</sup> Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich, *Werke, Gesamtausgabe* 2.1, eds. Hammacher, Klaus, Jaeschke, Walter (Hamburg 1998-) 103-112.

<sup>129</sup> Gottlob Ernst Schulze, “Aenesidemus (excerpt)”, transl. George di Giovanni, in: Idem, H.S. Harris (eds.), *Between Kant and Hegel. Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (New York 1985) 127.

<sup>130</sup> Most elaborately defended by Fichte in the *Aenesidemus Rezension*, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Fichtes sämtliche Werke [SW]* I, Fichte, Immanuel Hermann (ed.) (Berlin 1845) 1-25.

<sup>131</sup> Immanuel Niethammer, *Von den Ansprüchen des gemeinen Verstandes an die Philosophie*, *Philosophisches Journal* 1 (1795) 44.

knowledge which the first principle grounds), and not based on the certainty of the first principle as such.<sup>132</sup>

Since this last answer will be Fichte's, and the topic of the next paragraph, I will now first show the consequences of the new tasks that philosophy has to face by comparing the status of principles and concepts in Kant and Fichte. For in trying to find solutions to the mentioned problems, an awareness of the relation between these principles and concepts and their necessary preconditions arises, which radically changes the understanding of their status and capacity. It is this understanding which accounts for the amplification of critique in Hölderlin with respect to Kant. Therefore, it is important to see what this understanding encompasses. I will start by re-invoking Kant, then point at the vulnerability of his position to the mentioned skeptical objections, and conclude by explaining how Fichte's attempt at a solution takes a new and more fundamental perspective on philosophical judgment and its apparatus.

In Kant, unity is a logical category that stems from the understanding itself, and is used to explain how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible. If it can be shown that the categories apply to sensory data – that is, if the representations which stem from our sensibility and understanding can be combined in a consciousness in general, and acknowledged as forming an objective judgment – then the validity of the logical concept itself does not require further argument. For if it is proven that the function of the concept is a necessary condition of knowledge, then the actuality of the concept is inferred. This is why it makes sense for Kant to say that reason can think *anything*: reason can make transcendent use of the *a priori* concepts, combine them in an idea, add empirical content, etc. – the product of such use of reason will not be very useful, but no principal consideration prevents reason from thinking – for example – the complete unity of all.<sup>133</sup>

Furthermore, we find the concepts of the understanding by abstracting from the content of our knowledge till nothing remains but its logical form.<sup>134</sup> Since knowledge is based on unifying the manifold by performing judgments, and since judgments have logical forms when we abstract from their content (which can be enumerated exhaustively and systematically<sup>135</sup>), the categories have to run parallel to the table of logical forms.<sup>136</sup> Kant hence calls the power of judgment the 'principle' according to which the categories can be deduced satisfyingly, even though this is no principle in the sense of an absolute starting-point of a derivation, but rather a rule according to which the categories can be found and exhaustively categorized themselves. Whether the steps in this deduction really are satisfying is not up for discussion here. Instead, the point is merely that the transcendental deduction does not derive the categories from more basic premises, but rather proves their necessity as

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<sup>132</sup> Both Maimon and Niethammer consider this to be the only possible way to accept the use of principles in philosophy. For Maimon, in his *Briefwechsel* with Reinhold, however, they remain fictions which are only postulated because of their use in science. For Niethammer in the program text of his *Philosophisches Journal*, it is not yet certain whether a first principle is possible, but his later publication of texts by Fichte in this journal hints that the last paragraph of his text can be taken as a serious option to evade the skeptical consequences of the rest of the text. Maimon, *Salomon Maimon's Streifereien* 202, Niethammer, *Von den Ansprüchen* 45.

<sup>133</sup> *KrV* A320/B377.

<sup>134</sup> *KrV* A55/B79.

<sup>135</sup> *KrV* A70/B95.

<sup>136</sup> *KrV* A79/B105-A81/B107.

transcendental conditions of experience.<sup>137</sup> Further, it ‘finds’ them by abstracting from judgments of experience already present, since the factuality of experience is presumed, and takes them to originate when the forms of judgments are applied to intuition in general. That is, it accepts the concepts of the understanding to already lie in (actual) experience, and to be (more or less) coherent with the traditional concepts of logic, so that they can be found and determined successfully.<sup>138</sup>

In doing so, the earlier mentioned circularity and the *quid facti?* challenge is easily recognized: how can concepts that are found by presuming the factuality of experience ever prove this same factuality? How can we be sure that the forms and concepts which Kant finds are the same ones which we actually apply in our daily cognitive goings-about? And if we cannot, how is the whole body of principles then still grounded? Surely, Kant’s argumentation has rational merit, so that we may grant the rational coherence of his principles. But does this ensure the actual application of his philosophical theory, or is it just a coherent castle in the sky?

In this manner, Kant’s philosophy has been subjected to the skeptical endeavors of his contemporaries, which had to be tackled by making more explicit the status and aim of transcendental argumentation. In addition, it had to be made sure that only those elements of the deduction are presupposed which have to be presupposed *schlechthin*, and on whose absolute certainty the certainty of the whole chain of necessary conditions of experience rests. This had (among others) two important results for the principles and concepts that were deduced by Fichte as transcendental conditions of knowledge: one which tones down our expectations of the possible *aims* of philosophy, and makes clear that it is always only concerned with our own finite consciousness, and another which alters the *status* of the results of the transcendental deduction. I will explain both, but focus on the second, because it demonstrates the abyss between Kant and Fichte.

First, as philosophy accepts the circularity of attempting to prove principles that must be presupposed in order to make any proof possible, it recognizes that the correspondence of the deduced principles with the presupposed principles only points at their probability, not their complete certainty.<sup>139</sup> Aspects and aims of philosophical methodology like unity of system, unconditioned certainty of the first principle, exclusivity of conditions, reflection on method of deduction and solid reasoning all help to increase the certainty that the philosophical description of our knowledge matches our actual, real and necessary cognitive activity, but can never fully ground this correspondence.<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, despite the circularity, we learn much during the deduction: the principles and categories of the system of human knowledge are shown to originate (because of their

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<sup>137</sup> On the argumentation of the *Transcendental Deduction*, see for example Derk Pereboom, "Kant's Transcendental Arguments", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-transcendental/>>. Schelling concluded from this that Kant presupposed higher principles without making them explicit. See e.g. the introduction to *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke I [KFA]*, Karl Friedrich August Schelling (ed.) (Stuttgart 1856) I 1 153-154.

<sup>138</sup> *KrV* A71/B96.

<sup>139</sup> *Über den Begriff*, *SW I* 59-62, 74-75. Cf. essays by Thomas Seeböhm, Daniel Breazeale, Alain Perrinjaquet and Tom Rockmore on this topic and its consequences in *Fichte. Historical Contexts/Contemporary Controversies*, Daniel Breazeale, Tom Rockmore (eds.) (New Jersey 1994) 31-112.

<sup>140</sup> *SW I* 54, 76-78. This does not mean that we are in some way alienated from our own activity; for Fichte, it merely means that our philosophical description of it is an infinite task.



necessity as conditions) out of more basic acts of the mind.<sup>141</sup> From these basic acts, the axioms of Fichte's philosophy – the self-positing of the I, in opposition to absolute negativity, through consecutive mutual limitation and synthesis –, all other cognitive apparatus is deduced. In this way, concepts such as reality, identity and negation are aligned to judgments (*Setzungen*, results of positing) and posited as necessary elements of human consciousness in connection to particular judgments.<sup>142</sup> That is, they can now be seen as the product of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

With respect to Kant, this changes the status of the deduced categories: they are now dependent on more basic acts of the mind, and are *restricted* with respect to what they can express by the same strictures that guide consciousness, i.e. by difference and synthesis. As a corollary of this, the Kantian move of thinking unity as a regulative idea is more problematic in Fichte, because the logical concept is deduced through difference and synthesis. Because of this insight in the origin of the concept and its connection to a particular method of judgment, philosophy has learned that the complete unity at the start of the deduction is no object of thought, and cannot be.

In short, this could be the reason why the contradictions that Kant diagnosed when different kinds of *objects* of thought are confused (i.e. the objects of concepts/intuitions and the objects of ideas, *phenomena* and *noumena*), in Fichte and Hölderlin now already appear when *possible ways of thinking* are confused, irrespective of their object. While Kant claimed that a conflation of fields of reason's activity caused the contradictions, Fichte and Hölderlin now diagnose a conflation of ways in which we can think, and recognize that we cannot think anything in the field of *noumena*. This is because what we are able to think depends on the structure of judgment. And since this structure is built upon opposition, limitation, and synthesis, that is, a mediation of manyness, it cannot think the One complete unity.

So, in the search for more solid foundations, the impact of the choice of axioms has increased: it now results in implications for what kind of cognitive acts the human mind is capable of. Hence, judgment has become more aware of its limitations, and the *herumpfuschen* and *herumtappen* that Kant saw reason capable of now becomes problematic in a more radical manner: it not only lacks any relation to objects of possible experience, but is also impossible in itself. At least, this was the contention of Fichte: as soon as we understand what we are asking for, we understand that the question itself is impossible, and that an answer, if it were possible, would not help us a bit.<sup>143</sup>

### 3.2. Act and object, Absolute and consciousness, One and many

Usually, Romantic philosophy is explained as a critique of Fichte, or as a continuation of his philosophy which attempts to 'go beyond' Fichte. The procedure of the historian then is to motivate the Romantic departure from Fichte after having presented a rough account of his philosophy, usually framed by notions like 'subjective idealism' based on an 'absolute ego' or '*Produktionsidealismus*'.<sup>144</sup> I would like to take the opposite route: I will focus on Hölderlin's agreement with Fichte on fundamental matters, and motivate why his adherence to Fichte

<sup>141</sup> Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 175.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Ulrich Vogel, "Das Ich und seine Kategorien. Begründungsleistungen und –defizite bei Fichte und Schelling (1794-95)", in: Jürgen Stolzenberg (ed.), *System der Vernunft. Kant und der Frühidealismus* (Hamburg 2007) for an analysis of the relation between I and categories, especially 254, 258-259, and 263-265.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Fichte's reasoning on Being in the *Versuch*, SW I 529. I will return to this later.

<sup>144</sup> Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge 2003) 135-137 and Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 135 respectively.

makes sense.<sup>145</sup> My motivation for going about in this way lies in the fact that I hold a sympathetic Fichte interpretation to be more explanatory than a contrastive one in the analysis of Hölderlin's thought. In this way, I will show which strand of Hölderlin's anti-foundationalism can be traced back to Fichte himself, and can be explained without interpreting it as fierce Fichte-critique.<sup>146</sup>

This is not to idealize/subjectivize Hölderlin. Rather, it is to nuance the view that Fichte's foundation of philosophy lies in the absolute subject. Furthermore, and in general, it is to move away the discussion of the Absolute from the Idealism/Realism controversy, because I hold this distinction to obscure the real problem. The discussion of Fichte in this chapter will therefore focus not on subject and object, but instead on One and many, and unity and difference.

In doing this, I depart from a very strong tendency in the secondary literature to focus on ontological perspectives instead of on what is possible to even think.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, I will quote the formulation of the problem of the Romantic program by one of this tendency's main representatives, Frederick Beiser. The remainder of the chapter will then subsequently exhibit to what extent the opposite route really leads to new ground.

*It was the need to explain the reality of the external world, to do justice to the sheer otherness of the non-ego, that eventually forced the romantics to abandon the one-sidedness of Fichte's idealism and to complement it with the "higher realism" of Spinoza. Somehow, they would have to find an interpretation of the principle of subject-object identity that would accommodate our experience of an external world. This was an inherently paradoxical undertaking, since the principle of subject-object identity postulates the identity of subject and object, but ordinary experience seems to show that they are distinct from one another. Somehow, there would have to be an identity of subject-object identity and subject-object nonidentity. But merely in formulating this desideratum one seems to contradict oneself. Another formulation—no less paradoxical—is to claim that there must be some unity of Fichte's idealism and Spinoza's realism.*

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<sup>145</sup> This suggests that I consider Hölderlin to be a Romantic, which is controversial. However, since my interpretation only reflects on the relation between Fichte and Hölderlin, and not on other (*Atheneum*) Romantics, it is not important to decide on this issue. Furthermore, since the scholarly literature which I invoke all deals with e.g. Novalis, Schlegel and Hölderlin as heirs and critics of Fichte, and call them 'the romantics', I follow this literature, without thereby laying any weight on whether Hölderlin was a genuine Romantic or not.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Tom Rockmore on Fichte's foundationalism and anti-foundationalism. I agree with Rockmore that "mere consistency is less important than something one can provisionally designate by the imprecise term of "insight into the nature of the problem."" Actually, this is the attitude I hold to be most fruitful in assessing Hölderlin's problem, which I will show is closely related to Fichte's reflection on how to accept a starting point for philosophy. Rockmore, "Antifoundationalism, Circularity and the Spirit of Fichte", in: *Fichte. Historical Contexts* 106.

<sup>147</sup> E.g. Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 130-133, Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 665-667, Beiser, *German Idealism* 260-289, 389-390, Tom Rockmore, "Fichte, German Idealism and the Thing in Itself", in: Daniel Breazeale, Tom Rockmore (eds.), *Fichte, German Idealism, and Early Romanticism* (New York 2010) 9-20, and Steven Hoeltzel, "Critical Epistemology and Idealist Metaphysics in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794-1800)", in: Idem, 83-102. Günter Zöller presents a "realist restriction" to Fichte's Idealism, which is a very sensible and important statement to make, but thereby also focus on ontological perspectives: Zöller, "German Realism" 203-207.

*For the romantics, the path out of this impasse lay with their organic conception of nature.*<sup>148</sup>

While all the elements that Beiser mentions definitely are part of the controversy that fueled some of the new ideas that may be attributed to Romanticism, I hold the One/many-distinction to be more essential to the “Romantic undertaking” and its paradoxicality, and therefore better equipped to explain it. In the following, I will therefore focus on this distinction, and show that it is fundamental to both Fichte’s and Hölderlin’s understanding of the problem of adhering to the Absolute in philosophy. The conviction that the One/many-distinction is fundamental can for example also be recognized in a piece like Schelling’s *Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*.<sup>149</sup> For even though this work explicitly takes the relation between realism and idealism as its topic, Schelling there nonetheless locates the central problem which both ‘philosophical positions’ or ontological perspectives have to deal with in the contradiction of thesis and synthesis, of absolute unity and the Kantian synthetic unity of the many.<sup>150</sup> That is why I hope to gain understanding of the “inherently paradoxical undertaking” which goes by the name of Romanticism by focusing on what I hold to be the *source* of its paradoxicality, and not on the paradoxical claims in the field of ontology which I hold to be its *results*. This being said, let’s return to Fichte, and see how his philosophy deals with the problem of One and many, and of unity and difference, and how Hölderlin accepts its implications, but evaluates them from a whole other perspective.

Fichte’s transcendental deduction of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is about what we can think. Yet, at its ground there lies something – a principle, or an act; it is hard to determine *what* it consists in, as this chapter will show – that we cannot think. While this ground does belong to the act that starts our thinking, it does not belong to the objects that we can think. In the following, I will therefore explain how Fichte distinguishes between the first act that makes consciousness possible, and the consciousness of this act (as object of consciousness). The analysis of this distinction should help to understand Hölderlin’s distinction between what can be thought and what escapes thought, as I formulated it in relation to Kant. Moreover, it should become clear that this distinction is caused by consciousness’ dependence on opposition and difference, and by the radical difference between opposition and difference, as forms of manyness, and the first act, as the One.

I will start by invoking the 1797 *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre*. This text accompanied the two introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre* that Fichte published in the *Philosophischen Journal*.<sup>151</sup> The texts were meant to persuade the public to join Fichte’s project, and to help him to further work out his system of philosophy.<sup>152</sup> Especially since some of his students had proven capable of grasping the system, Fichte deemed the texts necessary and fruitful to make the effort of working out his philosophy the general task of his time.<sup>153</sup> Among these students was Hölderlin. In general, the counterarguments that Fichte discusses connect well to a line of thought influenced by Jacobi, which may apply to Hölderlin.

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<sup>148</sup> Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* 137. I chose particularly this passage because it is sympathetic to my position in stressing paradox, while it chooses a different way to explain it.

<sup>149</sup> *KFA* I 1 281 ff.

<sup>150</sup> E.g. in the fourth letter, *KFA* I 1 296-298, or the seventh, *idem*, 313-316.

<sup>151</sup> *SW* I 417-534.

<sup>152</sup> *Über den Begriff, Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe*, *SW* I 35-36.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*.

Since the discussion of Fichte here is mostly functional and not aimed at establishing the general position of Fichte among his pre-*Atheismusstreit* writings, I will assess the *Versuch* as an unproblematic continuation of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, and as an exemplar of its description of how the *Thathandlung*'s three principles (co-)operate. Furthermore, only the elements of this text that are relevant with respect to the goal of examining Fichte's stance towards the Absolute and consciousness/One and many will be considered.

So first of all, to prohibit endless regress in consciousness of objects, and in consciousness of our self as object of *our* consciousness, some form of immediate contact between thought and its object is necessary as its condition.<sup>154</sup> This immediate contact takes place in intellectual intuition. It is part *and* product of the first act that makes knowledge possible, and can be identified as Fichte's self-consciousness-orientated Absolute.<sup>155</sup> It receives the name 'Absolute I' and should express the complete unity of the self in the judgment  $I = I$ . In the case of the first principle, thought and its object (subject and object, form and content) allegedly are completely *One*, and in intellectual intuition, we allegedly experience thought and its objects to be *One*.

Yet recall: the condition of the possibility of consciousness necessarily lies beyond the cognitive activity which such a condition conditions.<sup>156</sup> Only within the complex which it makes possible, can it be *represented* – but this presentation is a product of the whole chain of transcendental conditions, and thereby is radically different from the first principle as such. We cannot be conscious of the first principle in isolation from the whole structure, because no consciousness is yet actual at this point.<sup>157</sup> The immediate consciousness that Fichte accepts, and which he calls an intuition, is a transcendental condition that cannot be understood in isolation from what it grounds, and that can only be understood *through* what it grounds. Consciousness *first arises* because of this first condition, and “wird an dieses angeknüpft und durch dasselbe vermittelt; wird lediglich durch die Verknüpfung damit zu einem Bewusstseyn; dieses allein ist durch nichts vermittelt oder bedingt; es ist absolut möglich und schlechthin notwendig, wenn irgend ein anderes Bewusstseyn stattfinden soll.”<sup>158</sup>

This first transcendental condition of consciousness is the Absolute I, or the subject-object, or *Thathandlung*, or intellectual intuition, or self-positing of the I, according to the different perspectives of the multiple explanations and expositions that Fichte has provided in order to be understood by his audience. With respect to Hölderlin, it will be important to stress (1) that this condition can only be abstracted from the whole chain of conditions and its results by *representing* 'it' as an object of our faculty of presentation, (2) that this presentation is not the first condition as it is *as such*, and (3) that this 'as such' is not the worry of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, as its aim is to describe the whole act of the mind, and not to *reflect* on what it itself defines as *pre-reflective*, since this should be immediately recognized

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<sup>154</sup> SW I 47-48, 527.

<sup>155</sup> For a critical examination see Vogel, “Das Ich und seine Kategorien” 264-265. The circularity which Vogel puts forward as problematic, I (as yet) consider to be the merit of Fichte's reflection on philosophical method – on what it means to philosophize about the conditions of our own consciousness.

<sup>156</sup> *Über den Begriff*, SW I 120.

<sup>157</sup> *Zweite Einleitung*, SW I 459, 463-465.

<sup>158</sup> SW I 529.

as not very useful.<sup>159</sup> In the following, these three elements of Fichte's reaction to what may be called a general longing towards the Absolute will be the basis of my interpretation of his position on the relation between the Absolute and the consciousness which is grounded on it. I will present it by posing two questions to Fichte from the perspective of the quest for the Absolute, and by giving two lines of response: the first through a general explanation of Fichte's account of the operation of judgment in consciousness, the second by producing three answers that connect to the three stressed elements of Fichte's attitude towards what a first principle for philosophy should be.

### 3.2.1. The law of reflection

For a start: whence the certainty that Fichte's absolute I is no object of consciousness? Was it not called an immediate self-consciousness? This has to do with what Fichte called the 'law of reflection'.<sup>160</sup> It states that in order to be conscious, I need an object to be conscious of; that is, I need to oppose myself to something else, and I need to be able to oppose different objects in experience in order to distinguish them.<sup>161</sup> Without the negativity, difference or manyness of such opposition, no judgment could be conducted in which something is judged to be this, *and not* that; in which something is *understood as this*, and not that. So, the law of reflection requires that determination in consciousness functions by means of processing manyness through opposition and synthesis in judgment.

In chapter one, this has been explained as the necessity of opposition in the form of an *Ur-theilung* of subject and object. The consequences of the necessity of *Ur-theilung* in our quest for Being have already been made clear: the strong distinction between judgment's need of manyness and Being's Oneness prohibits thinking complete unity. For Fichte, the law of reflection implies that when the Absolute I is concerned, it can only be *understood as* what it is not.<sup>162</sup> This is because the necessity of opposing this act to another act (e.g. a Non-I) involves (1) considering this other act too, and (2) considering the relation between the first and the second act. Yet in doing this, reflection is not exclusively considering the first principle anymore. Instead, reflection has already arrived at the third principle, and comes to the conclusion that any attempt to determine the first principle in itself automatically leads to an understanding which encompasses more elements, and which is therefore not completely One anymore.<sup>163</sup> For Fichte, it is precisely because of this reason that the Absolute I works as a first principle of philosophy, and as a *start* of the transcendental deduction of the system of human knowledge: "lediglich darum, weil durch diesen bloßen Akt kein Bewußtseinzustande

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<sup>159</sup> The actuality of the first condition as fact of consciousness, which the philosopher finds when enquiring into the grounds of knowledge, can be secured by referring to its necessity as condition, to our practical freedom, and to our *Glauben* in it. Already at the start of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte stresses: "Selbst vermittelt dieser abstrahirenden Reflexion nicht – kann Thatsache des Bewusstseyns werden, was an sich keine ist; aber es wird durch sie erkannt, dass man jene Thathandlung, als Grundlage alles Bewusstseyns, nothwendig denken müsse." Further grounding and evidence for these theses in the main text below. SW I 91-92, de Goeij, "Fichte's Doctrine of Intellectual Intuition" 4, 8-9.

<sup>160</sup> On the relation between the law of reflection and intellectual intuition, see Frank, "„Intellektuale Anschauung"" 116-117.

<sup>161</sup> For further explanations, see Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 138-139 and Beiser, *German Idealism* 388, even though the conclusion that Hölderlin draws on the basis of this law does not fit Beiser's interpretation of Fichte.

<sup>162</sup> Is it then really understood; do I really completely understand myself *as me* when I reflect on my self in this way? In *Urtheil und Seyn*, Hölderlin justified this question by stating: "ich kann, ich muß so fragen, denn in einer andern Rücksicht is es sich entgegengesetzt." *StA* IV 217.

<sup>163</sup> SW I 459.

kommt, wird ja fortgeschlossen auf einen anderen Akt, wodurch ein Nicht-Ich für uns entsteht; lediglich dadurch wird ein Fortschritt des philosophischen Rasonnements und die verlangte Ableitung des Systems der Erfahrung möglich.”<sup>164</sup> In this way, the first principle can only be understood as a product of further acts, hence it is understood as what it is not.

In the *Versuch*, Fichte derives the law of reflection from the impossibility understanding our own activity without opposing it to an object:

*[M]an findet sich thätig, nur inwiefern man dieser Thätigkeit eine Ruhe (ein Anhalten und Fixirtseyn der inneren Kraft) entgegensetzt. (Der Satz, welches wir hier nur im Vorbeigehen erinnern, ist auch umgekehrt wahr: man wird sich einer Ruhe nicht bewusst, ohne eine Thätigkeit zu setzen. Thätigkeit ist nichts ohne Ruhe und umgekehrt. Ja, der Satz ist allgemein wahr, und wird im folgenden in dieser seiner allgemeinen Gültigkeit aufgestellt werden: Alle Bestimmung, was es nur sey, das bestimmt werde, geschieht durch Gegensatz. Hier sehen wir für auf den vorliegenden einzelnen Fall.)*<sup>165</sup>

In the following, this principle is indeed elaborated on, as Fichte defines “die innere Thätigkeit, in ihrer Ruhe aufgefasst” – that is, our activity, understood as an object – as what it is to be a *concept*.<sup>166</sup> Consequently, this leads to the confirmation of the claim that the absolute as such is no object of consciousness – as the previous paragraph on the status of concepts in Fichte also resulted in. That which is object of consciousness, is the product of the whole chain of conditions, and is not (‘anymore’) its starting point ‘as such’. Instead, as object of consciousness, the first principle is already a processed many, and not One ‘anymore’. Has it then ever been One? For Fichte, it is clear that *our* consciousness cannot do without opposition: when *we* are conscious of objects, these objects are radically different from complete unity, because they are syntheses of many elements.

So, without the mediation of conceptuality, we could only speculate on the possibility of pure intellectual intuition: “Es war sonach der Begriff des Ich, der mit der Anschauung desselben nothwendig vereinigt war, und ohne welchen das Bewusstseyn des Ich unmöglich geblieben wäre; denn der Begriff erst vollendet und umfasst das Bewusstseyn.”<sup>167</sup> In this final

<sup>164</sup> SW I 459.

<sup>165</sup> SW I 531-532.

<sup>166</sup> SW I 533. Cf. the third paragraph of the *Grundlage*, where Fichte states on the product of anti-thesis (negativity, difference) and consecutive synthesis: “Erst jetzt, vermittelst des aufgestellten Begriffes kann man von beiden sagen: sie sind *etwas*. Das absolute Ich des ersten Grundsatzes ist nicht *etwas* (es hat kein Prädicat und kann keins haben); es ist schlechthin, *was* es ist, und dies lässt sich nicht weiter erklären.“ Although *what* it is may remain problematic, it is clear that for Fichte, it will not help to further enquire ‘into it’. I will show this below. SW I 109.

<sup>167</sup> SW I 533. This is confirmed in the *Zweite Einleitung* as well, where Fichte clarifies what the act of intellectual intuition encompasses. Part of this passage was already quoted, but it is an important statement: *Es ist kein Begreifen: das wird es erst durch den Gegensatz eines Nicht-Ich, und durch die Bestimmung des Ich in diesem Gegensatz. Mithin ist es eine bloße Anschauung. – Es ist demnach auch kein Bewußtsein, nicht einmal ein Selbstbewußtsein; und lediglich darum, weil durch diesen bloßen Akt kein Bewußtseinzustande kommt, wird ja fortgeschlossen auf einen anderen Akt, wodurch ein Nicht-Ich für uns entsteht; lediglich dadurch wird ein Fortschritt des philosophischen Rasonnements und die verlangte Ableitung des Systems der Erfahrung möglich. Das Ich wird durch den beschriebenen Akt bloß in die Möglichkeit des Selbstbewußtseins, und mit ihm allen übrigen Bewußtseins versetzt; aber es entsteht noch kein wirkliches Bewußtsein. Der angegebene Akt ist bloß ein Teil, und ein nur durch den Philosophen abzusehender, nicht aber etwa ursprünglich*

passage of the *Versuch*, the term ‘der Begriff’ could be interpreted as fulfilling two functions: it designates the concept (of the I) and its role in constituting (self-)consciousness, and it refers to a more general meaning of ‘Begriff’, which means understanding something, grasping it, or having a *grip* on it. This understanding of the absolute I is mediated by conceptuality, and is not the same as the absolute I as such. So, according to this second sense of ‘der Begriff’, Fichte makes clear that consciousness can only possibly exist as an activity which grasps conceptually, and that it is only possible through this grip of the Absolute I, even though as a ground of consciousness, an intuition is presupposed which escapes this conceptual grip. Hence, the absolute I is no object of consciousness, and Fichte concludes: “Im gemeinen Bewußtsein kommen nur Begriffe vor, keineswegs Anschauungen als solche; unerachtet der Begriff nur durch Anschaaung, *jedoch ohne unser Bewußtsein*, zustande gebracht wird.”<sup>168</sup>

### 3.2.2. Fichte’s attitude towards his first principle of philosophy

Still, how can it be an *intuition* or immediate consciousness then, if no consciousness is yet actual? Should it not be accessible, and if it is, what does the object of this intuition amount to? Along the lines of the three elements which I introduced earlier, and which delineate Fichte’s attitude towards what a first principle for philosophy should be, the following three answers to this question are in place.

First of all, a very important distinction has to be invoked, which is the difference between the original acts of the mind, and the philosopher who reflectively enquires into the necessary and exclusive conditions of the system of human knowledge. Arguably, this distinction is Fichte’s method to prevent performative contradiction, although the distinction is not equally clear in every text.<sup>169</sup> It makes clear that the concepts which the philosopher uses in order to explain the structure of consciousness can never fully grasp the moments and activities of the human mind which these concepts describe, *and that, if* the description is accurate enough, lie at the basis of the performance of this same description as well. According to Fichte, this is a necessary circle, of which we should be aware before conflating the philosophical description with the process which it describes.<sup>170</sup> In this way, the philosopher may very well transcendently argue for the actuality of a condition when this condition is of exclusive necessity to make a certain fact of consciousness possible – even when this condition itself is not something which we can be conscious of. Furthermore, the philosopher may isolate this condition from others, form a presentation of it, and conceptualize it in relation to the other conditions of the process which she describes.<sup>171</sup> However, this does not entail consciousness/actual performance of intellectual intuition on the part of the philosopher, because her consciousness also functions in the described manner: it forms syntheses out of many opposed elements, and thereby never grasps the complete unity of the One.

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*abgesonderter Teil der ganzen Handlung der Intelligenz, wodurch sie ihr Bewußtsein zustande bringt.* SW I 459.

<sup>168</sup> SW I 459. Italics are mine.

<sup>169</sup> A triggering presentation of alleged inconsistency on Fichte’s part, and possible misinterpretations of his position that stem from it, can be found in Beiser, *German Idealism* 282-288.

<sup>170</sup> *Über den Begriff*, SW I 149. Cf. Daniel Breazeale on intellectual intuition (*as such*) as an extra- or pre-philosophical act, and on the distinction between ordinary consciousness and transcendental philosophy. Breazeale, “Fichte on skepticism”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991) 430-431.

<sup>171</sup> This is what Fichte does in paragraph five of the *Zweite Einleitung*, SW I 464-465. That this should be the method is confirmed in *Begriff*, SW I 79.

Secondly, this concept or presentation which the philosopher presents of intellectual intuition must be distinguished from intellectual intuition as such. For, since the philosopher is herself still all too human as well, she never intuits the first condition in isolation either, since no human consciousness is yet actual when it is taken in isolation. Intellectual intuition *as such* has to be postulated as an activity of the human mind that makes consciousness possible, but is no state of consciousness itself – this postulation is part of the philosophical description.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, besides this postulation, the absolute I is an idea towards which we infinitely strive, even though we are aware of the fact that absolute consciousness is a contradiction, since consciousness needs an object.<sup>173</sup> Hence, this idea is “selbst nicht denkbar [...], indem sie für uns einen Widerspruch enthält.”<sup>174</sup> This has as its effect that the striving “nur durch eine geendete Annäherung zum Unendlichen hervorgebracht werden könnte, welche an sich unmöglich ist.”<sup>175</sup> That is to say, real consciousness of the Absolute is impossible.

So, in itself, that is, in isolation, intellectual intuition is not yet determined, not yet brought into relation with anything else, not yet part of the synthesis that is essential to human consciousness. As such, it is an idea of infinite unity, of complete Oneness, and a necessary presupposition in the philosophical description of human knowledge. But in this sense, it is not available to us. This distinction between Absolute and consciousness, tied to the distinction between One and many, brings us to the third answer to the question whether intellectual intuition as such should be available to consciousness. Here, I would like to permit myself to imagine Fichte’s furious line of response. So, as a disclaimer: the following is no real quote, but instead expresses what I hold to be Fichte’s attitude towards what we can reasonably expect from his first principle. It will be illustrated below, while referring amply to Fichte’s own writings. “Stop worrying over what an Absolute or its intuition may be in itself, since you will never be confronted with it in itself! It is a mere element of the structure of consciousness, and a concept which the philosopher uses to make this structure intelligible, but it has no value whatsoever in itself! So stop attaching value to this non-object of consciousness, and stop longing for it!” Expressions on par with this declamation can be found in the *Zweite Einleitung* and in the *Versuch*.<sup>176</sup> I will give examples of it before moving on to the relation to Hölderlin, to show that ‘moving on’ in this case merely means switching perspective on the very same topic; a perspective which Fichte was confronted with during his lectures, and which he attempted to prevent from (what he considered to be) useless and misguided endeavors. After the sketch of this discussion between Fichte and his audience, that will now follow, Hölderlin’s relation to Fichte can be decided on.

The precise objection which Fichte attempts to counter in the *Versuch* rests in the contention that an *existence* of the I is a necessary precondition of its self-consciousness. Although Fichte treats this objection as a reintroduction of a thing in itself from a

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<sup>172</sup> *Das Ich wird durch den beschriebenen Akt bloß in die Möglichkeit des Selbstbewußtseins, und mit ihm allen übrigen Bewußtseins versetzt; aber es entsteht noch kein wirkliches Bewußtsein. Der angegebene Akt ist bloß ein Teil, und ein nur durch den Philosophen abzusondernder, nicht aber etwa ursprünglich abgesonderter Teil der ganzen Handlung der Intelligenz, wodurch sie ihr Bewußtsein zustande bringt.* SW I 459.

<sup>173</sup> SW I 117, and his remark on Spinoza’s highest unity, which can be found in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, “aber nicht als etwas, das ist, sondern als etwas, das durch uns hervorgebracht werden soll, aber nicht kann.” SW I 101.

<sup>174</sup> SW I 117.

<sup>175</sup> SW I 115.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. his irritation on whether a function of conscious could be called a consciousness in itself in paragraph 6 of the *Zweite Einleitung* SW I 473-474.



transcendental realist standpoint, which is not the position of Hölderlin that I defend, the objection is still concerned with *Being*, and moreover, with Being lying necessarily beyond consciousness. Fichte responds: sure, a moment of absolute identity of subject and object is a necessary precondition of consciousness, but how could we sensibly speak of this without relating it to our consciousness, the very consciousness which performs the asking of the question of the Absolute?<sup>177</sup> The first act of philosophy therefore is nothing more than what *we* understand it to be, and it makes no sense to ask what it is *as such*, that is, as what we *do not understand* it to be.<sup>178</sup> Intellectual intuition, Fichte ensures his public, consists in “nichts mehr, als dies: *du musst deinem gegenwärtigen, zum deutlichen Bewusstseyn erhobenen Selbst-Setzen ein anderes solches Setzen, als ohne deutliches Bewusstseyn geschehen, voraus denken, worauf das gegenwärtige sich beziehe und dadurch bedingt sey.* Bis wir dir das fruchtbare Gesetz, nach welchem es so ist, aufzeigen, begnüge dich mit der Einsicht, dass das angeführte Factum weiter nichts aussagt, als das Angegebene, damit du durch dasselbe nicht irre gemacht werdest.”<sup>179</sup>

Still, on pains of appearing non-sensical in front of Fichte, the addressed public did not seem to be satisfied by this insight, as the progression of Fichte’s text suggests. For how could it accept that we necessarily presuppose something “als ohne deutliches Bewusstseyn geschehen” while still relating this exclusively to self-consciousness? Furthermore, *that* we cannot be conscious of this act as such (in contrast to its conceptual thematization, which is sufficient for Fichte) was all too clear: the contradiction between the law of reflection and the alleged complete unity of intellectual intuition excluded this; the One cannot be reached through a synthesis of the many. So, why not refer this complete unity to a domain completely transcendent to consciousness, and accept the sharp distinction between mediated consciousness and immediate ‘Being’? For Fichte, it was clear that besides its non-sensicality, there would lie no gain in this move, because the Absolute had no value in itself. His audience, however, was very interested in pushing forward in this direction, and in making more explicit that Fichte’s complete unity should completely emigrate out of consciousness, and be accepted as a transcendent category, non-relative to consciousness.<sup>180</sup> This category would then, however problematic, more clearly be a unity of *all*, and not merely a complete unity which the subject presupposes in order to ground her own activity. Thereby, the existential value and function of holding on to this category would increase, while arguably, the technical contradictoriness of accepting the Absolute would remain the same, since Fichte too in the end ascribed a function to Absolute (transcendent) unity in his philosophy.

At least in the *Versuch*, Fichte resisted this tendency to the end. I will quote the most expressive passage in which he makes this clear, and suggest that the two strategies that

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<sup>177</sup> SW I 524-525: *Hierbei sage mir vorläufig nur dies: wer ist es denn, der da behauptet, dass du vor deinem Denken vorher gewesen seyn müssest? Das bist ohne Zweifel du selbst, und dieses dein Behaupten ist ohne Zweifel ein Denken; und, wie du noch weiter behauptest, und wir dir mit beiden Händen zugeben, ein nothwendiges, in diesem Zusammenhange dir sich aufdringendes Denken. Du weisst doch hoffentlich von diesem vorauszusetzenden Daseyn nur insofern, inwiefern du es denkst; und dieses Daseyn des Ich ist sonach auch nichts mehr, als ein Gesetzseyn deiner selbst durch dich selbst.*

<sup>178</sup> Paraphrase of a Fichtean way of dismissing the idea of a thing in itself, e.g. in the *Aenesidemus Rezension*, SW I 14-15.

<sup>179</sup> SW I 525.

<sup>180</sup> Frank, “„Intellektuale Anschauung”” 119, and Henrich on the influence of Jacobi, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 91.

Fichte confronted his audience with were not as ridiculous as Fichte considered them to be. The passage is long, but illustrative:

*Nun ist hier von keinem anderen Seyn des Ich die Rede, als von dem in der beschriebenen Selbstanschauung; oder, noch strenger ausgedrückt, von dem Seyn dieser Anschauung selbst. Ich bin diese Anschauung und schlechthin nichts weiter, und diese Anschauung selbst ist Ich. Es soll durch dieses sich selbst Setzen nicht etwa eine Existenz des Ich, als eines unabhängig vom Bewusstseyn bestehenden Dinges an sich, hervorgebracht werden; welche Behauptung ohne Zweifel der Absurditäten grösste seyn würde. Ebenowenig wird dieser Anschauung eine vom Bewusstseyn unabhängige Existenz des Ich, als (anschauenden) Dinges vorausgesetzt; welches meines Erachtens keine kleinere Absurdität ist, ohnerachtet man dies freilich nicht sagen soll, indem die berühmtesten Weltweisen unseres philosophischen Jahrhunderts dieser Meinung zugethan sind. Eine solche Existenz ist nicht vorauszusetzen, sage ich; denn, wenn ihr von nichts reden könnt, dessen ihr euch nicht bewusst seyd, alles aber, dessen ihr euch bewusst seyd, durch das angezeigte Selbstbewusstseyn bedingt wird; so könnt ihr nicht hinwiederum ein Bestimmtes, dessen ihr euch bewusst seyd, die von allem Anschauen und Denken unabhängig seyn sollende Existenz des Ich, jenes Selbstbewusstseyn bedingen lassen. Ihr müsset entweder gestehen, dass ihr von etwas redet, ohne davon zu wissen, welches ihr schwerlich thun werdet, oder ihr müsset läugnen, dass das aufgezeigte Selbstbewusstseyn alles andere Bewusstseyn bedinge, welches euch, wenn ihr mich nur verstanden habt, schlechthin unmöglich seyn wird.<sup>181</sup>*

Hölderlin would definitely agree that we could not presuppose something *determinate*, and he also agreed that the necessary presupposition would not be the existence of the I. What his account of Being does have in common with the *Seyn* that Fichte disapproves of, however, is its independence from consciousness, and its function as necessary precondition of (self-)consciousness. In addition, the problem that it cannot be presupposed in judgment without performative contradiction, because this implies speaking of something which we are not conscious of, also connects Hölderlin to the position described in the quote. Therefore, the corollary that we should admit that we speak of something of which we cannot know, as Fichte formulates it in the passage, is indeed present, and will be worked out below. Hence, at least one of the two options that Fichte presents at the end of the passage is conceivable for Hölderlin.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> SWI 529.

<sup>182</sup> The second remains interesting as well: does judgment have exclusive rights to consciousness in Hölderlin's theory? This is a recurring theme; earlier intellectual intuition seemed to compete with judgment, and with respect to Kant reason seemed to play such a role alongside the understanding. However, the discussion of Fichte has shown, I hope, that transcendental conditions are necessary and *exclusive*, and that Hölderlin's theory, by arguing for judgment and Being as transcendental conditions of consciousness, leaves no room for consciousness without judgment. I consider this to be an effect of the amplification of *Critique* since Kant. Fichte's intellectual intuition as such only proves the problem of incorporating the Absolute in a philosophical system.

However, as I have laid out above, Fichte's intellectual intuition as such has more in common with this *Seyn* than Fichte reveals in this passage: as such, intellectual intuition is no object of consciousness, although a necessary precondition of it, and as object or concept it is not the intuition as such anymore. What's more, determinate knowledge of it would contradict what it should be: unconditioned, Absolute. Besides, the position which Fichte depicts in the quote, as holding on to an existence (of the I) as a thing (in itself), is not a strong depiction of a possible alternative to his theory. For, this alternative, as put forth by Hölderlin, merely takes Fichte's own understanding of the Absolute, and makes clear that its transcendence in relation to human subjects is more radical than Fichte wanted (and needed) to stress. It does not posit the existence of the Absolute as some *thing* (in itself). Further, as my interpretation of Fichte's position on the Absolute and consciousness has demonstrated, this alternative also is closer to Fichte's account of the Absolute than he recognizes in the quote. This is because on my interpretation of Fichte's account of intellectual intuition, Fichte even has to agree that when the question on the Absolute as such keeps being pressed, the answer in the end must be that we speak of something without being conscious of it. So, in this respect, the position which Fichte describes at the same time is more close to his own; Being and Fichte's Absolute both should express an absolute unity which is not available to consciousness. When the accounts are compared on the level of One/many instead of on subject/object, therefore, Fichte's first principle of philosophy matches the Absolute unity that Hölderlin is in search of.

So, the difference between Fichte and Hölderlin does not lie in these systematic features. For both, the Absolute is complete unity, and for both, this excludes consciousness of it, because for both, the One cannot be reached through the many. Instead, the difference lies in Fichte's contention that this 'as such moment' of intellectual intuition is only a necessarily vague start of a process that produces positive results and determinate knowledge. Further, when the concept of the first principle of philosophy is discussed during this process, the philosopher can explain the function of intellectual intuition satisfyingly, even though it replaces intellectual intuition's 'as such' moment with the understanding of 'it' that it reaches via opposition and concept. That is to say, the difference between the two lies in their evaluation of the first principle rather than in its systematic nature: Fichte wants us to move on, and to act and to know on the basis of his foundation of philosophy, while Hölderlin longs for this foundation itself. Where Fichte assures his public that nothing more can be thought about the first principle than he has already put forth, and that it would not help his philosophy to further go down the rabbit hole of enquiry into the Absolute, Hölderlin considered the insight that the Absolute is radically different from human consciousness to be a valuable result in itself. So, while they were equal in their understanding of the strong distinction between Absolute and consciousness, the one only philosophized about the Absolute in relation to the *results* that this ground creates for philosophical knowledge and action, while the other held on to his pre-theoretical intuition of the *value* of an Absolute unity of all. It is this difference which separates Fichte and Hölderlin, and which accounts for the different demands and estimations they have of philosophy.

### 3.3. Fichte and Hölderlin

Now if Hölderlin could have found these ideas concerning our limitations with respect to the Absolute in Fichte, then how to interpret his 'Fichte critique', for example in a letter to Hegel? Actually, Hölderlin's remarks in the letter are genuinely concerned with the possibility of

experience, its conditions and limitations. They are rightly interpreted as Kantian.<sup>183</sup> In relation to the above presented account of Fichte, moreover, they just seem to fit in very well, since they respect the Fichtean ‘law of reflection’ and distinguish between consciousness and Absoluteness:

*[S]ein absolutes Ich (= Spinozas Substanz) enthält alle Realität; es ist alles, u. außer ihm ist nichts; es giebt also für dieses abs. Ich kein Object, denn sonst wäre nicht alle Realität in ihm; ein Bewußtsein ohne Object ist aber nicht denkbar, und wenn ich selbst dieses Object bin, so bin ich als solches notwendig beschränkt, sollte es auch nur in der Zeit seyn, also nicht absolut; also ist in dem absoluten Ich kein Bewußtsein denkbar, als absolutes Ich hab ich kein Bewußtsein, und insofern ich kein Bewußtsein habe, insofern bin ich (für mich) nichts, also das absolute Ich ist (für mich) Nichts.<sup>184</sup>*

This short argument on the impossibility of an Absolute I has already been overanalyzed, and can easily be recognized as connecting to Fichte’s own understanding of what the first principle of philosophy could possibly be for us.<sup>185</sup> What the absolute I cannot be, obviously, is an absolute substance; in this Hölderlin clearly misinterprets Fichte’s absolute I. His understanding of why this could not be, however, connects to Fichte’s description of the genesis of consciousness.

On top of that, and more generally, Hölderlin did not abandon this understanding in his search for the Absolute through art. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I want to take the liberty to quote some passages that can be found in Hölderlin’s poetological texts and in his remarks on tragedy, in order to show how they all fit in the interpretation of Hölderlin that I have worked out thus far. Or at least, to prove that it is a fruitful perspective on Hölderlin’s thought across the 1794-1795 period and the later period, in which Hölderlin moved away from philosophy and focused on poetology. While no significantly new analyses or insights will accompany the quotes, they function as a support of what I have claimed in this chapter, and as a short advance to the conclusion of this thesis. Before the real concluding can commence, however, one last chapter will pay due attention to the more positive ways of describing the Absolute that were available to Hölderlin. For now, a remark on the role of intellectual intuition in poems:

*Die Fühlbarkeit des Ganzen schreitet also in eben dem Grade und Verhältnisse fort, in welchem die Trennung in den Teilen und in ihrem Zentrum, worin die Teile und das Ganze am fühlbarsten sind, fortschreitet. Die in der intellektualen Anschauung vorhandene Einigkeit versinnlichtet sich in eben dem Maße, in welchem sie aus sich herausgeht, in welchem die Trennung ihrer Teile statt findet[.]<sup>186</sup>*

<sup>183</sup> Pro Henrich, contra Beiser. Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 274-275, Beiser *German Idealism* 388, 666.

<sup>184</sup> *StA* VI 155.

<sup>185</sup> As expounded above. Cf. for example (again) Fichte’s stress that intellectual intuition as such, on its own, does not form actual consciousness yet: *SW* I 459. Analyses of this letter can be found in e.g. Beiser, *German Idealism* 387-388, Frank, “Intellektuale Anschauung” 120, and most extensively in Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 377-389, but also other work of Frank and Millán-Zaibert.

<sup>186</sup> *StA* IV 269.

This is quoted from an unpublished fragment that was dubbed *Über den Unterschied der Dichtarten* by its editors, in which Hölderlin discusses different *Grundstimmungen* and *Grundtöne* of poems (lyrical, epic and tragic) and their reliance on intellectual intuition. What the quote shows, however, is Hölderlin's understanding of the impossibility of intellectual intuition *in isolation*: separation is a necessary condition of making unity sensible, that is, accessible to consciousness. This line of reasoning reminds of a passage in the *Zweite Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre*, which in turn directs attention towards what I have called Kant's pre-theoretical intuition; the subject's confrontation with a manifold. In this confrontation, the processing of manyness, prescribed by the law of reflection, prevents intellectual intuition from becoming a state of consciousness in isolation:

*Nun aber kommt diese Anschauung nie allein, als ein vollständiger Akt des Bewußtsein, vor; wie auch die sinnliche Anschauung nicht allein vorkommt, noch das Bewußtsein vollendet, sondern beide müssen begriffen werden. Nicht allein dies aber, sondern die intellektuelle Anschauung ist auch stets mit einer sinnlichen verknüpft. Ich kann mich nicht handelnd finden, ohne ein Objekt zu finden, auf welches ich handle, in einer sinnlichen Anschauung, welche begriffen wird; ohne ein Bild von dem, was ich hervorbringen will, zu entwerfen, welches gleichfalls begriffen wird. Wie weiß ich denn nun, was ich hervorbringen will, und wie könnte ich das wissen, außer daß ich mir im Entwerfen des Zweckbegriffs, als einem Handeln, unmittelbar zusehe? – Nur dieser ganze Zustand in Vereinigung des angegebenen Mannigfaltigen vollendet das Bewußtsein. Nur des Begriffs vom Objekt und des vom Zweck, werde ich mir bewußt; nicht aber der beiden ihnen zugrunde liegenden Anschauungen.<sup>187</sup>*

Similar to the final passages of the *Versuch* which I discussed earlier (in 3.2.1.), here the double meaning of 'Begriff' again stresses the necessity of conceptual mediation in order to first be able to *understand* what intellectual intuition could be for us. Without this conceptual understanding, our consciousness would not be possible. And since the Absolute transcends conceptual understanding, we cannot be conscious of it. Thus, this quote shows the important similarity between Fichte and Hölderlin that I have demonstrated in this chapter. It consists in the acceptance of the impossibility of absolute consciousness, or of thinking the Absolute – as a thing, or a consciousness, or a concept or object.

In relation to the Idealism/Realism controversy that is central to the debate on Fichte and early Romanticism in the secondary literature, a consequence of this problem of judgment and Being is that it does not matter whether we interpret Being as Spinoza's substance or Fichte's Absolute I, or as a combination of them (as Beiser holds the Romantic undertaking to consist in). This is because the problem of reaching the One through the many is not changed when this One is located in an absolute I, or in an absolute substance. When Being remains held on to as absolute (simple) unity, then no conception of organic nature could prove a way out of this problem. So, the core problem of the adoption of the Absolute in philosophy does not lie in whether it is argued for in an idealistic or realistic fashion – the problem rather lies in whether it can be argued for at all. It is this problem, in the end, which motivates the bold moves that I have ascribed to Hölderlin in relation to Kant, in the

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<sup>187</sup> SWI 463-464.

conclusion of chapter two: if the core thesis of metaphysics is contradictory, and if we take an interest in it as such instead of in relation to its results, then we should stop arguing for it. Since the logically impossible is accepted as being real, rationality and its principle of non-contradiction have proven defective. That is, it makes no sense anymore to argue for the One when it is accepted that the structure of argumentation is foreign to it. The One/many distinction thus forms the source of the paradoxicality which Beiser recognizes in subject-object identity and in Fichteanism and Spinozism. With respect to this source, however, no “path out of this impasse lay with the [...] organic conception of nature”, because instead of searching for ways out, ways to deal with this situation need to be sought, as this situation is ours.

In Hölderlin’s oeuvre, many attempts to deal with the displayed situation, and to express the difficulties that come with it, can be found. This is because in many different contexts, Hölderlin reverts to his understanding of the contradiction in which judgment and Being are trapped – because it is the contradiction in which we are trapped, and which forms our existential situation. For now, I will present a few poetological remarks on tragedy, and argue that they can be understood as attempts to deal with this contradiction:<sup>188</sup>

*Die Bedeutung der Tragödien ist am leichtesten aus dem Paradoxon zu begreifen. Denn alles Ursprüngliche, weil alles Vermögen gerecht und gleich geteilt ist, erscheint zwar nicht in ursprünglicher Stärke, sondern eigentlich in seiner Schwäche, so daß recht eigentlich das Lebenslicht und die Erscheinung der Schwäche jedes Ganzen angehört. Im Tragischen nun ist das Zeichen an sich selbst unbedeutend, wirkungslos, aber das Ursprüngliche ist gerade heraus. Eigentlich nämlich kann das Ursprüngliche nur in seiner Schwäche erscheinen, insofern aber das Zeichen an sich selbst als unbedeutend = 0 gesetzt wird, kann auch das Ursprüngliche, der verborgene Grund jeder Natur sich darstellen. Stellt die Natur in ihrer schwächsten Gabe sich eigentlich dar, so ist das Zeichen, wenn sie sich in ihrer stärksten Gabe darstellt, = 0.<sup>189</sup>*

According to the last two sentences, the relation between the original and the sign is one in which the original can only be presented when the sign is posited as zero, that is, when the sign is not (present). When the sign is absent, however, nothing can be signified. The paradox that Hölderlin introduces here, therefore, consists in the impossibility of presenting the original when the sign = 0, since the sign is the medium. That is, when the sign is “wirkungslos”, no medium can be actual, so *nothing* can be mediated. Yet the suggestion is that in this way, the original can present itself. In order to present itself, however, it needs a form of presentation, that is, a medium: a sign. So, the immediate proves non-mediabile: that which is *unmittelbar* should be truly understood as not to be mediated. However, this is a paradoxical result, for how could we understand such a thing, as our understanding is mediated?

The relation between sign and original in this remark on tragedy is remarkably similar to the relation of Being and judgment, and moreover, to intellectual intuition as such and

<sup>188</sup> In contrast to Beiser, who considers the aesthetic to be Hölderlin’s magical medium to gain knowledge of the Absolute, and contra the separation of philosophy and literature in general. Beiser, *German Idealism* 391-393.

<sup>189</sup> *StA* IV 286, written in 1798 or 1799.

actual consciousness in Fichte. For Fichte, however, the presentation of intellectual intuition in the philosophical description is sufficient, because its function in the process of reaching knowledge is secured, and in itself it is of no special value. For Hölderlin, however, it makes sense to push the problem until the impossibility of presenting Being presents itself, because this impossibility is an important (negative) result in his quest for Being. This is because this result informs us, at least negatively, about our limitations with respect to Being, and thereby informs us about the nature of what lies beyond these limitations too. That is, the diagnosis of paradox, in its range more radical than Kant, and in its evaluation even more radical than Fichte, is a result in itself. In the reflection on the relation between judgment and Being, a lesson has been learned which proves fruitful in application to tragedy. In fact, this lesson on our limitations forms the main metaphysical understanding of human life, and I think it has become clear by now that this understanding can rightfully be called tragic.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Hölderlin's remarks on Oedipus and Antigone both conclude that the presentation of the tragic, or the tragic presentation of the One, consists in the monstrous effect of the performance of an impossibility. The tragic hero suffers from the violent transgression of the limits of his existence; the transcendental rules that enable consciousness and language are violently shattered in the play of mutually eliminating oppositions.<sup>190</sup> The form of the tragic play, furthermore, performs this mutual elimination of oppositions:

*Die Darstellung des Tragischen beruht vorzüglich darauf, daß das Ungeheure, wie der Gott und Mensch sich paart, und gränzenlos die Naturmacht und des Menschen Innerstes im Zorn Eins wird, dadurch sich begreift, daß das gränzenlose Eineswerden durch gränzenloses Scheiden sich reiniget. [...]*

*Darum der immer widerstreitende Dialog, darum der Chor als Gegensatz gegen diesen. Darum das allzukeusche, allzumechanische und factisch endigende Ineinandergreifen zwischen den verschiedenen Theilen, im Dialog, und zwischen dem Chor und Dialog und den großen Parthien oder Dramaten, welche aus Chor und Dialog bestehen. Alles ist Rede gegen Rede, die sich gegenseitig aufhebt.<sup>191</sup>*

The question remains how such a 'discourse' could communicate anything at all; yet this quote shows that the concept of paradox is indeed most productive for an understanding of tragedy: the monstrous understands itself through a limitless process in which no understanding could arise at all. Or in other words, the mutual elimination of discourse against discourse does not lead to an understanding of the tragic, and therefore we

<sup>190</sup> StA V 201.

<sup>191</sup> StA V 201. Cf. the conclusion of the *Anmerkungen zur Antigone*, StA V 269: *Die tragische Darstellung beruhet, wie in den Anmerkungen zum Oedipus angedeutet ist, darauf, daß der unmittelbare Gott, ganz Eines mit dem Menschen (denn der Gott eines Apostels ist mittelbarer, ist höchster Verstand in höchstem Geiste), daß die unendliche Begeisterung unendlich, das heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt, und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist.* In this, Hölderlin's understanding of tragedy resembles Nietzsche's violent and orgiastic interpretation much more than the understanding which Nietzsche attributed to Hölderlin's acquaintance and inspiration, Schiller, i.e. the naïve Greek in peaceful unity with nature, free from contradiction and suffering. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*: in: Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari (eds.), *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden* (Munich 1980) 1 37.

‘understand’ what it means to present the tragic. This is because the contradiction between the violent unification, and the boundless separation (what this could mean is not clear) through which it purifies itself can only result in two mutually eliminating options: *either* the tragic presentation does lead to real unification, in which case the monstrous does not understand itself, *or* the tragic presentation leads to real separation, in which case the monstrous is no unification of man and God. The combination of boundless unification and boundless separation suggests a form of sublation, but it is not clear at all how any reconciliation could become of this – instead, the contradiction, struggle, and mutual elimination of man and God<sup>192</sup> all hint at a violent transgression of limits that are not to be surpassed. Whether this really is a viable option in the search for Being will be decided on later. For now, it should be stressed that this understanding of tragedy is not limited to the literary genre, as Hölderlin considers tragedy to be the “Sprache für eine Welt, wo unter Pest und Sinnesverwirrung und allgemein entzündetem Wahrsagergeist, in müßiger Zeit, der Gott und der Mensch, damit der Weltlauf keine Lücke hat und das Gedächtniß der Himmlischen nicht ausgehet, in der allvergessenden Form der Untreue sich mittheilt, denn göttliche Untreue ist am besten zu behalten.”<sup>193</sup>

The all-forgetting form of infidelity: Hölderlin’s analyses do not improve on clarity when they reach into the area of the communication of unification. But they do express more the problematic of a genre in which the impossible is mediated, instead of guiding towards an easy way out of the problem. In this way, they show that for Hölderlin, no third way between the extremes of (exclusive) judgment and (Absolute) Being could be a real solution. Instead, in this world, “in müßiger Zeit”, a language is needed which does not genuinely attempt to perform the impossible, but merely points at the impossibility. Furthermore, at least the infidelity of the divine is communicated in this way, “damit der Weltlauf keine Lücke hat und das Gedächtniß der Himmlischen nicht ausgehet”, because at least this “göttliche Untreue” can be mediated. For, as the preceding analyses have shown, the contradictoriness of Being as a category which we attempt to understand is unavoidable.<sup>194</sup> A disloyal divinity therefore is better suited to express Hölderlin’s understanding of the Absolute, as is the violent transgressive play of oppositions that goes by the name of tragedy. That is why, to end this chapter, I will quote one last passage in which Hölderlin expresses his tragic understanding of human life, and its aptness for communication through the genre of tragedy:

*So beruhet griechischer oder hesperischer die tragische Darstellung auf gewaltsamerem oder unaufhaltsamerem Dialog und Chören, haltend oder deutend für den Dialog, die dem unendlichen Streite die Richtung oder die Kraft geben, als leidende Organe des göttlichringenden Körpers, die nicht wohl fehlen können, weil auch in tragischunendlicher Gestalt der Gott dem Körper sich nicht absolut unmittelbar mittheilen kann, sondern verständlich gefaßt, oder lebendig zugeeignet werden muß; [...] und in der Vernunftform, die sich in der furchtbaren Muße einer tragischen Zeit bildet, und so wie sie in Gegensätzen sich darstellte, in ihrer wilden*

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<sup>192</sup> I equate this with the finite and infinite, with the limited and unlimited; with judgment and Being.

<sup>193</sup> *StA V* 201-202.

<sup>194</sup> I take Being, as Absolute, to be of the same nature as all the sorts of divinities and holiness which populate Hölderlin’s oeuvre.



*Entstehung, nachher, in humaner Zeit, als feste aus göttlichem Schicksaal  
geborene Meinung gilt.*<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *StA* V 272.

#### 4. Schelling and the perspective of the Absolute

In Hölderlin's intellectual climate, two main tendencies of incorporating complete unity in philosophical theory may be discerned: the theoretical endeavor to epistemologically ground philosophy in a first principle, and the tendency to attribute to the 'object' of this principle value in isolation from the results which it grounds – to evaluate it as worth more than everything else. While the first has been analyzed extensively in the preceding chapters, the second is still in need of clarification. What does it mean to evaluate the Absolute as having value in itself instead of in relation to deduced results in a philosophical system? In the previous chapter, Hölderlin has already been shown to attach this value to Being, and the consequences and difficulties that go with this have been delineated. However, the significance of attaching this value, and its implications on Hölderlin's views of Being and of us, still have to become clearer.

In order to carry this out, Fichte and Schelling will be brought to the stage. Discussing what kind of unity these two philosophers were searching for, and what this might teach us about the object of Hölderlin's search, will be this chapter's job. So, to make more explicit the tension that arose between Fichte and Hölderlin in the previous chapter – the agreement on what an Absolute could possibly be in philosophy versus the difference in evaluation of the strong distinction between Absolute and consciousness – Fichte's attitude towards the first principle of philosophy will be contrasted to Schelling's understanding of the Absolute (I). Since Fichte has already been discussed sufficiently, I will merely present his stand towards attributing value to the Absolute as such. Subsequently, the extent to which Schelling's position is different from this, even though it claims to adhere to Fichte's methodology, will shed light on the positive claims of Hölderlin on the primacy of Being.

By briefly adopting a suitable lack of nuance, the difference between this chapter and the preceding chapters could be explained by stating that thus far, I have attempted to prove the thesis that Hölderlin's acceptance of the limits of judgment was far from naïve, irrational or other predicates that have been attributed to Romanticism in its historiography. In stressing Hölderlin's profound technical understanding of the problem, however, I have (consciously *and* partly rhetorically) resisted tendencies that result in more positive descriptions of Being – descriptions which, I wanted to argue, cannot be understood without first assessing the deep problem that is involved in performing the judgments through which they are conducted. From now on, these tendencies have to re-appropriate their rightful place in the explanation of Hölderlin's quest for Being (without losing sight of the result of the previous chapters). So, this chapter and the following, in which I will address how Hölderlin dealt with his understanding of our existential situation, have to compensate for the one-sided problematization that I have carried out, by addressing the possible positive descriptions of the Absolute.

##### 4.1 Jacobi's *Anregung*

In Fichte, it is clear that the transcendental deduction of the system of human knowledge works because the subject is aware of the fact that the first necessary condition of her self-consciousness is not to be found as such in her reflective self-consciousness. Further, she understands that this first condition is not to be sought for or mourned over, for she knows that the thesis in her consciousness is a product of synthesis, because the act of synthesis is a necessary condition of consciousness. The unity at the start of the deduction merely is the first of the necessary conditions which the philosopher distinguishes in her description of the necessary stages of the system of human knowledge; a condition which she thus *represents* as

such in her philosophical discourse, while fully aware of the impossibility of otherwise finding it as such. No sense of loss or mourning over this impossibility is felt, since she knows the first principle as such to be a mere necessary condition of consciousness and knowledge, and no thing nor state of consciousness nor being or reality or even a kind of primal unity in any *sense* worth longing for.

Why did Fichte's audience keep pushing the question what the first principle of philosophy could be in itself? Many sources of inspiration can be mentioned here, and their reception by the Romantics has been well documented.<sup>196</sup> I will just mention one author here, since the task that he designated to philosophy has been openly adhered to by both Hölderlin and Schelling. In his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi formulated what he considered to be the greatest merit of any philosophical search: "Nach meinem Urtheil ist das größte Verdienst des Forschers, *Dasein* zu enthüllen, und zu offenbaren... Erklärung ist ihm Mittel, Weg zum Ziele, nächster – niemals letzter Zweck. Sein letzter Zweck ist, was sich nicht erklären läßt: das Unauflöslliche, Unmittelbare, Einfache."<sup>197</sup> To disclose Being, while realizing that it in principle resides beyond explanation, arguably became the common goal of a whole philosophical generation.<sup>198</sup>

This orientation of philosophy has been recognized in the *Transcendental Dialectic* as the natural tendency of reason as well, and more generally has always played a major role in philosophical questioning: on God, on creation, on good and evil, on the soul etc. However, the metaphysical debates that surrounded among others the reception of Kant's philosophy, the pantheism controversy and the various answers on the *Preisschrift* question "What is Enlightenment?" brought the limits of this orientation to the center of discussion.<sup>199</sup> That is to say, the awareness of a huge problem or even impasse of philosophy in its traditional areas of expertise was raised, while these areas were at the same time recognized as of the utmost importance – perhaps even more important than ever, since the sense of loss of orientation required new reassurance e.g. on the place of man in the universe, on truth, and on religious matters in general.<sup>200</sup> Jacobi's fierce problematization<sup>201</sup> of many of these

<sup>196</sup> E.g. the revival of Platonism, the work of Frans Hemsterhuis, Spinoza and the Pantheism controversy, cf. Beiser, *German Idealism* 361-368, 379-386, Kurz, *Mittelbarkeit und Vereinigung* 19-31, Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 690-715.

<sup>197</sup> Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich, *Werke, Gesamtausgabe* 1.1, eds. Hammacher, Klaus, Jaeschke, Walter (Hamburg 1998-) 29. Hölderlin concluded his Winter semester 1790/1791 notes on the letters on Spinoza by citing this passage, while Schelling gave his own turn to the quote in paragraph 9 of *Vom Ich* five years later.

<sup>198</sup> At least it was for the Romantics, Cf. Beiser, *German Idealism* 385.

<sup>199</sup> See contributions to this debate collected by James Schmidt in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley 1996) 119-142, 168-188, and 212-224.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. the preface of Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 17-25, or the introduction of Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* 1-15.

<sup>201</sup> To justify this odd phrasing, and the abundant presence of the term 'problem' and 'problematic ...' (insert noun) in general, I have to come clean here on the significance which I attribute to 'problematization' as put forth by Michel Foucault in the interview "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations", <http://foucault.info/foucault/interview.html> (8-1-2015), especially the answer to the last question, e.g.: "To one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made. And most of the time different responses actually are proposed. But what must be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their simultaneity is rooted; it is the soil that can nourish them all in their diversity and sometimes in spite of their contradictions." And: "This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the

issues, in combination with the skeptical attacks on Kant and subsequently on foundationalism, forced philosophers and artists to deal with the amplified tension between what philosophy should do, and what they understood it to be able to do. Or, to rephrase this in the vocabulary of my interpretation of *Urtheil und Seyn*: to deal with the contradiction between the necessity and impossibility/contradictoriness of accepting Being. Or again, to return to Jacobi's formulation: the disclosure of the unexplainable should be the goal of philosophy.

This sketch presents a very short hint at an answer to why Fichte's first principle became an 'object' of value in itself. While for Fichte, the Absolute I was merely put forth to protect philosophy and science from skepticism, and was adopted as mere necessary condition and starting point of deduction, part of his audience interpreted it as the holy grail of philosophy. Furthermore, this context also presents a possible reason for why the Absolute I transformed into Absolute Being, even in a work that was still recognized by Fichte as true to his doctrine, like Schelling's *Vom Ich*. In this work, it becomes clear that Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza was of great influence to the reception of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. In this way, Being was disclosed in a theoretical context where, as we have read Fichte make clear in the previous chapter, we indeed have to accept that we reveal something without knowing of it.<sup>202</sup> According to Jacobi's dictum, this is no shame. In the context of Fichte's attempt to found the science of sciences, it seems impossible and, more importantly, useless.

#### 4.2 The aim and method of philosophy

In the introduction to his *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, the already famous twenty year old Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling explicitly adhered to Jacobi's winged words. In contrast to what he considered to be a lifeless, artificial and imprisoning adoption of Kantian formulas without enquiring into the origin from which these formulas stem, Schelling's intention in doing philosophy was, "daß sie vielmehr, wenn ich es mit einem Ausdruck *Jacobis* sagen soll, darauf geht, Daseyn zu enthüllen und zu offenbaren, daß also ihr *Wesen*, *Geist*, nicht Formel und Buchstabe, ihr höchster Gegenstand aber nicht das durch Begriffe Vermittelte, mühsam in Begriffe Zusammengefaßte, sondern das unmittelbare nur sich selbst Gegenwärtige im Menschen seyn müsse".<sup>203</sup> This immediate *Daseyn*, that is merely present to *itself*, and that purportedly is to be found in man itself (at least in this period of Schelling's thought), is the highest object of philosophy. It should also found the results of Kant's philosophy, which already presupposed such a foundation, according to both Fichte and Schelling.

However, as becomes clear during the development of the paragraphs of *Vom Ich*, this highest object of philosophy, that Schelling recognizes as Fichte's Absolute I, is much more important in itself than in relation to what it should found. That is, most of Schelling's energy goes into *determining* what it should be in isolation/as such. This tendency is what Fichte argued against, for instance in the discussed works in the *Philosophische Journal*, and as we have seen for good reason: it easily invites making claims that contradict their own transcendental conditions, and that thereby risk self-annulment or even plain non-

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point of problematization and the specific work of thought." In the previous chapter, I called problematization a focusing on the *source* of the paradoxicality of the Romantic undertaking, instead of on its *results*.

<sup>202</sup> I.e. the context of Fichte's foundation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

<sup>203</sup> *KFA* I 1 100-101.

sensicality. Before I will bring in examples of this trend in Schelling, however, I want to make two caveats. First, the aim of the invocation of Schelling is to show the effect of the different evaluation of what the first principle of philosophy should do, even when some basic consensus of what it possibly *could* do was already present. Showing this, however, has the purpose of delineating the kind of claims that are made on the Absolute, and not of extensively discussing how they are or can be argued for; how they connect to modes of argumentation of Fichte, Jacobi or Spinoza. This is because for Hölderlin, I hope to have already explained sufficiently his understanding of the problem involved in making these claims, so that there is no need to enquire into how Schelling saw his argument to work.<sup>204</sup> Secondly, though, I should first make clear that Schelling explicitly adhered to Fichte's methodological strictures to thought, even though he might be seen to transgress them nevertheless. Therefore, I will start by invoking Schelling's understanding of our limits with respect to the Absolute.

In the context of determining the essence of the Absolute I as freedom, Schelling poses counter questions to a possible uneasiness, which asks why we are not conscious of this absolute freedom:

*Ihr verlangt, daß ihr euch dieser Freiheit bewußt seyd? Aber bedenkt ihr auch, daß erst durch sie all' euer Bewußtseyn möglich ist, und daß die Bedingung nicht im Bedingten enthalten seyn kann? Bedenkt ihr überhaupt, daß das Ich, insofern es im Bewußtseyn vorkommt, nicht mehr reines absolutes Ich ist, daß es für das absolute Ich überall kein Objekt geben, und daß es also noch viel weniger selbst Objekt werden kann? – Selbstbewußtseyn setzt die Gefahr voraus, das Ich zu verlieren.*<sup>205</sup>

Here, Schelling clearly adheres to the rules and strictures of judgment as laid out in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Hölderlin's "Fichte-critique", that was not really a critique of Fichte, is present as well – the question remains, though, why it is necessary to even mention that for the absolute I, no object is present, since for Fichte, this is a triviality, and suggesting otherwise simply absurd. The last sentence of the passage, however, does *suggest otherwise*, because there, Schelling considers it to be dangerous to 'lose' the absolute I. More will be explained on what this could mean below. For now, the following passage could reinforce the idea that Schelling did adhere to the strictures of thought:

*Wer das Ich für einen Begriff halten, oder von ihm numerische Einheit oder Vielheit aussagen kann, weiß nichts vom Ich. Wer es in einen demonstrirbaren Begriff verwandeln will, der muß es nicht mehr für das Unbedingte halten. Denn das Absolute kann nimmer vermittelt werden, also nimmer ins Gebiet erweisbarer Begriffe fallen. Denn alles Demonstrirbare setzt etwas schon demonstrirtes, oder das höchste nicht*

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<sup>204</sup> Put bluntly, this implies that according to Hölderlin, Schelling's program of founding philosophy on his Absolute (I) could not work. Some cryptic remarks made in letters have been used in the secondary literature to prove that this was indeed how Hölderlin conceived of Schelling's early writings.

However, remarks like these have been interpreted in many ways by different scholars to prove many different theses, so I prefer to stay out of interpreting them to back up historiographical argument. Cf. Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 67-70, Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 127-135, Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 164-165, Beiser, *German Idealism* 478.

<sup>205</sup> KFA I 1 180.

*mehr Demonstrirbare voraus. Wer also das Absolute demonstriren will, hebt es eben dadurch auf, und mit ihm alle Freiheit, alle absolute Identität u.s.w.*<sup>206</sup>

By definition, the unconditioned cannot be demonstrated by pointing at necessitating conditions. Similarly, its unity cannot be grasped in a concept, since concepts subsume a multitude in a unity, that therefore cannot be an absolute unity – or, in the Fichtean vocabulary, they are the products of synthesis, which presupposes antithesis.<sup>207</sup> In concepts, proofs, or the empirical realm (conditioned by the Kantian forms of intuition), the absolute unity of the absolute I cannot lie, Schelling concludes in this ninth paragraph of *Vom Ich*. Furthermore, a distinction between *Dasein* and *Wesen* or *Sein* is made to distinguish between empirical and *true* unity; “seinem bloßen, reinen Sein nach schlechthin Eines”.<sup>208</sup> From the perspective of our finite consciousness, therefore, it must be recognized as strictly beyond our conceptual or empirical activity. Even in the case of intellectual intuition, Schelling made clear that he was well aware of this impossibility, because it “ebensowenig als die absolute Freiheit im Bewußtseyn vorkommen kann, da Bewußtseyn Objekt voraussetzt, intellektuale Anschauung aber nur dadurch möglich ist, daß sie gar kein Objekt hat.”<sup>209</sup>

#### 4.3. “[Ü]ber das Absolute würden wir alle einig seyn”

Fichte explained that intellectual intuition as such is no state of consciousness by making clear that intellectual intuition is a mere necessary condition of consciousness, only encompassing our own activity, and only available in combination with the other necessary conditions of knowledge. In Schelling, however, the intuition of the Absolute gets a new twist, because it is evaluated not merely as having value in itself, but even as of more value than any other philosophical knowledge, or anything else. Because of this prime importance of the Absolute I, the question how to then reach or disclose it becomes more pressing. If intellectual intuition is not present in consciousness, how is it then possible? If it is not actual in virtue of its transcendental function of making other activity possible<sup>210</sup>, but instead to somehow be in contact with the Absolute, how is its actuality then argued for? Along the lines of these questions, multiple passages in *Vom Ich* can be seen to beg the question.<sup>211</sup> That is, the specific nature which Schelling attributes to the Absolute in these passages cannot be argued for, because the Absolute falls outside of the scope of argumentation. Since the unconditioned is concerned, this might be accepted. Yet in comparison to Fichte, quite some ‘content’ is ascribed to the Absolute in claims of which it should be asked how they could even be made. It is this kind of claim that helps to understand *what* Hölderlin was after. Furthermore, Schelling’s awareness of the problem of instructively discussing the Absolute – then why introduce it as a *principle* for philosophy, one might ask? – suits Hölderlin’s tragic understanding of our situation, as a remark at the end of paragraph 15 of *Vom Ich* emphatically exhibits. I will quote the whole of the remark, because it contains a beautiful synthesis of many of the important issues which the quest for Being raises, and because it succinctly expresses Schelling’s perspective on them:

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<sup>206</sup> *KFA* I 1 184.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>209</sup> *KFA* I 1 181-182.

<sup>210</sup> Other activity which we can be certain is actual for us, in order that the transcendental argumentation works.

<sup>211</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism* 472-475.

... *Ich wünschte mir Platons Sprache oder die seines Geistesverwandten, Jacobis, um das absolute, unwandelbare Seyn von jeder bedingten, wandelbaren Existenz unterscheiden zu können. Aber ich sehe, daß diese Männer selbst, wenn sie vom Unwandelbaren, Uebersinnlichen sprechen wollten, mit ihrer Sprache kämpften – und ich denke, daß jenes Absolute in uns durch kein bloßes Wort einer menschlichen Sprache gefesselt wird, und daß nur selbsterrungenes Anschauen des Intellektualen in uns dem Stückwerk unsrer Sprache zu Hülfe kommt.*

*Selbsterrungenes Anschauen. Denn das Unbedingte in uns ist getrübt durch das Bedingte, das Unwandelbare durch das Wandelbare, und – wie, wenn du hoffst, daß das Bedingte dir selbst wieder das Unbedingte, die Form der Wandelbarkeit und des Wechsels die Urform deines Seyns, die Form der Ewigkeit und der Unwandelbarkeit, darstellen werde? –*

*Weil du mit deiner Erkenntniß an Objekte gebunden bist, weil deine intellektuale Anschauung getrübt und dein Daseyn selbst für dich in der Zeit bestimmt ist, wird selbst das, wodurch du allein zum Daseyn gekommen bist, in dem du lebst und webst, denkst und erkennst, am Ende deines Willens nur ein Objekt des Glaubens für dich – gleichsam ein von dir selbst verschiedenes Etwas, das du ins Unendliche fort in dir selbst als endlichem Wesen darzustellen strebst, und doch niemals als wirklich in dir findest – der Anfang und das Ende deines Wissens dasselbe – dort Anschauung, hier Glaube!<sup>212</sup>*

As the quote demonstrates, the unconditioned Being – in us, but completely opposed to the empirical I, and not reachable in consciousness – is holy in itself, but has become besmirched by our finite, earthly existence whenever we encounter it. The conditions which determine the possibility of experience – space, time, objects, and concepts – at the same time disrupt that which cannot be captured by these cognitive functions. To interpret this process as a *disruption* is the key to Schelling's position: it explains how we can consider the 'Something' which we attempt to present to ourselves through media that distort 'it' to be undamaged, unchangeable, infinite etc. *in reality*; somewhere else.

Or at least, this is how I have attempted to interpret Hölderlin on judgment and Being. For in *Vom Ich*, Schelling chooses a more straightforward strategy to determine what the Absolute should be, grounded on Schelling's own self-attained intuition. In this, he frequently stresses our incapability of such a determination, reminding of Plotinus writing on the One; writing about the impossibility of writing on it, and nonetheless continuing writing.<sup>213</sup> In addition, this also reminds of Hölderlin's interpretation of tragedy as language for a world which is in danger of losing its meaning, and where the divine has to be communicated through contradictions, in the form of infidelity.<sup>214</sup> Even though this language cannot really mediate what we purportedly feel to be true, we still need some language "um das absolute, unwandelbare Seyn von jeder bedingten, wandelbaren Existenz unterscheiden

<sup>212</sup> *KFA* I 1 216.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI 9.4, 9.10. Werner Beierwaltes has extensively studied the connection between Plotinus and Schelling – it clearly lies beyond the scope of this thesis. See e.g. his *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main 2004) 100-143.

<sup>214</sup> *StA* V 201-202.

zu können.”<sup>215</sup> In tragedy, this happens by means of its violent story, and the violent form of “Rede gegen Rede, die sich gegenseitig aufhebt.”<sup>216</sup> In Schelling, a constant struggle with language is present, just like he notices in Plato and Jacobi, and which is accompanied by the awareness of this problem of expressing in language what transcends it. Yet still quite some determinations are carried out which it is not clear what they could mean. I will give a very short summary:

The I contains all being, all reality, and is the infinite unity of all specific determinations.<sup>217</sup> It describes the sphere of everything which can be thought, excludes any other reality, and must be thought as having absolute causality and pure identity.<sup>218</sup> Its essence is absolute freedom.<sup>219</sup> This means that it is posited by itself (as I, not as thing), it is through itself, “gibt sich selbst die Form der Identität, denn nur das, was schlechthin ist, weil es ist, ist seinem Sein selbst nach durch Identität, d.h. durch sich selbst, bedingt”.<sup>220</sup> Tied to this, the I is determined as Spinoza’s *causa sui* through self-thought, immanent cause of all which is, and thereby the one substance in Schelling’s idealist metaphysics.<sup>221</sup>

The basis of all these descriptions is the “Ich bin! Mein Ich enthält ein Sein, das allem Denken und Vorstellen vorhergeht.”<sup>222</sup> The certainty of my existence is not conditioned by anything else; the activity of thought and the fact of being are identical; no further reason can account for my presence. Why this being should be located in an I, though, is not clear, certainly since Schelling stresses that we should not conflate this Absolute with our empirical I’s, and that it is not subjective at all. It is therefore quite tempting to read *Vom Ich* as the start of a philosophy which focuses on the Absolute in more abstraction, away from subjective consciousness.<sup>223</sup> In relation to Hölderlin, this of course would be convenient.<sup>224</sup> As it precedes all thought and presentation, it is impossible to decide whether the Absolute lies in us or ‘somewhere’ outside of us – and as Hölderlin could explain, this is a misguided question. According to Schelling’s determinations of the Absolute ‘I’ as containing all reality in an infinite unity of all, furthermore, it really is more productive to follow Schelling’s warrants in paragraph two that the unconditioned is beyond subject and object, and to ignore his search for a location of the Absolute.<sup>225</sup> For, as the difference between the infinite and the finite really is about the difference between the One and the many, there is no use to determining whether it should be located in Spinoza’s absolute object, or in an absolute ‘I’.<sup>226</sup> Schelling perhaps indeed was in need of a more thoroughly Platonic language to separate the

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<sup>215</sup> *KFA I 1* 216.

<sup>216</sup> *StA V* 201.

<sup>217</sup> *KFA I 1* 187. “Es soll die Data, die absolute Materie der Bestimmung alles Seins, aller möglichen Realität enthalten.” Cf. Beiser, *German Idealism* 472-475.

<sup>218</sup> § 6, *KFA I 1* 176-177.

<sup>219</sup> § 8, *KFA I 1* 179-182.

<sup>220</sup> § 7, *KFA I 1* 177-179.

<sup>221</sup> § 12-13, *KFA I 1* 192-195.

<sup>222</sup> § 3, *KFA I 1* 166-170.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Beiser and Frank, who right away consider the absolute in *Vom Ich* already more close to Hölderlin’s Being than to Fichte’s I. Beiser, *German Idealism* 472-473, Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 71-72.

<sup>224</sup> Not for the authors of the Frankfurt edition of Hölderlin’s works, though, because they claim that *Urtheil und Seyn* can only be understood as a critique of *Vom Ich*. Henrich argues against this on the basis of historical evidence, and I agree that as regards content, there is no need to understand it as directed against Schelling in order to make sense of the fragment. Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 781-783.

<sup>225</sup> *KFA I 1* 164-166.

<sup>226</sup> *KFA I 1* 167-168.



infinite from the finite.<sup>227</sup>

However, awareness of the contradiction between the Absolute and our situation is clearly present in *Vom Ich*.<sup>228</sup> Further, Schelling understood this contradiction to be the primal contradiction of human existence, which fuels all other contradiction – between philosophical systems, between theoretical and practical reason, between subject and object, concept and reality – as his *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus* of a year later show more extensively.<sup>229</sup> On par with interpreting the effect of judgment as disruption, Schelling considers the source of this contradiction to be the fact that we have *abandoned* the Absolute: “denn über das Absolute würden wir alle einig seyn, wenn wir seine Späre niemals verließen; und träten wir nie aus derselben, so hätten wir kein anderes Gebiet zum Streiten.”<sup>230</sup> The primal contradiction in our thought stems from the contradiction between our finite understanding and the infinite which it attempts to understand. The synthesis of our judgments is an expression of the failed attempt to restore the unity of the Absolute.

Yet everything depends on the evaluation of this attempt, since according to Schelling, this is simultaneously the explanation of the possibility of experience: synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible on the condition of the contradiction between difference and a necessarily presupposed primal unity.<sup>231</sup> On this subject, the *Philosophische Briefe* and *Vom Ich* are continuous; Schelling’s self-understanding in relation to Kant provides an intelligible motive for granting the Absolute its role in philosophy; for diagnosing contradiction *and* presupposing complete unity.<sup>232</sup> In interpreting Kant’s philosophy in this way, Schelling is able to coherently make two different claims which are both informed by his understanding of the Absolute. First, he adheres to Fichte’s attempt to ground the Kantian results by presenting the premises out of which they should be understood, i.e., the contradiction between primal unity and manyness. That is, he performs what Beiser calls the paradox of transgressing the Kantian limits on knowledge in order to save this same philosophy from the difficulties which skeptics had confronted it with, and to make the transcendental deduction work.<sup>233</sup> Secondly, however, he interprets the nature of these results quite differently from Fichte, as he considers them to be failed efforts to capture the transcendent via empirical means. Therefore, Schelling could envision a domain beyond thought, even beyond philosophy, that would release us from all contradiction:

*Hätten wir bloß mit dem Absoluten zu thun, so wäre niemals ein Streit*

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<sup>227</sup> Or a Plotinian language, since Schelling’s determination of the I as existing through self-thought resembles a *nous* which – according to Plotinus, and on par with Hölderlin’s dissociation of Being from identity in *Urtheil und Seyn* – should be distinguished from the absolute One.

<sup>228</sup> E.g. *KFA* I 1 176, 190-191.

<sup>229</sup> E.g. the third letter, *KFA* I 1 293-294.

<sup>230</sup> *KFA* I 1 294.

<sup>231</sup> *KFA* I 1 296.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Schelling’s explanation of synthetic judgment in the introduction to *Vom Ich: Betrachtet man die Sache genauer, so findet sich, daß die im Urtheilen enthaltene Synthesis zugleich mit der durch die Kategorien ausgedrückten nur eine abgeleitete ist, und beide nur durch eine ihnen zu Grunde liegende ursprünglichere Synthesis (die Synthesis der Vielheit in der Einheit des Bewußtseyns überhaupt), und diese selbst wieder nur durch eine höhere absolute Einheit begriffen wird, daß also die Einheit des Bewußtseyns nicht durch die Formen der Urtheile, sondern umgekehrt diese zugleich mit den Kategorien nur durch das Princip jener Einheit bestimmbar seyen.* *KFA* I 1 154, and Vogel’s analysis, “Das Ich und seine Kategorien” 249-250. Frank also considers Hölderlin and Schelling to agree on this issue: *Unendliche Annäherung* 712-714.

<sup>233</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism* 368-369.

*verschiedener Systeme entstanden. Nur dadurch, daß wir aus dem Absoluten heraustreten, entsteht der Widerstreit gegen dasselbe, und nur durch diesen ursprünglichen Widerstreit im menschlichen Geiste selbst der Streit der Philosophen. Gelänge es irgend einmal – nicht den Philosophen, sondern – dem Menschen, dieses Gebiet verlassen zu können, in das er durch das Heraustreten aus dem Absoluten gerathen ist, so würde alle Philosophie und jenes Gebiet selbst aufhören. Denn es entsteht nur durch jenen Widerstreit, und hat nur so lange Realität, als dieser fort dauert.*<sup>234</sup>

The condition of our situation is contradiction. To be released from this situation is the ideal of our philosophical striving – theoretically and practically, in different ways – yet as Schelling stresses in the quote, philosophy cannot reach this ideal; it ends in contradiction, and can only demand us to nevertheless not give up our search.<sup>235</sup> In this way, Schelling relates himself interestingly to what I have called Kant’s pre-theoretical intuition. For Kant, the confrontation of the subject with the manifold is the start of the process through which we are able to gain knowledge through synthetic judgment. This basis is the matter of experience, and not problematic at all. For Schelling, synthetic judgment is the expression of our attempt to recognize unity in the manifold. The unity that we express through these judgments is made *possible* by the precondition of absolute unity, and it is first made *necessary* by our confrontation with manyness. This unity in judgment is not absolute unity though.<sup>236</sup> For, the manifold, caused by our leaving the Absolute, is in contradiction to the Absolute, and can therefore never be completely *processed* by us in order to reach complete unity – the many will never be completely brought back to One.<sup>237</sup> Thus, the way in which Kant situates the subject is affirmed by Schelling, but his explanation of *why* this is so radically alters the understanding of our situation – in a tragic way that reminds of Hölderlin’s evaluation of the loss of Fichte’s first principle; Being.

Furthermore, Schelling’s explanation proceeds by making a metaphysical assumption that on principle could not be argued for, as Schelling himself understood.<sup>238</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption is made, and the metahistorical structure that is built upon it – a primordial state of blissful unity, and a subsequent Fall, an *Ur-Teilung* – accounts for our existential situation as in opposition to the Absolute Oneness because of our manyness. For again, Schelling adhered to Fichte’s law of reflection, and opposed the Absolute to consciousness because of this. Yet his understanding of the Absolute as a blissful unity which we have lost, and which we should attempt to regain, leads him to a quite different conclusion:

*“Wo absolute Freiheit ist, ist absolute Seligkeit, und umgekehrt. Aber mit absoluter Freiheit ist auch kein Selbstbewußtseyn mehr denkbar. Eine Thätigkeit, für die es kein Objekt, keinen Widerstand mehr gibt, kehrt niemals in sich selbst zurück. Nur durch Rückkehr zu sich selbst entsteht Bewußtseyn. Nur beschränkte Realität ist Wirklichkeit für uns. Wo aller Widerstand aufhört, ist unendliche Ausdehnung. Aber die Intension unseres Bewußtseyns steht im umgekehrten Verhältniß mit der Extension*

<sup>234</sup> KFA I 1 296. Cf. Waibel’s analysis, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 171-172.

<sup>235</sup> KFA I 1 176, 299.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 714.

<sup>237</sup> KFA I 1 294. Cf. Waibel, *Hölderlin und Fichte* 172.

<sup>238</sup> Because it is the unconditioned; “Wer also das Absolute demonstrieren will, hebt es eben dadurch auf”, KFA I 1 194.

unseres Seyns. Der höchste Moment des Seyns ist für uns Uebergang zum Nichtseyen, Moment der *Vernichtung*.”<sup>239</sup>

What Schelling here names the highest moment of Being, and the moment of destruction, in which no self-consciousness can be thought, is Schelling’s interpretation of Fichte’s intellectual intuition as such. Systematically, it is on par with Fichte’s intellectual intuition as described in the previous chapter: an immediate intuition of complete unity which transcends consciousness. Imbedded in Schelling’s understanding of the Absolute as analyzed above, however, the issue of intellectual intuition leads Schelling into a terrain which Fichte attempted to prevent his audience from entering: real intellectual intuition means pursuing an experience in which we give up the limits which ensure reflected life. For Hölderlin, therefore, it is important that “das gränzenlose Eineswerden durch gränzenloses *Scheiden* sich reiniget”, as takes place in tragedy.<sup>240</sup> In the quoted passage, however, Schelling seems to fashion an experience which has as its object the great Nothing, and which inclines to preferring death over life.<sup>241</sup>

That is why Schelling coherently concludes “je unmittelbarer die Erfahrung, desto näher dem Verschwinden”, and states that waking up out of intellectual intuition is like waking up out of death.<sup>242</sup> “Würde ich die intellektuale Anschauung fortsetzen, so würde ich aufhören zu leben. Ich ginge “aus der Zeit in die Ewigkeit!” –”<sup>243</sup> As a conclusion of Schelling’s understanding of the contradiction between our existential situation and the Absolute, this is right. However, as the end of the previous chapter has concluded, what really should be inferred from this is even more radical, less optimistic and, as Hölderlin acknowledged, tragic. That is, what should be concluded is that intellectual intuition as Schelling conceives it is not possible, and that our awareness of its impossibility is the only insight that can be learned from pushing this question. Nonetheless, this insight does not vindicate our pre-theoretical intuition or faith, because it operates by assuming some rough conception of the Absolute as a complete simple unity which stands in contradiction to our situation. So with Schelling, we could conclude “über das Absolute würden wir alle einig seyn”, but for Hölderlin, the hypothetical status of the used *Konjunktiv II* is in need of more stress. For sure, on the Absolute no disagreement would arise, because a mere simple Oneness would not allow negativity. Yet this is to say that we would all agree on the Absolute because we would all be dead.<sup>244</sup>

Compared to Hölderlin’s thought on tragedy, this seems to be the same sort of paradox as the claim that the primordial can only present itself when the sign = 0.<sup>245</sup> However, in the way in which I analyzed Hölderlin on tragedy, this is more about a violent

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<sup>239</sup> *KFA* I 1 324. Because of the amount of italics, I have chosen to not italicize this quote, in order to preserve clearly which terms Schelling wanted to stress.

<sup>240</sup> *StA* V 201, as discussed in 3.3. Italics are mine.

<sup>241</sup> As is affirmed by his remark that Chinese mystics are more honest than others when they locate the state of absolute bliss in Nothing: “Denn, wenn Nichts das heißt, was schlechterdings kein *Objekt* ist, so muß das Nichts gewiß da eintreten, wo ein Nicht-Objekt doch noch objektiv angeschaut werden soll, d.h. wo alles Denken und aller Verstand ausgeht.” *KFA* I 1 326.

<sup>242</sup> *KFA* I 1 325.

<sup>243</sup> *KFA* I 1 325.

<sup>244</sup> As a title of this paragraph, the quote therefore is slightly ironical as well. However, death and Nothing certainly are important elements accompanying the quest for Being, as *Hyperion* (and the next chapter) shows. Cf. *StA* III 72 and Lawrence Ryan, *Hölderlins »Hyperion«*. *Exzentrische Bahn und Dichterberuf* (Stuttgart 1965) 129.

<sup>245</sup> *StA* IV 286.

transgression of limits that are not to be surpassed than it is about the possible positive result of such a transgression. Conceded, for Hölderlin, tragic presentation is based on the occurrence that “die unendliche Begeisterung unendlich, das heißt in Gegensätzen, im Bewußtseyn, welches das Bewußtseyn aufhebt, heilig sich scheidend, sich faßt, und der Gott, in der Gestalt des Todes, gegenwärtig ist.”<sup>246</sup> In the appearance of death, the divinity becomes *present* during the process of the presentation of the tragic. What should be realized, however, is that this is no solution to the contradiction: a consciousness which annuls consciousness either is no experience at all, or it does not really annul consciousness. The aim of tragedy is not to solve an impossibility: it is rather to point at the infinite, that is: in contradictions.

As a conclusion of this chapter, therefore, two main results of the discussion of Schelling are important. First, the positive descriptions (and evaluation) of the Absolute offer a bit more detailed notion of what it would mean to reach complete unity, to give up and be liberated from philosophical argument, and to all become One. Further, concepts like freedom and salvation are ascribed to this state, in which we become one with unchanging and infinite unity. Thereby, Schelling is able to interpret and evaluate the aims of philosophy, and the results of the endeavors of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi from a higher standpoint, that is: from the standpoint of the Absolute, which on my account can already be ascribed to Schelling’s early works. This results in an interesting interpretation of Kant’s philosophy, and a corresponding presentation of the situation of the subject in the world and the cause of this situation: because she abandoned the Absolute, the subject now attempts to regain it through synthetic judgment, but never really succeeds. The latter is most interesting, because it deeply resembles Hölderlin’s interpretation of our existential situation – both in its method of comparing our life with primordial unified life, and in this method’s result.

Secondly, however, the positive descriptions of the Absolute lead to accepting our limitations with respect to this topic, and they do so in even a more thorough manner than Schelling demonstrates at times. That is to say, when he attempts to distinguish between the finite and the infinite, Schelling ascribes determinations to the Absolute that cannot be made, despite all his own warnings against it. Because of this, it does not become clear why exactly these determinations are the right ones, and not others. Finally, in a general sense, an author is usually said to commit a performative contradiction when the practice or performance of her argument violates one of her own theoretical assumptions. In the case of Schelling, it can now be concluded that his performative contradiction is at the same time the most salient falsity, and the most easily forgiven error. This is because respectively, he performs the exact sort of claim which he decries so fiercely, while at the same time, this sort of determination is a necessary error in this context – because it is necessary to err in the quest for Being, since otherwise no notion, however vague, of what we are after could be presented.

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<sup>246</sup> *StA* V 269.

## 5. Conclusion

As the final passages of the last chapter again witnessed, the discussion of Being easily falls prey to negative conclusions, even when this discussion's aim is to present some positive descriptions, as was the case in the previous chapter. Yet this does not imply that nothing has been learned about Being, and about Hölderlin's search for it, or that the questions which I posed in the introduction have not been answered. That is why I will reintroduce the main question of this thesis, and the questions that led to posing it. In this final chapter, I will subsequently present the main answers to these questions by invoking Hölderlin's only novel, and by examining how it expresses and deals with the results of the previous chapters.

The main question was: How should Hölderlin's search for Being be understood? This question was chosen because a direct enquiry into the nature of Being would have been too problematic, and not very fruitful, as the sub-questions showed: What is the problem that we face when we search for Being? What does it even mean to search for Being? What kind of options and attitudes does the problem leave *us* in search, and furthermore, what does it tell us about ourselves? Finally, what does this tell us about our goal?

Even though this thesis has focused on the problem of searching for Being, it has still provided considerable insight into the goal of the search, as well as into our relation to this goal, and our existential situation in general. This is because what Hölderlin understands Being to be informs his view on the problem of searching for it, and because in the end, the object of search and the search itself are hard to separate, that is: this separation has been useful for analytical reasons, but should not be considered as a real separation of two different things. This is quite similar to the effect of judgment on Being. Therefore, in the following conclusions, the answers to the different questions, and the results of the chapters, will be discussed integratively: the problem of searching for the One, Hölderlin's way of dealing with this problem, and the way in which this manner of coping is informed by his understanding of the Absolute. In this, I will use *Hyperion* as an instrument to express Hölderlin's position. Hence, my discussion of the novel will be very fragmentary, and is not aimed to present a full interpretation of it.

### 5.1. The intuition of the whole's presence

I want to start by relating the final letter of the first part's second book to my discussion of Schelling. This is because there, *Hyperion* in one short speech to his friends makes statements on both of the elements of my conclusion on Schelling: the interpretation of our situation from the perspective of an account of the Absolute, and the impossibility of experiencing complete simple unity. Thus, the letter presents a good starting-point for noticing what kind of strategy Hölderlin employs in his depiction of *Hyperion's* quest for Being, and what this strategy deals with, that is, from which understanding it starts of what Being could possibly be for us.

As both Hölderlin and Schelling believe, the reason why synthetic *a priori* judgment is so important to philosophy, is because we attempt to restore the complete unity which we left when an *Ur-Theilung* forced us to abandon the Absolute. Without this goal, all (philosophical) search would be senseless, and without the contradiction between this goal and our existential situation, all philosophical quarrel and opposition would be unintelligible.<sup>247</sup> In this way, the perspective of the Absolute offers an explanation of our human activity, and thereby also lends meaning to our quest, even though we are confronted with a sort of contradiction which reason would rather solve by giving up the search for

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<sup>247</sup> As made clear in the quoted *KFA* I 1 296 and my discussion of it in 4.3.

Being.<sup>248</sup> That is, even though the synthesis in judgment is a *failed* attempt to restore the unity of the Absolute, the interpretation of judgment with regard to the infinite nonetheless teaches us about the limits of our finite situation. Furthermore, even though this interpretation points at our limits, it is informed by the perspective of the unlimited, and thus grants that this perspective is what lends our attempts significance.

In *Hyperion*, the protagonist explains to his friends why the ancient Athenians' unity of religion, art and philosophy made them the best philosophers. According to Hyperion, the fact that they did not yet really *separate* their gods from their selves, and were still able to represent them as beautiful self-images, was caused by their contact with the Absolute, here in the appearance of divine beauty:<sup>249</sup>

*Der Mensch, begann ich wieder, der nicht wenigstens im Leben Einmal volle lautre Schönheit in sich fühlte, wenn in ihm die Kräfte seines Wesens, wie die Farben am Irisbogen, in einander spielten, der nie erfuhr, wie nur in Stunden der Begeisterung alles innigst übereinstimmt, der Mensch wird nicht einmal ein philosophischer Zweifler werden, sein Geist ist nicht einmal zum Niederreißen gemacht, geschweige zum Aufbaun. Denn glaubt es mir, der Zweifler findet darum nur in allem, was gedacht wird, Widerspruch und Mangel, weil er die Harmonie der mangellosen Schönheit kennt, die nie gedacht wird. Das trockne Brot, das menschliche Vernunft wohlmeinend ihm reicht, verschmähet er nur darum, weil er ingeheim am Göttertische schwelgt.*

*Schwärmer! rief Diotima, darum warst auch du ein Zweifler.*<sup>250</sup>

From the perspective of the intuition of the Absolute, we understand the limitations of our faculty of reason, and of our thinking, to be despicable but definitive parts of our finite situation. Compared to Kant, this quote shows that for Hölderlin, the tendency towards the unconditioned has completely emigrated out of reason. The confrontation with reason's limitations, and the belief in the necessity of continuing the search, are both the product of a pre-theoretical intuition of the Absolute. So, as a first conclusion, it should be clear that for Hölderlin, all doubt, contradiction and difficulty which this thesis has addressed, could only be worried about because of a pre-theoretical grasp of the beautiful whole. The author of this thesis on the search for Being would not unhesitatingly attribute such a grasp to himself, but surely would admit that, if Hölderlin's *Schwärmerei* did not appeal to him at all, he would have written a thesis on counterfactuals in causal explanation, or on Frege.

Another beautiful example of this interpretation of our finite activity as related strictly towards the One goal, and as stemming from an understanding of its actual presence, can be found in the preface to the *Vorletzte Fassung of Hyperion*:

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<sup>248</sup> Yet even in the *Critique or Pure Reason*, Kant considers the tendency towards the unconditioned natural and unavoidable, as explained in chapter two.

<sup>249</sup> *Das erste Kind der menschlichen, der göttlichen Schönheit ist die Kunst. In ihr verjüngt und wiederholt der göttliche Mensch sich selbst. Er will sich selber fühlen, darum stellt er seine Schönheit gegenüber sich. So gab der Mensch sich seine Götter. Denn im Anfang war der Mensch und seine Götter Eins, da, sich selber unbekannt, die ewige Schönheit war. — Ich spreche Mysterien, aber sie sind. — StA III 79.*

<sup>250</sup> StA III 81.

*Wir hätten auch keine Ahnung von jenem unendlichen Frieden, von jenem Sein, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, wir strebten gar nicht, die Natur mit uns zu vereinigen, wir dächten und wir handelten nicht, es wäre überhaupt gar nichts (für uns), wenn nicht dennoch jene unendliche Vereinigung, jenes Sein, im einzigen Sinne des Worts vorhanden wäre. Es ist vorhanden – als Schönheit; es wartet, um mit Hyperion zu reden, ein neues Reich auf uns, wo die Schönheit Königin ist. –*<sup>251</sup>

As conclusion of the preface to this version of *Hyperion*, this passage shows Hölderlin's strong conviction that only the reality of what Hyperion searches for makes this search intelligible. That is, the presence of the goal, in the appearance of beauty, even though it is "nie gedacht", is constitutive to understand our situation and all our activity. Furthermore, the conditional verbs give proof of Hölderlin's transcendental argumentation: Being is the condition of the possibility of all our striving, our thought and our action. Furthermore, Being is the transcendental condition of our consciousness of objects ("es wäre überhaupt gar nichts (für uns)"). This corresponds to the argument of *Urtheil und Seyn*, in which the unity of Being is introduced as necessary condition of the separation which judgment performs. Similarly, it corresponds to the function of intellectual intuition in Fichte's philosophy, in which the immediacy is grounded of objects in experience *to us*.<sup>252</sup>

In the same speech which an inspired Hyperion delivers to his friends, and which I quoted above, Hyperion also warrants that a use of understanding and reason, which is not fueled by a feel for the divine beauty of all, does not result in philosophy.<sup>253</sup> This is because it misses the higher goal which should motivate all of our philosophical quests. As illustrations, Hyperion compares the Egyptians and the Nordic people with the Athenians. While the Nordic sobriety and rationality kills all feeling before it is well developed, the Egyptian tends to rule the infinite, master it, and exert power on the world and on herself.<sup>254</sup> Perhaps this reminds more of fierce Fichteanism, as the figure of Alabanda does in the first book, than that it reminds of Schelling. However, it has in common with Schelling that it pushes the (self-understood) impossibility of determining the Absolute, and thereby risks ending up in infinite emptiness. Hyperion dismisses this result of the Egyptian attitude as follows: "das Höchste, was er nennt, ist eine verschleierte Macht, ein schauerhaft Rätsel; die stumme finstre Isis ist sein Erstes und Letztes, eine leere Unendlichkeit und da heraus ist nie Vernünftiges gekommen. Auch aus dem erhabensten Nichts wird Nichts geboren."<sup>255</sup>

In relating this to Schelling, I do not claim that Schelling's position is satisfyingly described by stating that it results in an empty infinity. Rather, I hold Schelling's method in *Vom Ich* to run the danger of necessarily ending in mere Absolute Nothing, if it were consistently pursued. That is why, for once, I would like to refer to a vague remark in a letter of Hölderlin to support an interpretation. In this letter to Niethammer of 24-2-1796, Hölderlin writes about Schelling: "Er ist mit seinen neuen Überzeugungen, wie Du wissen

<sup>251</sup> *StA* III 236-237.

<sup>252</sup> In addition, the formulation, specifically the 'for us', can be considered Fichtean, as this was one of Fichte's important moves in the *Rezension Aenesidemus* to secure the certainty of experience. Thus, Hölderlin keeps thinking in a Fichtean way, even though he is after something else. The same can be seen in the 'Fichte-critique' in the discussed letter to Hegel: *[A]ls absolutes Ich hab ich kein Bewußtsein, und insofern ich kein Bewußtsein habe, insofern bin ich (für mich) nichts, also das absolute Ich ist (für mich) Nichts. StA* VI 155.

<sup>253</sup> *StA* III 83.

<sup>254</sup> *StA* III 82.

<sup>255</sup> *StA* III 82.

wirst, einen besseren Weg gegangen, ehe er auf dem schlechteren ans Ziel gekommen war.”<sup>256</sup> Henrich interprets the worse route as referring to Schelling’s foundationalist attempt to ground philosophy in the absolute I, while Frank suggests two opposite readings, suspending judgment on whether Hölderlin’s remark was meant ironical.<sup>257</sup> For me, by contrast, it would be most convenient if the worse route referred to Schelling’s tendency to argumentatively determine what the nature of the Absolute consists in, while at the same time claiming that its pure simple unity transcends thought. For as section 3.3 on Fichte and Hölderlin concludes, after its due problematization in judgment, the Absolute should not be argued for anymore. As the discussion of Schelling exhibits, the correct result of this route is that such determination is not possible, because an abyss separates us from the Absolute which may only possibly be bridged by dying. Hence, a sublime Nothing would remain as the result of arguing for the Absolute. However, this does not suit Schelling’s understanding of what the Absolute should be. For, sources of inspiration like Spinoza, Platonism and Christianity point at what the Absolute should be, for Schelling just as for Hölderlin: a divine unity of all. Hence a new route is required.

In the novel, Hölderlin has made Hyperion abandon a similar route in the transition from the first book of the first part to this part’s second book. For at the end of the first book, Hyperion is completely disillusioned: he was searching for complete simple unity through ecstatic experience, but in the end, he only found Nothing:<sup>258</sup>

*O ihr Armen, die ihr das fühlt, die ihr auch nicht sprechen mögt von menschlicher Bestimmung, die ihr auch so durch und durch ergriffen seyd vom Nichts, das über uns waltet, so gründlich einseht, daß wir geboren werden für Nichts, daß wir lieben ein Nichts, glauben an's Nichts, uns abarbeiten für Nichts, um mälig überzugehen in's Nichts — was kann ich dafür, daß euch die Knie brechen, wenn ihr's ernstlich bedenkt? Bin ich doch auch schon manchmal hingesunken in diesen Gedanken, und habe gerufen, was legst du die Axt mir an die Wurzel, grausamer Geist? und bin noch da.*

*O einst, ihr finstern Brüder! war es anders. Da war es über uns so schön, so schön und froh vor uns; auch diese Herzen wallten über vor den fernen seeligen Phantomen, und kühn frohlokend drangen auch unsere Geister aufwärts und durchbrachen die Schranke, und wie sie sich umsah, wehe, da war es eine unendliche Leere.*<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *StA* VI 203.

<sup>257</sup> Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein* 128-130, Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung* 427. A short conclusion on the difference between my interpretations and Manfred Frank’s depiction of the historical relations between Fichte, Hölderlin and Schelling: Frank considers Schelling and Hölderlin to move beyond Fichte in stressing the abyss between consciousness and the Absolute. I have interpreted this the other way round: I see Schelling to indeed adhere to Fichte’s *ursprüngliche Einsicht* (as Frank suggests yet rejects), but to combine this with the different evaluation of the Absolute. This means that not the technical insight is radicalized in Schelling and Hölderlin, but the existential implications. So, while Frank connects Schelling to Hölderlin on the basis of insight in the problematic, I have connected Schelling and Hölderlin to Fichte in this context, and draw a parallel between Schelling and Hölderlin rather on grounds of the tendency to appreciate the Absolute in itself. Frank, *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* 57-60.

<sup>258</sup> See Ryan, *Hölderlins »Hyperion«* 111-112 for this interpretation of the first book of the first part, and its demarcation from the second book.

<sup>259</sup> *StA* III 45.



Perhaps it is right to say that, as a result of all the reasoning on Being in this thesis, the only correct argumentative determination of it is emptiness. Self-contradictory and self-annulling because of its impossible simplicity, the Absolute One may perhaps only be *determined as Nothing*. As Fichte explained, according to the law of reflection, the Absolute I can only be understood as that which it is not. And as this thesis has shown, Hölderlin's understanding of this problem was strong, and did not shy away from negative results. However, Nothing in the end is an incorrect result of arguing for the Absolute just as much as Everything, because it still contradicts the structure of judgment in which the argument takes place: the infinite emptiness is just as hard to express as the infinite all. That is why, as chapter two and three both concluded, reason should stop at the self-contradiction, accept its limitations, and not claim any positive conclusion.

## 5.2. The eccentric orbit

However, that does not mean that we should stop here. Hölderlin did never stop here. Being still remains the unity of all, and no empty infinity. The acceptance of contradiction does not entail that the search for this unity should be stopped, or that the pre-theoretical intuition of it has changed. So, a better route is required, a route which allows us to accept our limitations, and nonetheless not completely give up hope. In *Hyperion*, two similar methods are displayed which can be seen to present such a route, although the road is bumpy: the theory of the two opposing drives and their reconciliation in love, and the dynamic which Hölderlin calls the eccentric orbit. I will start by explaining the latter, and by giving an example of one its movements, and will subsequently depict the former. In this way, these two methods should be understood as strategies to deal with the problem which this thesis has discussed. Their invocation therefore serves to answer the questions posed in the introduction: on how to understand Hölderlin's search for Being, on the nature of the problem surrounding it, and on Hölderlin's manner of dealing with this problem.

*Hyperion* is structured according to the repetitions of the eccentric orbit that Hyperion experiences, the last of which consists in his writing of the letters to Bellarmin.<sup>260</sup> This orbit is eccentric, because it takes the unity of Being that we allegedly experience in childhood as the centric point of departure that we necessarily depart from when we grow up. The goal of the orbit is to reproduce this (lost) unity in ourselves in the form of character or maturity.<sup>261</sup> However, during the novel, time and again an attempt at such a reproduction is rejected as not the right method to reach this goal.<sup>262</sup> A renewed attempt then follows, in which Hyperion briefly experiences a return to the center before starting a new eccentric orbit. Over the course of these repetitions, the orbit changes too: a new method is chosen to reach the goal (reproduction of the center through human activity), and the goal itself also seems to take on different shapes.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Ryan, *Hölderlins »Hyperion«* 6-7.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. the preface to the *Vorletzte Fassung*, *StA* III 236-237, especially the following passage: *Wir durchlaufen alle eine exzentrische Bahn, und es ist kein anderer Weg möglich von der Kindheit zur Vollendung. Die seelige Einigkeit, das Seyn, im einzigen Sinne des Worts, ist für uns verloren und wir mußten es verlieren, wenn wir es erstreben, erringen sollten. Wir reißen uns los vom friedlichen En kai Pan der Welt, um es herzustellen, durch uns Selbst. Wir sind zerfallen mit der Natur, und was einst, wie man glauben kann, Eins war, widerstreitet sich jetzt, und Herrschaft und Knechtschaft wechselt auf beiden Seiten.*

<sup>262</sup> As announced in the preface to the *Fragment von Hyperion*, *StA* III 163.

<sup>263</sup> Ryan, *Hölderlins »Hyperion«* 11-14.

In this way, the method of the eccentric orbit effects the meaning of its goal. The result is a variance of possible meanings of the goal across the novel. This is not to say that every new eccentric movement announces a radical break: many concepts reappear in new stages and contexts to refer to the Absolute: *himmlisch, heilig, Seyn, Natur, Einheit*, etc. Moreover, the basic understanding of what these concepts refer to is also stable: the *En kai Pan*, the infinite unity of all which we have lost and attempt to restore. Nevertheless, the structure of the novel does entail some important reformulations. The first of these takes place in the transition from the first to the second part of the first book. In the first part, Hyperion fruitlessly pursues a return to Being through ecstatic experience, which is characterized by *Stille, Friede* and a complete simple being One. This does lead to some mystical experiences of *seliger Selbstvergessenheit*, but at the end of the first part, Hyperion rejects these as self-deceptions and falls in complete pessimism and nihilism.<sup>264</sup> In general, the problem with this method, and its concept of Being, follows the result of *Urtheil und Seyn*: the transgression of *Selbstvergessenheit* may bring a blissful moment in which the subject claims to experience mystical unity, but cannot be held on to, because it annuls conscious life. Hence, the subject claims to experience the loss of the self in absolute unity, while she at same time ascribes this experience to *herself*.<sup>265</sup> Further, this experience is closer to non-experience if it is an experience at all, as it negates the conditions of consciousness.

The transition to the second part of the novel brings a new return to the center, a new method to reproduce it, and a new conception of what this center should be, too. The most important change of the latter is its internal complexity, as it now is given the Heraclitian name of *das Eine in sich selber Unterschiedene*, which makes it more accessible:

*Ich hab es Einmal gesehn, das Einzige, das meine Seele suchte, und die Vollendung, die wir über die Sterne hinauf entfernen, die wir hinauschieben bis ans Ende der Zeit, die hab ich gegenwärtig gefühlt. Es war da, das Höchste, in diesem Kreise der Menschennatur und der Dinge war es da!*

*Ich frage nicht mehr, wo es sei; es war in der Welt, es kann wiederkehren in ihr, es ist jetzt nur verborgner in ihr. Ich frage nicht mehr, was es sei; ich hab es gesehn, ich hab es kennen gelernt.*

*O ihr, die ihr das Höchste und Beste sucht, in der Tiefe des Wissens, im Getümmel des Handelns, im Dunkel der Vergangenheit, im Labyrinth der Zukunft, in den Gräbern oder über den Sternen! wißt ihr seinen Namen? den Namen des, das Eins ist und Alles?*

*Sein Name ist Schönheit.*

*Wußtet ihr, was ihr wolltet? Noch weiß ich es nicht, doch ahn ich es, der neuen Gottheit neues Reich, und eil ihm zu und ergreife die andern und führe sie mit mir, wie der Strom die Ströme in den Ozean.*

*Und du, du hast mir den Weg gewiesen! Mit dir begann ich. Sie sind der Worte nicht wert, die Tage, da ich noch dich nicht kannte –*

*O Diotima, Diotima, himmlisches Wesen!<sup>266</sup>*

<sup>264</sup> *StA* III 45-46.

<sup>265</sup> As Schelling explains: “Schwerlich hätte je ein Mystiker sich als vernichtet denken können, hätte er nicht als Substrat der Vernichtung immer wieder sein eigenes Selbst gedacht.” *KFA* I 1 319.

<sup>266</sup> *StA* III 52-53.

The Absolute now seems to *appear* in the figure of Diotima. In this return to the center, Hyperion learns that the unity which he sought in ecstasy, in reality is all around him in the beauty of nature and in the woman which he falls in love with. Still, this beauty *was* there and can return, but remains a mystery. Hyperion will experience disillusionment again.<sup>267</sup> That is, the new direction does not entail a solution to the problem of reaching Absolute unity, because this experience of beauty in the world, and of love for Diotima, is not the infinite beauty. While the protagonist which expresses himself in the quote does not realize this, the writer of the letters does.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, Diotima herself understands very well that she as earthly creature is not the One goal of Hyperion, and that the appearance of beauty in the end will not satisfy Hyperion, because in reality he is in search of the Beyond to which this appearance points.<sup>269</sup> Moreover, Diotima understands why Hyperion necessarily will be confronted with disillusionment after every instance of renewed hope. Thereby, she presents an interpretation of the key movements that have thus far occurred in the novel, explaining why every return to the center necessarily is followed by a failure to reproduce the unity of all in ourselves. In this way, she explains why the interesting figures, which Hyperion encountered, in the end all disappointed him, just because they were no gods, and why the beauty of this world in the end will disappoint him, because it is not the infinite beauty of the world to come.<sup>270</sup> So, she rebuts Hyperion's lament that the gods have twice thrown him back on earth: "Zweimal, sagtest du? o du wirst in Einem Tage siebzimal vom Himmel auf die Erde geworfen. Soll ich dir es sagen? Ich fürchte für dich, du hältst das Schicksal dieser Zeiten schwerlich aus. Du wirst noch mancherlei versuchen, wirst —"<sup>271</sup>

This observation of Diotima hits the nail on the head. Or at least, this image, of Hyperion constantly reaching for the beyond, and being thrown back on earth, fits perfectly to my analyses of the contradiction between judgment and Being. Specifically, it expresses the status of this contradiction as a Kantian antinomy, in which the positing of a thesis leads to the conclusion that the antithesis must be true, and in which the affirmation of the antithesis leads back to the truth of the thesis. The 'balance' of mutually eliminating theses in which this results, or rather the dynamic of back and forth between thesis and antithesis, heaven and earth, is constitutive to the structure of the novel, and to Hyperion's fate. Furthermore, this antinomial relation of Being and judgment, heaven and earth, cannot be solved, nor can it be exposed as illusionary. Hyperion's story exhibits a dynamic which does not lead to the end of search through capture, but remains an endless back and forth between infinity and the finite.<sup>272</sup> Even though the eccentric orbit affects Hyperion's understanding of the goal of his search, and even though it at times presents new hope, the dynamic of

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<sup>267</sup> And renewed hope; no complete resignation ever takes place in *Hyperion* nor in Hölderlin. Cf. Paul Ziche, "„In die Arme der Unendlichkeit“. Zu Hölderlins Gebrauch mathematischer Darstellungsmittel am Beispiel seines Gedichts *An die Natur*", in: Daniel Fulda, Thomas Prüfer (eds.), *Faktenglaube und fiktionales Wissen. Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Kunst in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 1996) 92.

<sup>268</sup> *StA* III 60.

<sup>269</sup> *StA* III 66-68, especially: *Lieber — lieber Hyperion! Dir ist wohl schwer zu helfen. Weißt du denn, fuhr sie mit erhöhter Stimme fort, weißt du denn, woran du darbest, was dir einzig fehlt, was du, wie Alpheus seine Arethusa, suchst, um was du trauerst in aller deiner Trauer? Es ist nicht erst seit Jahren hingeshieden, man kann so genau nicht sagen wenn es da war, wenn es wegging, aber es war, es ist, in dir ist's! Es ist eine bessere Zeit, die suchst du, eine schönere Welt.*

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Ryan, *Hölderlins »Hyperion«* 123-127.

<sup>271</sup> *StA* III 68.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Cassirer on Hölderlin's understanding of our tragic situation as expressed in *Hyperion*, "Hölderlin und der deutsche Idealismus" 148-151.

dwelling between heaven and earth remains an expression of Hölderlin's tragic understanding of our existential situation.

### 5.3. Reaching maturity

What will become of Hyperion? In the course of the novel, the eccentric orbit repeats itself, causing moments of pure bliss, and of complete devastation. Nevertheless, Hyperion never resigns his search. By contrast, every time a new resurgence of *Begeisterung* and a new trail of the Absolute occur. This can be explained by the eccentric orbit, but also by another model that informed Hölderlin's understanding of the search for Being. According to this model, one drive directs us to the infinite, while the other asks to respect the limitations of our existence, because these limitations form the conditions of our conscious lives. Finding a balance between these two drives is what it means to reach maturity.<sup>273</sup> The condition of finding this balance between the two opposing drives is love, as the wise man in *Hyperions Jugend* expresses:

*Wir können den Trieb, uns zu befreien, zu veredeln, fortzuschreiten ins Unendliche nicht verläugnen. Das wäre thierisch, wir können aber auch den Trieb, bestimmt zu werden, zu empfangen, nicht verläugnen, das wäre nicht menschlich. Wir müßten untergehn im Kampfe dieser widerstreitenden Triebe. Aber die Liebe vereinigt sie. Sie strebt unendlich nach dem Höchsten und Besten, denn ihr Vater ist der Überfluß, sie verläugnet aber auch ihre Mutter die Dürftichkeit nicht; sie hoft auf Beistand. So zu lieben ist menschlich.*<sup>274</sup>

Love unifies two drives that, pursued in isolation, either have no value (pure judgment) or are not possible (pure Being). In fact, according to Hölderlin, this reconciliation is what first makes us human, since the drive towards the infinite is what distinguishes us from animals, and our holding on to the conditions of judgment is what enables us to live conscious, reflected human lives.<sup>275</sup> This reconciliation of conflicting drives is part of Hölderlin's way to deal with the contradiction that comes with our human condition. It means to accept the dynamic of affirming both ends of the contradiction between judgment and Being, between manyness and One. Hyperion moves from one extreme to the other in an educational process that moves away from both extremes, in order to understand them as necessary yet unattainable conditions of human life, which takes place between them. It should therefore be clear that the aim of love is not to reconcile judgment with Being. This is impossible. Rather, the aim is to reconcile tendencies which are both part of our existential situation.

In the introduction, I distinguished the question concerning the goal of search from the search itself. The problem of this goal consists in the fact that for us, it is self-contradicting, while we at the same time understand it to be the highest goal of our existence.

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<sup>273</sup> *StA* IV 255, 257, and compare Beiser's explanation, including the innocence – fall – redemption schema. I have mentioned this historical framework in the context of Schelling and in the introduction. However, it is misleading, since the Beyond of redemption is not reached. That is why Hölderlin's theory of reaching maturity is a better candidate to express the reconciliation that is aimed at here, even though the promise of redemption is overly present throughout *Hyperion*. Beiser, *German Idealism* 403-405.

<sup>274</sup> *StA* III 194.

<sup>275</sup> *StA* III 194, Cf. Cassirer, "Hölderlin und der deutsche Idealismus", in: *Idee und Gestalt* (Berlin 1924) 120-121, and Beiser, *German Idealism* 403. Similar statement in *StA* III 202.

In this way, the contradictoriness of Being in judgment teaches us about the limitations of our perspective. Thereby, however, despite the contradictoriness, the search remains informed by the intuition that the unity of all is to be sought, and thus the search for Being remains possible as a goal, even though the goal is never really reached. That is, in the end, our confrontation with our limitations, and our awareness of the problem of Being, only inspires to not give up the search, because it makes us aware that the worth of the goal transcends these limitations. Therefore, the arguing for Being should recognize its own rightful termination. Philosophy in this case does not incite us to give up our pre-theoretical intuition of the whole, nor does it theoretically ground it. Instead, philosophy gives prove of the limitations of thought in the quest for unity. The philosophical quest results in a tragic understanding of our situation, which cannot be corrected or ameliorated through further philosophizing. Nonetheless, both the negative insight, and Hölderlin's methods of dealing with it – such as the tragic presentation, the eccentric orbit, and the reconciliation of our drives – help to cope with the felt loss, and to never resign in the search for Being. Hölderlin's understanding may be tragic, but it is never nihilistic. Hope always remains, however unreliable.

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