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The interest of German idealism

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§ For over two hundred years, readers of all philosophical persuasions, from Schopenhauer to recent anglophone philosophers, have responded to German idealist writings with a mixture of incomprehension, frustration, and incredulity, in varying proportions. Indeed the German idealists levelled charges of meaninglessness against one another – Schelling, for example, complained that one 'cannot really contradict' Hegel's philosophical propositions, for they are propositions that 'give one nothing'; it is, he says, 'as if one wanted to carry water in cupped hands.'

The sheer difficulty of German idealism, combined with the claim that it makes for its own great importance, helps to explain why it should have elicited an unusual number of satirical treatments. One fine example comes from Hawthorne's 'The Celestial Rail-road', an allegorical tale modelled on Bunyan, published in 1843:

At the end of the valley, as John Bunyan mentions, is a cavern, where, in his days, dwelt two cruel giants, Pope and Pagan, who had strewn the ground about their residence with the bones of slaughtered pilgrims. These vile old troglodytes are no longer there; but into their deserted cave another terrible giant has thrust himself, and makes it his business to seize upon honest travelers and fatten them for his table with plentiful meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes, and sawdust. He is a German by birth, and is called Giant Transcendentalist; but as to his form, his features, his substance, and his nature generally, it is the chief peculiarity of this huge miscreant that neither he for himself, nor anybody for him, has ever been able to describe them. As we rushed by the cavern's mouth, we caught a hasty glimpse of him, looking somewhat like an ill-proportioned figure, but considerably more like a heap of fog and duskiness. He shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted.

Hawthorne was of course provoked to this by the American transcendentalists, but as he rightly supposes, the buck passes back up to the Germans.

But even if difficulty of comprehension is part and parcel of German idealism, it is surely also true that the outlook of the present-day anglophone philosophical world contains a hefty set of obstacles to a sympathetic appreciation of the German idealists: quite simply, speculative idealism clashes head-on with philosophical commitments which have come to be buried deep within us. One thing that shows this to be so is the way in which the tasks of exegesis and defence are related in present-day commentary on German idealism.

A renaissance of work on the German idealists has taken place in the States over the last twenty years or so and interest in German idealism shows no sign of flagging. Contemporary anglophone work on German idealism tends to go in one of two directions. On the one side are those who occupy themselves with accounting for its internal development out of Kant, and then the sequence, if that is what it is, of systems from Fichte to Hegel or to late Schelling, in a spirit that recalls German philosophical scholarship. On the other side are those whose primary aim is to defend German idealism as having contemporary philosophical relevance. The former are generally keen to show, with a view to telling a plausible history story, that the German idealists were not, perversely, returning in the name of Kant to the dogmatic metaphysics that Kant had supposedly destroyed, but commentators in this camp feel under no further pressure to play down the metaphysical commitment of German idealism. At the same time, their interpretations typically do not suggest, at least not directly, a way of getting inside German idealism from the outside, from the standpoint of philosophy as it now most widely practiced. The latter interpreters, by contrast, characteristically deflate the metaphysical commitment of German idealism, and they support their non-metaphysical readings by arguing that the cost of not doing so is to render German idealism so utterly incredible as to consign it immediately to the dusty archives of intellectual history.

Of course, not all commentary on German idealism falls squarely into the one camp or the other, but as a rough schema for classifying interpretations of German idealism, it is not misleading to think in terms of a choice between metaphysical deflation and metaphysical commitment: interpretations allow themselves to be plotted in terms of their proximity to the one pole to the other, and any interpretation of German idealism that lays claim to completeness must declare where it stands on the issue.

Confining ourselves to just these two options, it is not hard to describe the tasks and difficulties facing each. Deflationary interpreters may hope to persuade us that what seems to be the pronounced speculative metaphysical dimension of German idealism is a mere appearance and not to be taken at face value, perhaps just a matter of their philosophical rhetoric. Alternatively they may grant that the metaphysical commitment is what it seems, but argue that it is not essential to the true core of German idealism, that is, the German idealists' own view of their systems' philosophical centre of gravity. What deflationary interpreters must strive to avoid is having to concede that what they offer is not strictly speaking an interpretation of German idealism at all but rather a case of employing materials drawn from German idealism to construct something new in its place.

The general problem for non-deflationary approaches has already been indicated. The rationale for deflationary interpretation is quite clear – its goal is to recover, freed from mist and moonshine, German idealist insights into issues that remain of concern to us. The motivation of non-deflationary interpretations is not similarly transparent. If a non-deflationary interpretation is advanced in a strictly historical spirit, then no obligation is incurred to so much as raise the question of German idealism's relation to contemporary philosophical practice. This is, however, almost certainly not how the majority of non-deflationists regard their interpretations: rather they suppose, implicitly if not explicitly, that the study of German idealism is or can be a source of philosophical illumination for us in the here-and-now. But this makes the question of German idealism's positive relation to contemporary philosophical practice unavoidable. What can be held to sustain, these days, a non-deflationary interest in German idealism that is genuinely truth-directed, that amounts to more than a quasi-aesthetic admiration for the marvels of the past, or a kind of confused nostalgia for a time when more luxurious forms of philosophical thought were possible? Is there scope for arguing that it is precisely the speculative metaphysical commitment of German idealism that makes it deserve contemporary attention? The brief remarks that follow are intended to suggest, in a very sketchy form, one line that may be taken in response to the challenge facing non-deflationary interpretation of German idealism.

§ A good place to start is with an examination of the transformation in the philosophical landscape of the English-speaking world since the beginning of the twentieth century. To bring out the extraordinary quality of this historical development, I want to look at a somewhat out-of-the-way yet highly pertinent paper by Norman Kemp Smith.

Though best known to us now as Kant's translator and as the author of an outstanding commentary on the *Critique*, the first close textual study of the work in the English language, Kemp Smith wrote much else on philosophy and its history. In one paper, 'The present situation in philosophy', an inaugural lecture which he gave at Edinburgh in 1919 and published the following year in *The Philosophical Review*, Kemp Smith gives a typology of philosophical positions, and explains how, on his view, the balance of argument lies between them.

On Kemp Smith's account there are only three types of philosophical position: naturalism, idealism, and skepticism. (1) *Naturalism* he defines as the view that 'man is a being whose capacities, even in their highest activities, are intelligible only as exercised exclusively in subordination to the specific requirements of his terrestrial environment'. (2) *Idealism* by contrast treats man as a 'microcosm' of a larger reality and measures him 'against standards for which it [man's natural environment] cannot account'. The 'supreme concern [of idealism] is to show that the aesthetic and spiritual values have a more than merely human significance', and that 'intellectual and spiritual values' – by intellectual he means here, pertaining to empirical theoretical reason – 'stand on the same plane of objectivity, and thereby justify parity of treatment'. Idealism, he supposes, is 'probably the philosophy of the great majority of men', and he considers that the overall tendency in the history of philosophy 'has been towards' it. (3) *Skepticism* – which he also calls 'agnosticism', and under which heading he also includes nineteenth-century positivism – is a kind of pseudo-position, not on a par with idealism

and naturalism: it has, he says, no 'engine-power' and is 'at most, a kind of Greek chorus, commenting ironically on the course of the action'. Skepticism has affinities with both naturalism and idealism: with naturalism because it leads smoothly into the view that '[t]hought is an instrument developed through natural processes for the practical purposes of adaptation', and with idealism because it upholds a distinction of reality and appearance which opens the way to 'idealist teaching'. Skepticism thus resolves itself ultimately, according to Kemp Smith, into either naturalism or idealism.

So it is the great antagonism between idealism and naturalism that lies at the heart of all philosophy, and here there has been, he thinks, some change: whereas until recently idealism predominated, by virtue of its appeal to 'moral, social, religious' considerations, the nineteenth century has seen (through the growth of the human sciences) the development of a 'very greatly strengthened naturalism' that 'can now profess to meet idealism on more equal terms within its own field, that of our specifically human activities'. This fortified naturalism is further strengthened by having shed its positivistic elements: it now 'claims to be realistic', 'dealing with reality, not in the manner of J. S. Mill or Huxley but as apprehending it face to face'.

However, the opposition remains as sharp as ever: The naturalist holds that we are parts of the Universe which are simply 'more complex', 'more completely unified than is the Universe as a whole'; while the idealist interprets the Universe as a whole in the light of this 'part'. And although the decision between naturalism and idealism has become less easy to make, Kemp Smith considers that idealism retains its edge, for two reasons, both having to do with values.

First, because naturalism must hold that our values have value 'only by reference to the detailed contingencies of terrestrial existence', only idealism is compatible with the claim for their absoluteness. He writes: 'Now since the only basis upon which idealism can rest this far-reaching conclusion' – namely that man (purposive self-consciousness) is the model for grasping the Universe as a whole – 'is the contention that spiritual no less than intellectual criteria have an absolute validity, idealism must stand or fall according to its success or failure in upholding this latter position, in face of the counter-arguments of the naturalistic philosophies'.

Second, Kemp Smith thinks that the best that naturalism can achieve is a sideways-on view of values: the naturalists, he says, 'keep their eyes off the human values' in so far as they 'approach them only through the study of our natural and economic setting [...] the result is that they do not study them at all'.

The two criticisms are of course connected, for Kemp Smith: he thinks that to take a non-sideways-on view of values, to look them in the face, is to view them as absolute, beyond all natural contingency.

§ Kemp Smith's outlook sounds strange to our ears – not least because of the very high level of generality that he allows himself – but it is in no way idiosyncratic. The period which he represents was, at the time of his lecture in 1919, fast disintegrating, but it had had a very good run for its money, and as the philosophical journals of the period show, British and American philosophers had for several decades shared exactly Kemp Smith's view of the philosophical geography.

The *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* – the first scholarly journal in America devoted to philosophy (in which, incidentally, the pragmatists published their earliest essays) – was devoted to the task of promulgating idealism, and it contains a huge quantity of original translation of works by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and Schopenhauer, alongside articles on Shakespeare, Goethe, Beethoven, Michelangelo – a large range of literary and cultural topics, all taken to be relevant to the speculative philosophical project, which was regarded as vital to the nation's spiritual and political health. In such a context the philosophical question was not whether idealism is correct, but which form of idealism is correct. Naturalism, also referred to as materialism, is referred to in the pages of the *Journal* only incidentally, as one might speak of a primitive superstition, while recent challenges to idealism are given short shrift. For example, a review in 1876 of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* opens with the remarkably assured judgement, 'Darwin commences by begging the question ...', and the author goes on to say: 'Darwin is undoubtedly a great philosopher, but like other monomaniacs appears to be insane on one point, viz: that man came from the seed of a jelly by "Natural Selection" ...'

The *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* was founded by the so-called St Louis Hegelians, who believed that Hegelian philosophy contained a resolution of the conflict that had led to the American

Civil War, but the idealist hegemony shows itself in other, less systematically partisan journals. Virtually every issue of *The Philosophical Review*, from its first issue in 1892 until well after 1910, is dominated by discussions of idealism. And to only a slightly lesser degree, the same is true of *Mind*, which carried papers by Bradley, McTaggart and other idealists in almost every issue from its inception in 1880 to 1910.

It would be wrong to suggest that idealism was unchallenged throughout this period. One finds articles with titles like 'Naturalism and idealism', 'Objective idealism and its critics', and so on, in which philosophical debate is organised in terms of an argument between the idealist and the naturalist. But as often as not it seems that naturalistic challenges are entertained only in order that idealism should have the opportunity of flexing its muscles, and it is a long time before the criticisms made of idealism cease to be pot-shots and become more confident expressions of an alternative.

Really it is only after the publication of Moore's 'Refutation of idealism' in *Mind* in 1903, that one sees the formation of a three-sided debate in which there is a rough balance of power – between the old idealist school, the 'new realism' of Moore, Stout and Russell, and pragmatism as represented by F. C. S. Schiller.

At the risk of labouring the point, here is one more example of the pro-idealist, anti-naturalist outlook endorsed by Kemp Smith, at its height – from the opening of a paper called 'The present meaning of idealism' given by Ernest Albee to the American Philosophical Association in 1909:

What, then, may we all fairly take for granted in discussing the present situation in philosophy, no matter how divergent our final conclusions may seem, or may in fact be? In the first place, it seems fair to assume that, for the technical student of philosophy, materialism proper is a thing of the past.

What defines and suffices for idealism, Albee says, again very much in line with Kemp Smith, is 'the teleological standpoint, that of inner meaning or significance, which is the standpoint of philosophy itself.'

§ The nature of the historical change is therefore quite clear.

Once upon a time – to the philosophers whose papers filled the journals up until about 1905, and to Kemp Smith as late as 1919 – idealism seemed without doubt better established philosophically than naturalism, whereas we now think, more or less, the exact opposite. In fact, our conviction of the correctness of naturalism is so well entrenched that Kemp Smith's very broad category of naturalism is no longer particularly meaningful for us: It does not pick out a unified philosophical outlook, for us, but merely points towards a wide variety of clearly differentiated positions, which, we would say, have it in common just that they reject supernaturalism and restrict metaphysics to explicating the natural order. In order to give the term naturalism, or naturalisation, a real job to do, it has become necessary to employ it much more narrowly than Kemp Smith does – with the result that at least some of the arguments that now go on between self-described naturalists and anti-naturalists look, from Kemp Smith's point of view, like arguments within the naturalistic camp. Similarly, the term 'idealism' hardly serves for us, as it did for Kemp Smith, to express a unified philosophical programme worth speaking of under one heading – we do not find it helpful to suppose that a single philosophical thought is working itself out in the history of philosophy from Plato through Berkeley to Kant and the German and British idealists.

In this way, the victory of naturalism in Kemp Smith's broad sense has been followed by a kind of self-effacement: because naturalism takes itself to contrast with nothing philosophically significant, the designation falls away. From Kemp Smith's point of view, however, this is all a mistake: it is as if naturalism has sought to consummate its victory by concealing it, by dissolving the concepts needed to see clearly and properly what was at issue in its original struggle with idealism.

§ Recognition of the contrast between how the world looked to philosophy a hundred years ago and how it looks to us now is, it seems to me, a cause for wonderment, and it makes the historical question how this transformation took place worthy of investigation.

So what was it, exactly, that came to persuade philosophers that idealism in fact possesses none of the strengths supposed by Kemp Smith's generation?

On the account which it is most natural to suggest, as I indicated a moment ago, the end of idealism coincides with the rise of analytic philosophy, and the developments in philosophical logic and conceptual analysis that provided the core of the latter also provide the reasons why idealism lost credibility. This first stage of development of analytic philosophy – though itself naturalistic only in the weak sense of being broadly pro-scientific – may be seen as having laid the ground for the formulation much later in the day of more genuinely naturalistic positions. The historical development from idealism to naturalism would then be a two-stage process: first came the logical and methodological extinction of idealism, accompanied by a heightened respect for empirical knowledge claims, science and mathematics; then came the naturalistic turn within analytic philosophy.

The appropriate observation to make about this suggestion is that, while it is quite true that the end of idealism and the birth of analytic philosophy coincide historically, as they do in the biographies of Moore and Russell, it can hardly be maintained with any seriousness that idealist philosophy was refuted by logical discoveries or by the discovery of conceptual analysis. When charges of ground-level logical fallaciousness and conceptual confusion were levelled against the idealists, as they were by Moore, Russell, and others, the analytical machinery that was appealed to, or the interpretation that was given of its philosophical significance, came laden with assumptions that begged the major questions against idealism.

It needs also to be emphasised that the portion of idealist philosophy targeted for attack by Moore and Russell – reflecting their own primary exposure to Bradley and McTaggart – had an extremely loose relation to German idealism and cannot in any sense be held to have taken into account the actual historical positions of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. As far as I am aware, no attempt was made in early analytic philosophy to produce a thorough and convincing critique of historical idealism, and much of what was rejected in the name of idealism consisted in an identification of it with a Berkeleyan subjectivism – something which the whole tradition from Kant to Hegel had in fact strained to refute.

Of course, it is entirely understandable that the rejection of idealism should have had this rather peremptory character, since the new logic and method opened up possibilities that called to be explored as a matter of urgency, and this required a clean break with the existing idealist establishment, which had in any case become sterile and complacent. A proper critique of idealism would have required a detailed reconstruction of idealist philosophy – which is just what no longer seemed worth spending time on.

All the same, it is one thing to say that philosophers in the first decade of the twentieth century had good reasons to explore non-idealistic philosophy, and another to suggest that the rejection of idealism had the shape of a philosophical argument. We do better in seeking the missing argument for drawing a line under idealism, by looking across the Atlantic at developments in American philosophy around the turn of the twentieth century, where idealists and their critics continued to talk to one another for longer than they did in Britain.

The most revealing text that I have come across in this context is an influential paper by Dewey published in *The Philosophical Review* for 1906, called 'Experience and objective idealism'. Dewey recognises idealism, like Kemp Smith, as a unified tradition going back to Plato, which receives its optimal formulation in modern neo-Hegelian idealism, and in this paper he tries to engage with it on its own terms. Idealism has, Dewey claims, three cornerstones, namely its claims to be able to account for: (first) objectivity, in empirical data; (second) the transformation of empirical data into theoretical knowledge; and (third) the existence of purpose and value in experience.

Dewey argues that with each of these claims there is essentially one and the same problem, which, once recognised, leads to idealism's 'euthanasia', as he puts it, out of which emerges a 'thoroughgoing empiricism'. The problem, according to Dewey, is that the a priori structures affirmed by idealism are inherently unstable: supposedly, according to the idealist, they are non-transcendent, they cannot be dissociated from the actual concrete experience in which they are realised; and yet, they are also taken by the idealist to be detached from experience, since they are the agent of its formation. Idealism is, he concludes, 'condemned to move back and forth between two inconsistent interpretations of a priori thought'.

The correct view, Dewey claims, is that the objectivity, theoretical perspicuity, and value-ladenness of experience can be seen to grow from its inside, once it is recognised that 'experience' is not the subjective thing the idealist (on Dewey's interpretation) thinks it is, but rather an act, or

practice. We can see, he claims, that: 'The one constant trait of experience from its crudest to its most mature forms is that its contents undergo change of meaning, and of meaning in the sense of excellence, value.'

Without going into more detail, I think it fair to say that what Dewey's paper does at most is to remind us of a perennial issue in idealism concerning the status of the a priori – though one which the idealist tradition can hardly be said to have neglected – and to describe, in programmatic fashion, a possible alternative. So again, despite the more intimate engagement with idealism, the conclusion must be that nothing resembling a refutation is delivered.

§ The gist of what I have said so far, then, has been to suggest that idealism faded out of anglophone philosophy without having ever been expelled by force of argument.

Still – if we now switch standpoints and turn matters around – the question arises: Ought it to be thought that there was anything amiss with this? Perhaps there never were compelling philosophical reasons for idealism, and the fog simply lifted. After all, the historical fact that no conclusive argument for closing accounts with idealism was explicitly given, does not mean that there were at the time no good operative reasons for doing so, let alone that reasons are lacking now for continuing to keep idealism off the landscape.

The starting point for the next set of things I have to say lies in the feature of Dewey's paper which shows him to be closely in tune with the idealists of his age. Dewey shares with the earlier founders of American pragmatism a keen appreciation of the attractions of idealism – he began his career as a Hegelian – and he agrees with Kemp Smith, as I indicated, in thinking that the issue of value is paramount.

Now this is one feature of Dewey's engagement with idealism that makes his outlook remote from that of the present day. It is not now generally thought that the philosophical authority of naturalism is conditional upon what service it renders to our value-orientation – that is, our interest in inhabiting a world in which we can take value to be realised in a way that is satisfactory at all levels of reflection. It is not generally thought that our value-orientation is what gives us reason to be naturalistic: we do not tend to think that naturalism is essential for the realisation of our interest in value; nor that it would be an option for us to reject naturalism if it proved inimical to our value-interests. Dewey however does accept just these claims, and in so doing he shows himself to belong to the tradition of humanistic, value-grounded naturalism that flourished in the Enlightenment – the tradition which says, with d'Holbach and la Mettrie, that our value-interests alone make it rationally necessary for us to think of ourselves as natural through-and-through.

And (to repeat) it seems to me that this is not our present view – which is rather that naturalism is a *fait accompli*, setting limits to what we can allow ourselves to think, so that the question remaining is how much of the value-riddled 'manifest image' can be retained alongside or within the scientific image (and on what sorts of terms).

§ This characterisation of the way in which naturalism functions as a default, a kind of restraining presupposition in our present outlook, is intended to take into account the various kinds of contemporary positions which describe themselves as naturalistic, whilst opposing themselves sharply to naturalism's reductionist, scientific forms. Rich naturalism, as this kind of position may be called, formulates itself in reaction against the presumption that nature consists in nothing but the hard physical bare-bones of things: it presents itself as correcting what it regards as an unnecessarily austere conception of the natural order which other philosophical naturalists have, mistakenly, read off from natural science. By relaxing the boundaries of the natural, it tries to show that, appearances to the contrary, there is nothing within naturalistic commitment as such that threatens the value-interests of natural consciousness. We can have 'symphonies as well as atoms', as one naturalist has put it. According to this outlook, our value-interests give us reason to be rich naturalists, given that we have to be naturalists of some sort.

Now the issue of rich naturalism is, in my view, absolutely decisive in relation to the aim of showing that the interest of German idealism lies in and not in despite of its metaphysical commitment. If the prospects for rich naturalism are good, then Kemp Smith and the other idealists of his generation were wrong to draw up the battle-lines in the way they did, and at the same time, the

deflationary interpreters of German idealism are right to offer up German idealism as a resource for contemporary rich naturalists to draw on.

Now one might think that, if this is so – if the interest of German idealism under its metaphysical, non-deflationary interpretation, is bound up with the question whether rich naturalism is defensible – then there is not after all much scope for establishing the philosophical interest of German idealism, since the exploration and defence of rich naturalist possibilities is central to contemporary philosophy and can hardly be said to have reached, or to be heading towards, a negative conclusion.

Although this final point is true, I think it is possible to give reasons for thinking that there are limitations to what rich naturalism can achieve, which are at the same time reasons for regarding idealism as soundly motivated. So let me summarise, very briefly, what I take these to be.

The first thing to be said – returning to an earlier point – is that rich naturalism formulates itself as a corrective to austere naturalism. This originally negative, or reactive, character of rich naturalism is not accidental to it. It qualifies as naturalism because it rejects speculative metaphysics, and the ultimate historical source of this rejection can be nothing other than modern philosophy's incorporation of the great epistemological achievement of natural science. In this sense, the starting point of rich naturalism, as much as that of austere naturalism, is the conception of nature that arises out of natural science. To that extent, the road is tilted uphill for rich naturalism from the outset. What it needs to do, therefore, is to persuade us that it is not a merely negative position, that it amounts to more than a statement of obstacles to austere naturalism.

The next, and related, point is that the distinction between rich and austere naturalism is for us extremely well articulated, and that we are highly sensitised to the danger of fudging the issue, by merely stipulating a harmony between the Lebenswelt and reality as disclosed by natural science.

Again, looking back to Dewey throws this feature of present-day philosophical consciousness into relief.

There is a great deal in Dewey's statements of his position which initially seems to resonate with contemporary rich naturalism, but on closer examination one sees that Dewey is not a good advertisement for its coherence. Dewey's view is that it is *in the very nature of experience* to form ever higher unities, which, simply in virtue of being unities, possess value, value in the fullest and strongest sense. Yet, the ground of this tendency to unity and value is, on Dewey's account, simply Darwinian: biological functions take the place of the idealists' a priori metaphysics. Dewey talks as if it is *no surprise* to discover in nature the very same kind of purposiveness that we claim for human activity. We think, however, that Dewey ought to be surprised at this fact, if it is one.

This is why the generation of American naturalists to which Dewey belongs, and for whom Dewey was the leading figure, looks to us now a mere phase in the development of anglophone naturalism, in which the naturalistic impulse had announced but not yet clarified itself.

§ The next point to consider is that of the resources available to rich naturalism.

Rich naturalism standardly seeks to establish itself by means of anti-reductionist arguments, and this strategy raises several questions.

In the first place, concerning the criteria for reducibility. If reducibility is what is to decide between rich and austere naturalism, then the two forms of naturalism need to agree what considerations count as relevant to determining reducibility. But if that is so, then it seems that the substantial, doctrinal disagreement between the two kinds of naturalism will inevitably show up methodologically, as an argument over the criteria for reducibility. And if it is not possible to design criteria which will avoid begging questions, and yet also allow determinate conclusions to be reached, then anti-reductionist arguments will not suffice to establish rich naturalism securely.

In the second place, there is a question concerning what exactly is, or would be, achieved in any case through a successful demonstration of irreducibility. The austere naturalist holds that the reality of phenomena in the Lebenswelt – those that do have genuine reality – derives from the hard natural facts to which they reduce, while these facts derive their reality in turn from the nature of the basic stuff or structure that exhausts reality. Austere naturalism thereby answers the metaphysical question, What are the grounds that make possible the real existence of the Lebenswelt?

If, then, it is demonstrated successfully by the rich naturalist, that such-and-such a phenomenon is not reducible to the natural facts austere naturalism conceived, this conclusion is not an end of enquiry, but rather a reaffirmation that the phenomenon stands in need of explanation. Irreducibility

arguments, if successful, yield data that call for metaphysical interpretation: the rich naturalist needs to say something on the subject of *why there should be*, in general, phenomena that have substantial reality, but do not owe it to the hard natural facts. The idealist has at hand an independent, positive concept of the status to be accorded to phenomena that have been shown to be irreducible to the hard natural facts, that can play this role. The rich naturalist is not in the same position. And it should be plain that for the rich naturalist to answer here, that the reality of irreducibles 'derives from the natural order broadly conceived', would be to merely draw attention to the further difficulty facing rich naturalism, of specifying the principle of unity of this order, in such a way as to make 'nature', in the rich naturalist's sense, more than a mere aggregate.

One possibility that suggests itself, in view of this difficulty, is for the rich naturalist to reject the strong demand for a 'grounding' of the phenomena, and to appeal to some sort of internal perspective – the perspective afforded by the phenomena on themselves – as providing all the grounding that is needed. This however appears to leave rich naturalism in an odd position. The rationale of rich naturalism lies in its insistence on the reality of phenomena that it regards hard naturalism as putting in jeopardy – and this insistence makes less sense if the conception of reality claimed by rich naturalism is weakened in the radical way implied by the repudiation of a need for grounds. Put another way, the problem is that, while the original motivation for rich naturalism suggests that it accepts the traditional conception of the task of philosophy – as furnishing sufficient legitimating grounds – the strategy of repudiating the need for grounds appears to withdraw from that conception.

§ There is another, more basic question that needs to be addressed in this context.

Do our value-interests extend beyond what any naturalism, even a rich naturalism, can satisfy? The tendency in present-day philosophy is to assume that they do not. The view is often that we should draw a distinction between extravagant and moderate demands in the sphere of value, and that once we have achieved maturity – once we have stopped asking for heaven on earth; once it is been realised that the death of God is just a problem of adolescence – we will then be able to appreciate how moderate value-demands, at least, can be satisfied by rich naturalism.

The question of how we should set about measuring our value needs, and deciding whether the recommendation of moderation makes sense, seems to me, however, extremely difficult – and historical observation supports the idea that there is something puzzling here. Looking at the sweep of philosophy from Kant down to the present, with the question of the relation of naturalism to value in mind, two things stand out. One, already referred to, is the way in which present-day naturalism has detached itself from the value-motivation that underpinned it historically – from the eighteenth-century *philosophes* up to Dewey – and has become instead a self-sustaining, purely theoretical philosophical position.

The other is the violence of the impact of naturalism experienced in other historical quarters. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (each in their own way) accepted naturalism as a *fait accompli*, but they interpreted this fact as of momentous significance, as having catastrophic implications for natural consciousness, turning our natural value-orientation upside-down. They may be said to explain what is meant when Kemp Smith talks of naturalism as threatening the 'absoluteness' of value (and to that extent they can be conscripted, against their wills, in support of his case for idealism).

This historical point – the contrast of panic on the one hand, and insouciance on the other – proves nothing either way, of course; but it does show there is a puzzle here, which contemporary naturalism cannot really be said to have engaged with, and which is not dispelled by a cheery recommendation of maturity.

§ What I have been suggesting, then, is that a case can be made for thinking that, when naturalism is set alongside idealism, the limitations of naturalism are perceived to correspond to – to convert themselves into – strengths of idealism. These remarks are intended, however, to do no more than indicate the scope for recapturing Kemp Smith's perspective as at least a philosophical possibility: it is just possible that – just as Kemp Smith is under an illusion when he supposes that idealism cannot be dislodged – so equally we are under an illusion, when our philosophical instincts tell us that non-naturalism is unthinkable. At least to this (in one respect thin, but in another crucial) extent, German idealism holds philosophical interest.

The idea of German idealism, in my view, is that of an attempt to construct a philosophical system built on what is taken to be the universal value-orientation of critically enlightened humanity, by taking as given certain doctrines of Kant's, including the anti-naturalism of his theoretical and practical philosophy, while regarding Kant as having taken only half measures.

The perceived problem with Kant, in the eyes of the German idealists, is that he leaves two central threads of ordinary consciousness – its empirical orientation, and its value orientation – partially independent and to some degree in tension with one another. Kant's achievement is, they accept, to have clarified and disentangled these threads, and to have interconnected them, but Kant fails to reintegrate them as a complete totality, able to withstand the challenge of Spinozistic naturalism. In response, German idealism undertakes to dismantle speculatively the natural, commonsensical world and to reassemble it in accordance with a metaphysics that shows the possibility of value to be built into it.

In German idealism, the connection of the system with value takes a special, internal form: value – what the German idealists most often call 'freedom' – is taken as the primary authorisation for the system that provides it with a philosophical articulation, and the system itself explains what value and the demand for it are, in a way that shows in turn why it is proper to accord them this philosophical authority. In this way the German idealists remain true to the form of Kant's famous argument, that we are warranted by our experience of moral obligation in claiming cognition of the supersensible.

This 'value bias' in German idealism, so to speak, far from entailing that German idealist philosophy concentrates on ethics and political philosophy at the expense of theoretical philosophy, or that it somehow dissolves or translates theoretical issues into practical ones, has almost the exact opposite implication. Since the conditions for value are, according to German idealism, metaphysical, and since a theory of value is only as secure as the metaphysics which grounds it, the primary task for philosophy, in responding to value-demands, lies in the theoretical sphere. This is why skepticism is a major preoccupation for the post-Kantian idealists: because of what was staked on Kant's theoretical philosophy, it mattered greatly that Kant had failed to make theoretical reason secure against skeptical attack.

§ Regarding the outlook that motivates non-metaphysical interpretations of German idealism, there are a couple of things to be said.

First, if rich naturalism is not secure, and if German idealism itself provides some of the reasons why it is not, then rational reconstruction of German idealism as a species of rich naturalism, or as a buttress to it, looks arbitrary.

Second, the claim which is crucial for the historical aspect of the non-metaphysical interpretation – the claim that Hegel et al could not possibly have wanted to write metaphysics, since they believed Kant had shown metaphysics to be impossible – is not, I think, tenable. The notion that the German idealists took the message of Kant's *Critique* to be the end of metaphysics is anachronism. The German idealist view was that the only problem that exists with metaphysics as such is attributable to its contamination with empirical thinking. Kant's Dialectic was taken by them, rightly or wrongly, as showing only the necessity of *purifying* metaphysics. They were persuaded, not of Kant's conclusion that pure reason in its theoretical employment is cognitively empty, but of the diagnosis that Kant makes in the Dialectic: namely, that past metaphysics has failed due to its confounding of empirically formed thought with speculative reason. Since, however, the German idealists both rejected Kant's account of the limits of knowledge, and believed that Kant had in any case (in his moral theory and moral theology) claimed cognition which goes beyond the bounds of possible experience, the Dialectic appeared to them to be positively prescribing a task, that of constructing a speculative metaphysics aware of its heterogeneity with empirical thought.

Third, and in conclusion, it should go without saying, but perhaps needs to be said all the same, that the interpretation of German idealism as speculative metaphysics does nothing to make German idealism a somehow 'essentially religious' philosophical movement. Certainly German idealism has a lot to say about religious consciousness, on at least some forms of which it sets some sort of value, and it has a relation to negotiate with theology, but it is not the latter-day compound of Popery and Paganism suggested by Hawthorne.