ONE

RETRACING THE *UNGRUND*

Not "I think," but "it thinks in me."

—*Nietzsche*

THOUGHT LIVES UNDERGROUND. What is the ground (*Grund*) of human consciousness—of subjectivity—the very essence that makes thought, hence spirit, possible? Does such a ground exist, and if so, to whom does it belong—to the *I*, or to an *it* as Nietzsche suggests; or perhaps to nothing at all? If it is necessary to posit a sufficient reason—a ground—for every mental event, then it must be the case that such a ground exists for every determination of thought—for every choice—perhaps even its own ground. For Hegel, "Ground is first, *absolute ground*, in which essence is" (*SL*, 445); thought—spirit itself—grounds its own ground. As the grounding of its own ground, thought determines itself as the "*absolute* foundation," a foundation it has forged by its own hands. If pure thinking is self-determining "*Essence* [that] *determines itself as ground*" (*SL*, 444), then what is the ground of ground? Before thought, before consciousness, before the appearance of essence as ground, there is the *unthought*—unconsciousness—an *Ungrund*. Before thought appears, it lives *underground*.

For Hegel, as for psychoanalysis, the unconscious is the primordial ground of consciousness—an underground *abyss* that inhabits the psychic space between reason and desire, intuition and thought, between the *I* and the *it*. And it is such that this abyss within psychic space is itself a space, a pit that divides consciousness from what it is not, the known from the unknown. It is precisely this pit, this unknown that organizes thought and defines its operations, and yet it is itself beyond thought—perhaps simply the *un*thought. But the unthought that dwells underground hibernates in its pit, an eternal slumber. Such hibernation, however, is not the passive peacefulness of sleep, rather, it is an activity, an unrest

of the soul. In Hegel's words, this activity of thought, as well as every intention, idea, desire, and action is "unconsciously busy."[1] Thus, the activity of thought—that which is unthought—taking place "behind the back of consciousness," becomes the primordial ground of Spirit. The abyss, the *Ungrund*—as unthought thought thinking and feeling itself—may be said to even be a "riddle to itself." For how can one think the unthought?

From the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel talks of the unconscious processes of intelligence as a "nocturnal abyss" (*EG* § 453). Of all of Hegel's philosophical contributions to the understanding of human existence, his ideas on the unconscious abyss remain an underrecognized achievement. While largely overlooked even by himself, Hegel's notion of the abyss becomes a pivotal concept in his entire philosophical enterprise, for the abyss is the womb of spirit. The abyss, what we may compare to the *Ungrund*, not only performs an indispensable function in the dialectical organization and production of spirit, it provides the logical foundation for his philosophical system, a system that is itself foundational. Hegel's system is both architectonic and developmental; that is, spirit grounds its own being in the process of its own becoming. Hence, spirit is a teleological, developmental accomplishment. Yet from the telic and more primordial nether-regions of spirit, ground is always redefined underground, under the world of appearances. As the dialectic paves a progressive unity toward more mature shapes of consciousness, the abyss is never abandoned as such; for it always remains in the shadows, making its presence known as drive and desire, fueling the dialectic itself. As the appearance of unconscious essence, desire reveals the abyss, because for Hegel, "Essence must *appear*" (*EL* § 131): whatever exists within must be made actual. And it is precisely within this underworld that spirit is born—thus consciousness becomes its spawn.

The presence of the abyss is not only developmentally prior to the rational self-conscious subject, it maintains an ontological *priority* in the very constitution of spirit itself. In order to fully appreciate the role and priority of such unconscious activity that underlies the self-grounding nature of spirit, we will need to carefully examine the scope and range of the abyss in Hegel's system. Before we undertake a textual analysis of Hegel's position on the unconscious, however, it will be necessary to address his historical predecessors in order to determine who influenced his thought on the subject. Retracing the origins of the *Ungrund* will prove to be useful when later offering a full exposition of Hegel's treatment of the unconscious, for we may be able to conceptually contrast what differentiates Hegel's unique contribution from other perspectives which will further aid in our understanding of the role of the abyss in his system. The main focus of this chapter, therefore, will be to highlight some of Hegel's likely historical sources on the abyss that will serve to prepare us for a systematic treatment of his position, which is later to follow. This becomes significant because the metaphysical status of the *Ungrund* plays a central role in Hegel's overall philosophy of spirit, a comprehension of which may hold the secrets to the soul.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE ABYSS

Hegel himself did not originate the notion of the unconscious abyss. Rather, he took it over in large measure from Boehme, neo-Platonism, and Schelling. The concept of the abyss (*Abgrund*, *Ungrund*) derives from Boehme's theosophic Christianity. Inspired by the study of Plotinus,[2] Boehme radically reconceptualized God as the *ens manifestativum sui*, "the being whose essence is to reveal itself."[3] Boehme developed an elementary form of dialectic. In this dialectic, positive and negative polarities emerge out of the Godhead's original undifferentiated nonbeing (*das Nichts*), and these unfold through orderly stages of manifestation as it ascends toward absolute self-consciousness.[4] At one time, scholars thought that Boehme's term *Ungrund* originated in the Gnostic "abyss," since there are shared similarities between the two.[5] But Koyré has cogently disputed this claim, interpreting Boehme's notion of the abyss as the "ground without a ground."[6] Before the divine *Ungrund* emerges, there is no source of determination, there is nothing; the *Ungrund* is merely "unfathomable" and "incomprehensible."

> The *Ungrund* is the uncertainty which precedes the divine will's arousing itself to self-awareness.[7]

Furthermore, Boehme's *Ungrund* acts as a subject who desires: "it 'seeks,' it 'longs,' it 'sees,' and it 'finds'."[8]

While Hegel does give testimony to Boehme,[9] he probably owes more to Proclus (through Creuzer), Plotinus, Erigena, and Schelling.[10] Boehme's impact on Schelling was considerable;[11] and Schelling was among the very first philosophers to underscore the importance of the unconscious and the role of irrationality in human experience. However, it was two arch-rationalists, Leibniz and Kant, who paved the way for this development. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz propounded a theory of unconscious "*petits perceptions*."[12] Kant, in his *Anthropology*, discussed the nature of "obscure presentations" (*dunkele Vorstellungen*) that remain just below the level of conscious awareness.[13] Schelling's revision of Kant's and Fichte's transcendental idealism together with his own philosophy of identity (*Identitätsphilosophie*) and philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) led to one of the first systematic conceptualizations of the unconscious.

BOEHME'S INFLUENCE ON HEGEL

Perhaps remembered more for his legend than his ideas, the seventeenth-century philosopher, mystic, and theosophist, Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), is considered an intellectual giant among early German philosophers. As a forerunner of the German Romantic movement, Boehme was an inspiration to poets and intellectuals and was also praised by philosophers such as Baader, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Hegel—leading Hegel to further credit Boehme as "the first German philosopher."[14] Through Boehme, German philosophy had come into

its own. Heralded as the self-proclaimed *Philosophus Teutonicus* or the *Philosophus der Einfältigen* ("philosopher of the simple folk"), Boehme's major works include the *Aurora* or the *Morgenröthe im Aufgang* (1612) and *Mysterium Magnum* (1623).[15] Known for his supposed insights into the divine nature, the origin and structure of the universe, and the hidden mysteries of the Bible, Boehme was above all concerned with the human subject, and particularly the soul.

In *Forty Questions on the Soul* (1620), Boehme provides an account of the origins of the soul and for the first time refers to the mystical being of the deity as the *Ungrund* (the "unground").[16] Prompted by Balthasar Walter, Boehme's friend who had researched the secrets of the Jewish Kabbalah in the Near East, Boehme set out to describe ten forms of the soul. Andrew Weeks informs us that Walter may have influenced Boehme's questions as well as his answers, which correspond to the sefirot or the ten emanations of the Kabbalah, thus providing the prototype for the ten forms the soul may assume. Ten is also of eschatological significance to Boehme, because the number ten contains a one and a null. The *Ungrund* is everything yet nothing, both unification and void.

While Boehme may have borrowed the Kabbalic notion of cosmic evolution that precipitates from the Divine Unity,[17] another major source of influence on Boehme was hermeticism,[18] an occult practice thought to have been known to Boehme through the writings of Paracelsus,[19] a tradition employing the use of alchemical symbols and allegories that explain the Deity.[20] Drawing upon the use of astronomical world-models that were often designed by mathematicians and scientists during his time, Boehme diagrammed his own model of the solar system in *The Threefold Life of Man* (1620). It is in the *Forty Questions*, however, where he provides an intricate interpretation of the subtle symbolism that characterizes the spheres of the Divine Being. Boehme's mystical circle-symbolism stands in a tradition that dates back to Cusanus and ultimately Parmenides.[21] Symbolized by Boehme's mystical configurations of the Divine Being, the *V* (designating the *Ungrund*) is dialectically opposed to the *A* (for *Anfang* or *Alpha*) which is encased in the empty mirror or eye of eternity, designated by *O*. In constructing the mystical cell of the Divine Being, Boehme further designed a "Philosophical Globe" or "Wonder-Eye of Eternity" that encompasses numerous other philosophical elements constituting his theosophic cosmology. Boehme's "Globe" is designed to show the interface and circumscription of the created world by the mirroring spheres of night and light. Eternity—the Godhead—is the polarization of life and death, light and darkness, being and nothingness.

In *Forty Questions on the Soul*, Boehme moves toward the neo-Platonic pole of his thought, for he focuses on the eternity of forms within the soul. In response to the question: "Where, from the beginning of the world, does the soul originate?," Boehme replies that by way of reason (*aus der Vernunft*), all things have their origin in eternity (III 8/1.3ff). "Before the divine *Ungrund*, there is nothing, no source of determination."[22] Following Koyré's interpretation: "L'*Ungrund* . . . est l'Absolu absolument indéterminé, l,Absolu libre de toute détermination,"[23] (The *Ungrund* is the Absolute, absolutely indetermined, the

Absolute free of all determination).[24] Here we may see the idealism that parallels Hegel's thought. Spirit first awakens from within itself and then takes itself as its first form, only to progressively move away from itself and then back into itself through its many appearances on its long dialectical ascendence toward absolute self-consciousness. Hegel's notion of spirit in its initial unfolding closely resembles the coming to presence of Boehme's Divine Being. Boehme's *Ungrund* is the abyss of eternity that is absolutely indeterminate subjectivity. For Boehme, like Hegel, the unground, as the groundless ground, behaves as a desiring subject that grounds itself within its own determinations through its burgeoning process of becoming.

Weeks notes that prior to the textual occurrence of the noun *Ungrund*, Boehme uses the adjective *ungründlich*, meaning "unfathomable" or inconceivable. This may correspond to the Kantian view of the noumenal realm of pure reason; absolute knowledge of the *Ding-an-sich* is foreclosed from our awareness—it must always remain unknown.[25] As such, the *Ungrund* is ineffable, in a word, indescribable. And as Koyré contends, whatever exists is always in relation to the "impossible."[26] But Boehme was not content with the silent impotence of reason; the impossible must be named and given substantive form. Thus, what is abysmal for Boehme is retrieved from the lair of the unknown and assimilated into the experience of the devout subject.

> "About the final ground of God one cannot be certain." And: "The final ground of God is Uncertainty." In the first instance, the seeking subject is cut off from the unknown object of its contemplation. In the second instance, the subject has recognized its inner longing for the deity as akin to the Divine Unknown . . . the uncertainty and tormented freedom of the self has been recognized in its relationship to the ultimate ground of divinity. The unknown divine object is reflected in the self-knowledge of the subject. The *Ungrund* is the uncertainty which precedes the divine will's arousing itself to self-awareness (though in the deity this "happens" in eternity).[27]

Like Boehme, Hegel was also intent on showing the knowability of the unknown. But instead of relying on the faith of the devout seeker, Hegel argues that there is nothing we can know more easily than the thing-in-itself, because the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal is a distinction in thought.[28] For Hegel, Kant's view of the noumenal was "completely abstract, or totally empty." Positing something that is out of reach of the mind is incoherent; if it were out of reach, one couldn't be positing it in the first place. And it is precisely the distinction between what can be experienced and what can only be thought that Hegel is attempting to annul. The very movement of thought hinges on a negative dialectic—something can only be known in relation to what it is not.

For both Boehme and Hegel, the origin of God and Spirit respectively, may be viewed as original Beginning, an eternal abyss from which both awaken to their own immediate determinateness. As Hegel states: "The beginning of

spirit is therefore nothing but its own being, and it therefore relates itself only to its own determinations" (*EG* § 440). Similarly for Boehme,

> God is in Himself the *Ungrund*, as the first world, about which no creature knows anything, for it stands with its body and spirit in the ground alone: Even God would therefore not be manifest [*offenbar*] to Himself in the *Ungrund*; but His wisdom has from eternity become His ground, for which the eternal will of the *Ungrund* has lusted, from which the divine imagination has arisen.[29]

Boehme, like Hegel, points to the notion that the *Ungrund* is the presupposition for the manifestation of God (or Spirit) to occur. Like God who would not be manifest to himself in the abyss itself, Spirit also must emerge from its unconscious fountain to take its initial forms as soul and consciousness. For both thinkers, the *Ungrund* is "the first world," the *underworld* that precedes all else from which desire and thought arise. Yet this underworld is eternal—as original Being, God and Spirit may not be properly said to have a beginning or end, even if they are coextensive with the temporal unfolding of world history.[30] In the *Aurora*, Boehme says, "In his depth (i.e., in the *Ungrund*), God himself does not know what he is. For he knows no beginning, and also nothing like himself, and also no end."[31] God and Spirit respectively, must project their own essence into the world in order to arrive at complete self-actualization as the coming to presence of pure subjectivity. It is only when God and Spirit encounter their own opposition as self-willed independence that self-consciousness (self-revelation) occurs. Within their dialectical polarities, perhaps the *Ungrund* is also an *Überwelt* (overworld), the supernatural space where under and over are equivocated, for they are one and the same. For spirit and the deity, they "seek," they "will," and they "lust" for "wisdom," a longing to complete themselves. Here we may further see a symmetry between the *Ungrund* and Freud's tripartite notion of the soul (*Seele*); reason (mediated by *Ich*) and higher levels of self-consciousness (*ÜberIch*) develop out of natural desire (*Es*) from its primordial subjectivity. Furthermore, for Hegel and Boehme, spirit is self-positing—the deity may only manifest itself through an act of will.

The mystical speculations of Boehme draw on the use of antithesis to explain the *Ungrund*. "God's emergence out of pure oneness into differentiated actuality required a confrontation with opposition. It was out of this creative struggle that the sensible universe issued forth."[32] God is a world beyond this world and beyond direct knowledge as such, yet the divine object is mirrored in the self-knowledge of the subject. As the soul impregnates itself by reflection, yearning, and imaginative faith, the believer approaches knowledge of the divine by "transforming itself into the mirror of the hidden God."[33] Furthermore, God comes to know himself as "ground" through his desire for self-actualization: "His wisdom has from eternity become His ground, for which the eternal will . . . has lusted" (IV 127/II.3.5). This statement by Boehme may suggest that the deity had experienced eternal wisdom that had at some point been alienated from his being. As alienated knowledge, the *Ungrund* awakens from within itself

only to desire what had been previously both eternal and estranged. Here we may see an allusion to the desire for recognition that is such a prevalent theme of the Hegelian corpus—the deity desires *itself*, its own self-recognition. The alienation dialectic is a central process whereby recognition is achieved. In fact, the Christian story of man's fall and redemption is itself an alienation dialectic that stands behind both Boehme and Hegel. Yet for Boehme, the *Ungrund* is originally a primal "darkness," a nocturnal will that proceeds through a series of developmental stages that forms the world-creative process. It is through this self-unfolding that the deity initially draws into itself, into its darkness before it manifests as a creative will. The initial withdrawal into itself forms the core of being, which becomes the ground (*Grund*) of all subsequent stages.[34] The process of God's will toward manifestation as a spiritual "hunger" for "wisdom" may also be said to prefigure Hegel's account of unconscious spirit that awakens from within its "nightlike abyss" and "intuits" itself as feeling soul before it unfolds toward the Concept as its absolute self-knowing. Both philosophers employ a dialectic that emerges from undifferentiated unity and passes through a process of differentiation and reunification, constituted in and through a dialectically self-articulated holism. It is Hegel, however, who places more emphasis on the dynamic circularity of the drive toward reason, while Boehme's dialectic is less rational and more volitional, thus becoming more attractive to Schelling's conceptualization of the divine will and the ontology of irrationality.

At this point it becomes important to emphasize the essential metaphysical similarities and dissimilarities between Boehme's divine being and Hegel's concept of spirit. Like subjective spirit, Boehme's *Ungrund* is a desirous subject who seeks to become fully self-actualized. It is only through a self-imposed aspect of limitation that the godhead can emerge and experience his epiphany in nature so he may become self-conscious. Edward Allen Beach explains this process:

> In the finite creature . . . God found his own revelation reflected as in a mirror. Böhme reasoned that because God desired to reveal himself to himself, and because revelation required a sensible (i.e., experienceable) embodiment, therefore God had to become sensible in order to satisfy his need for self-revelation. Thus, the dialectical drive toward self-awareness within God's originally inchoate will was what gave rise to the spiritual as well as the material universe.[35]

But unlike Boehme whose god is only known sensuously, Hegel's spirit is ultimately the embodiment of absolute totality. As pure self-consciousness, spirit transcends its corporeal, sensuous nature through reason while at the same time it becomes instantiated within the concrete universals that comprise nature and culture.[36] For Hegel, spirit moves beyond intuition to thought that belongs to its self-conception proper, viz., its non-sensuous self-actualization. Nature is only an intermediate step in the process for spirit to realize itself. Yet despite this divergence, the ontology of spirit and Boehme's godhead emerge from a process of self-negation.

There are remarkable similarities between the initial stages of spirit and the deity's coming into being: (1) Both emerge from an initial darkness, a nocturnal abyss that contains the potentiality of becoming actual and concrete; (2) Both seek self-manifestation, a longing or desire to know itself; (3) This necessarily gives rise to a negative dialectic. The darkness of the will conflicts with its will to manifest, which sparks the creative process, or in Hegelian terms, spirit moves from its initial intuition of itself as inner feeling to external sensuousness as consciousness and eventually self-consciousness through the process of negation; (4) Moreover, the initial movement of drawing in upon itself is present in both concepts and forms the foundation or ground of all succeeding stages to transpire; (5) Both spirit and the deity achieve self-recognition through the form of concrete self-alienation; and (6) Both seek to acquire (or return to) an original unity.

The positive significance of the negative that informs the dialectic is unmistakably a central aspect of both systems. However, Hegel's dialectic is significantly distinct, and more rigorously articulated, from Boehme's who relies on a firm antithesis between god's three distinct wills. Although Hegel's dialectic offers the theoretical sophistication of a formally logical system, Boehme's emphasis on conflict, self-destruction, and lack informs the very process of becoming, the driving force behind Hegel's articulation of *Geist*. For Boehme, the primal abyss of God undergoes a suffering due to the "darkness" that envelops his will, thus preventing him from becoming manifest to himself. Analogous to the indeterminate Void in Buddhism or to the *ain soph* in the Kabbalah,[37] the "no-thingness" of god's undifferentiated unity underwent its initial differentiation through the experience of "longing" or "hunger," a hunger to know itself, to become manifest—"the craving to draw into itself" (*die Sucht, in sich zu ziehen*).[38]

Boehme argued that there must be a transition from the unmanifest (nonbeing) *Ungrund's* need to become manifest to itself and the coming-to-presence of a manifest being that stands in opposition to itself. Like unconscious spirit, the unmanifest *Ungrund* precedes all existence and is completely undifferentiated (homogeneous), yet it paradoxically has the innate propensity to divide itself into contraries, and thus pass from an undifferentiated unity into a self-differentiated multiplicity. In the deity's initial inwardness, as inverted will, will-as-desire, Boehme reasoned that there must have been a prolonged longing that was incapable of being satisfied, and thus took its form as a fierce "fire" of chaos that burned internally without giving light. The inner blaze was the quality of the divine wrath or bitterness (*Grimmigkeit*) that turned on itself and consumed its own substance. Such self-consumption gave rise to a self-destruction that took the form of a painful anguish which the deity suffered.[39] And after the divine bitterness turned its destructive drive toward itself, a dramatic reversal occurred. "The anguished negation of free self-manifestation was itself negated: with a violent thunderclap, that harsh first principle overcame its own harshness, and a joyous light supervened. This symbolized the emergence of harmony and order out of original chaos."[40] Boehme speculated that the polarization of the two wills was mediated by a third will that formed the creative impulse in which

the universe evolved. The bifurcation of the positive and negative wills of the godhead is the necessary condition that sustains the cosmos. Negativity and conflict form the very foundation for all subsequent stages to occur.

The ontology of the *Ungrund* has important implications for Hegel's system, a system that feeds off its own circularity as spirit elevates itself to the pinnacle of self-actualization. The *Ungrund* becomes the primal ground of spirit, its original being, an edifice that always informs the shapes of Spirit. While Boehme's reasoning was far from systematic or exacting, he nevertheless attempted to account for the emergence of existence out of possibility and multiplicity out of unity, a task Hegel's system specifies. Conceiving of the divine principles based on the supernatural fusion of psychological and alchemical properties rather than on formally logical or objective laws, Boehme's theosophy may be said to be merely a preface to Hegel's system, a preface that nevertheless appears over and over again in a new guise. By emphasizing the experience of absence, craving, striving, and conflict that characterizes divinity and human consciousness, Boehme was a harbinger for modern philosophies of the will.

HEGEL'S NEO-PLATONIC SOURCES

The exact nature of the historical influence on Hegel's conception of the unconscious may never be fully known. There is some debate regarding just how much Hegel was directly influenced by Boehme—ranging from a profound indebtedness to Boehme, to the claim that he was merely a peripheral figure. David Walsh argues that Boehme's impact on Hegel was considerable, which substantially influenced his conception and subsequent articulation of *Geist*. His claim relies on four factual elements: (1) Hegel's endorsement of Boehme within his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*;[41] (2) a thank-you letter Hegel wrote to one of his former pupils for sending him an edition of Boehme's collected works, a letter in which he praises Boehme;[42] (3) two essays from Hegel's Jena period, one on the Trinity and the other on spirit; and (4) the various thematic similarities that exist between Boehme's theosophy and Hegel's philosophy. Perhaps the strongest evidence comes from Hegel's early years at Jena when his mature thought was first beginning to take shape.[43] Hegel's textual admiration for Boehme also shows his support, a support however that is always riddled with reservations about the completeness of the Silesian theosoph's philosophy, a system that lacked logical rigor and consistency.

While Walsh makes a compelling case for Boehme's direct influence on Hegel's system, Eric von der Luft attributes more significance to neo-Platonism. Despite Hegel's testimonial to Boehme and the striking similarities that exist between Hegel's treatment of the triplicity of trinities in the Jena fragment and Boehme's conception of the three principles constituting the godhead,[44] Hegel explicitly rejects Boehme's mystical treatment of religion as mythological "picture-thinking"[45] and grows increasingly more critical of Boehme's contributions as his thought matures.

> Because mythologized religion, theosophic religion, a religion of nature, tends to lose the individual in contemplation of an infinite or transcendent beyond, Hegel, for whom the rational individual is the ultimate locus of spirit, and especially of free spirit, has no choice but to reject such religion and to substitute for it a knowledge that both explains and includes the full richness of this individual developed from spirit as consciousness.[46]

While there are thematic similarities in Hegel that can be traced back to Boehme, such similarities may also be traced farther back to neo-Platonic thinkers such as Eckhart, Erigena, Proclus, and Plotinus.[47] Although Walsh places Boehme in a tradition that goes back as far as Gnosticism, due to his lack of formal education[48] Boehme was probably not familiar with these systems of thought. It is not known whether Boehme had been exposed to the general ideas of gnostic and neo-Platonic thought, but presumably he could have been, though perhaps not to the details. Given such ambiguity, Boehme may be said to have formulated his own tradition of natural-mystical theosophy independently. Hegel, on the other hand, would have been familiar with the more classical, strictly philosophical neo-Platonic texts, which were a likely source for his ideas.

It may be argued that Hegel's generic conceptualization of the dialectical self-unfolding of spirit and Boehme's account of the process of self-revelation as the coming into being of God is a standard neo-Platonic idea. Von der Luft points out that in *The Elements of Theology*, Proclus tells us that the One must give of itself or else lack fertility and honor (Prop. 23) and that the One is equated with the Good and must produce the manifold phenomena of nature in order to become complete (Prop. 25). John Scotus Erigena in *On the Division of Nature*, Book 1, further describes how God shows himself to rational creatures each according to its own capacities and that he moves from within himself and toward himself.[49] Boehme's and Hegel's characterization of the process of God's and spirit's own self-recognition may be said to be present in Erigena's dialectic in which

> God proceeds from Himself as uncreated creator, through his self-manifestations as created creators and created noncreators, and returns to Himself, thus realizing and fulfilling Himself as Himself, as the uncreated who does not create because He then no longer needs to create.[50]

These dialectical characterizations of the activities of Spirit and God may be all said to originate and emerge from an unconscious *Ungrund*. The coming to presence of self-consciousness through inner contemplation, separation, projection, and self-recognition as self-reintegration is a general structural organization (as process) of spirit and Boehme's deity. The Divine Essence of Boehme's godhead as the Being whose essence is to reveal itself is not only present in Erigena's text, but is articulated by Plotinus in the *Enneads*[51] where god as the One must manifest and cause its own essence which is to reveal itself.

Boehme's postulation of the polarities of God's will, at once both loving and wrathful, may be seen as a correlate to standard Plotinian "theodicy." For Boehme, evil was a residue of God's original "darkness" and was part and parcel of God's creative process. For Plotinus, evil is the outward extreme of God's dialectical manifestation, "matter conceived as a negative factor, *when* the soul turns toward it, away from the One, instead of remaining faithful to its ultimate source, and directly *before* the soul realizes the sterility of this choice, and initiates its epistrophic dialectic."[52] Von der Luft convincingly shows that Hegel's use of the positive significance of the negative cannot be primarily derived from Boehme's theosophic speculation and is more likely attributed to the cosmology of Proclus and Plotinus whom Hegel would know quite well since his friend and Heidelberg colleague, Georg Friedrich Creuzer, prepared standard editions of both philosophers.

Hegel was too broad and systematic a thinker to have borrowed concepts limited to only one or even a few sources. Because Hegel never offered a formal theory of the unconscious abyss, allusions to Boehme and neo-Platonism are not surprising and may be seen as a product of Hegel's own dialectical assimilation of philosophical knowledge that had formed a sediment on his thinking. But as with any current of thought dealing with first principles, metaphysical turns of thought may be ultimately traced back to antiquity on some archaic or unrefined level. Yet Hegel was an independent thinker and his dialectic lives up to its name. Hegel's system surpasses his predecessors while simultaneously canceling but preserving their insights. What is most interesting about the influence of the *Ungrund* that figures so prominently in Hegel's system, albeit unintended by him, is that it forms the foundation for spirit to manifest. Because the retentive element of the dialectic prefigures the self-unfolding of spirit in all its subsequent stages, the unconscious is always present in the most exalted forms of spirit, although in a preserved and subordinated mode.

Drawing on the ontological speculations of Boehme and the neo-Platonists, Hegel could not elude the inclusion (even unconsciously) of an implicit theory of the unconscious that plays such a central role in the metaphysics of spirit. While Hegel's system is a formally articulated rational enterprise, the presence of the concept of the unconscious allows for an elaborate articulation of desire and irrationality (which Schelling heavily emphasized) as well as a theory of abnormal psychology that Daniel Berthold-Bond[53] has so brilliantly illuminated within Hegel's philosophy. Therefore, the unconscious is instrumental in the normative processes of cognition, emotion, and mental adjustment as well as in illness.

Although Hegel was influenced by theosophic and neo-Platonic thought, as we have seen, he shows greater affinity for Aristotle rather than neo-Platonism in regarding *nous* (*νόοζ*) as absolute and underived.[54] In fact, Hegel maintains a clear allegiance to Aristotle with respects to the soul, the principle of internal teleology, the unification of form and matter, the process of the actualization of pure thought, and in elevating *Sittlichkeit* to the apex of human reality through self-realized freedom.[55] Although I will not elaborate on these comparisons here, Hegel's reappropriation of Aristotelian teleology allows him,

through his Logic, to introduce an inner principle of self-derivation in which all particularization is developed from within the universal. This is why Hegel enlists Aristotle in his initial discussion of the soul: the soul in its implicitness is the "*sleep* of spirit;—the passive nous of Aristotle" (*EG* § 389), a simple universality. As with Aristotle's *de Anima*, Hegel's depiction of the soul moves from immediate potentiality to mediated actualization through the modification and differentiation of its nascent corporeality. Thus, the soul, as with spirit, is the process of moving from indeterminate, undifferentiated immediacy to determinate, differentiated mediacy. And this is partially why Boehme and neo-Platonists are attractive to Hegel: spirit becomes a self-generating movement.

The implications of Hegel's theory of the *Ungrund* far surpass those of Boehme's by providing a systematic and rigorous justification for the dialectically self-articulated process of human consciousness and subjectivity. As a result, the unifying and synthetic nature of the dialectic finds its origins in an unconscious teleology that underscores the positive significance of negation as spirit elevates itself to its highest potentiality-for-Being.

The positive significance of the negative is a cardinal element in the organization of the *Ungrund* and subsequently the self-manifestation of Spirit. This point opens potential vistas that merit careful exploration, a point that will be emphasized and examined over again throughout the scope of this project. If the *Ungrund* is indeed negativity as Being-in-and-for-itself, then it is essential to the dialectic and may be seen as the fertile source of all psychic reality. This notion poses difficulties in reconciling the dual intentionality of spirit as an upward synthetic and unifying movement and a destructive and regressive drive that is both the source of all rational and irrational determination. The dialectic as determinate negativity is both constructive and destructive, harmonious and chaotic, insofar as all harmony exists within unrest and upheaval and all chaos within a unifying purposeful order. The disharmonious unity that comes with spirit's sublation is itself a paradox. Negative activity is both the power of death and desire and the elevation of spirt as it cultivates a unity through pure self-realization. The *abyss* therefore becomes the darkness of the "not" which undercuts itself and becomes the source of all. Unlike Nietzsche, this is not an abyss we must confront in order to make sense out of our lives, rather, it is an abyss we are continually emerging out of, only to sink back into as finite individuals. It is this "tarrying with the negative" that defines the life of spirit who "wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself" (*PS* § 32). Such can be said for the quest of self-consciousness: not only does Spirit find its culmination in the unity of aesthetic, religious, and rational life, its very attainment is contingent on the epigenesis and exaltation of the unconscious soul.

THE SPECTRA OF FICHTE

The premiere idealist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) is known as "the philosopher of the *I*."[56] Such a narcissistic characterization is accompanied by

the biographical fact that he truly had an ego worthy of his subject matter. Notwithstanding, Fichte was Jena's resident genius during the time Schelling and Hegel arrived on the scene. As the foremost successor to Kant, Fichte instigated the philosophical tradition commonly known as German Idealism. In fact, it was Fichte's anonymously published *Critique of All Revelation*,[57] initially thought by many to have been Kant's, that first won him a post at Jena—only to lose that same post in 1799 for his controversial political and religious lecturing, just a year after Schelling had been appointed to the faculty.[58] Fichte's as well as Schelling's influence on Hegel was considerable, and it may even be said that Fichte and Schelling were mainly responsible for dividing German thought into the disciplines of Spirit and Nature, a division Hegel sought to reconcile.

Fichte's emphasis on the primacy of the I (*Ich*) or Self (*Selbst*) deserves special attention not only for its inauguration of the idealist movement, but because this emphasis had a direct impact on Hegel's thinking on spirit. While not formally stated by Fichte, the notion of the unconscious is deeply embedded in his *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), a text Hegel knew intimately because the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801), commonly known as the *Differenzschrift*, was his first acknowledged philosophical publication.[59] However, Fichte's theory of the unconscious is largely overshadowed by his attention to self-consciousness. As Eduard von Hartmann (1868) puts it:

> [E]lements of the Unconscious are to be found in Fichte, but they appear only casually, as vague hints scattered here and there, and these promising thought-blossoms were soon buried under the later growths without having borne any fruit.[60]

Because Fichte offered no formal account of the unconscious structures and operations of the self-positing self in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, we will need to examine its latent or implied presence with respect to the *Ungrund* and its implications for Hegel.

Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, literally the "Doctrine of Science," but customarily translated as the "Science of Knowledge,"[61] closely resembles Kant's transcendental idealism, but it is more appropriately interpreted as a radicalized reappropriation or systematic correction of Kant where all objects of possible experience are grounded or are necessarily conditioned by some nonempirical activity of the subject.[62] The *Wissenschaftslehre* attempts to address three central issues: (1) that Kant's formulation of apperception was incomplete; (2) which may be remedied by offering an account of the autonomous self-posting activity of the self as the foundation of subjectivity; (3) that is furthermore responsible for resolving the practical question of moral freedom. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* stands for a doctrine of systematically grounded knowledge that is itself the proper role and task of philosophy, thus making philosophy the eminent science. For Fichte, philosophy is *Wissenschaftslehre*. Like all modern philosophers, Fichte,

no less than Hegel, was concerned with ultimate knowledge, or absolute knowledge regarding knowledge—the self, nature, God, and freedom were major metaphysical preoccupations.

Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* is a theory of self-consciousness, what Dieter Henrich has called Fichte's "original insight,"[63] because Fichte was the first philosopher to consider the actual conditions or ground that make self-consciousness possible without taking consciousness as its supposition. Following Kant, Fichte was concerned with justifying the nonempirical ground of experience through transcendental deductive or a priori maneuvers. Taking over Kant's analysis of the ground and scope of knowledge, Fichte focuses on the "feeling of necessity" that accompanies our intentional representation of objects, and elevates freedom to the pinnacle of the mind's operations—the *I* freely posits or asserts itself absolutely—the representation of reality is entirely attributed to the human mind. Fichte's emphasis on freedom as the foundation for mental activity was an attempt to circumvent the problematic division of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy, a distinction that demanded serious attention and revision through an integrated theory of mind.[64] The role of freedom was such an ultimate concern for Fichte that he himself credited his philosophy as the "first system of freedom."[65]

While I have no intention of offering an extended interpretation or critique of Fichte's system, it will be necessary to examine his implicit theory of unconscious mental activity and determine whether this had had any impact on Hegel's thinking. It is well known that Hegel thought poorly of Fichte; in the words of H. S. Harris: "Toward Fichte, Hegel had always been rather cool."[66] Yet despite Hegel's reproach of Fichte in the *Difference* essay, an issue I will address later, as well as in chapter V of the *Phenomenology*,[67] there are many currents of thought that overlap in Hegel's philosophy and therefore merit our attention.

In the *Wissenschaftslehre* (§§ 1–3), Fichte discerns three fundamental "principles" (*Grundsät*) or transcendental acts of the mind: (1) the *I* posits itself absolutely; (2) then counterposits itself through negation as a ~ or not-*I*; (3) only to reconcile its division by counterpositing once again the divisible *I* from the divisible not-*I*, thus taking account of the mutual limitation between the *I* and the not-*I* as its mediated solution. It will be necessary to carefully examine each of these principles in order to bring Fichte into closer dialogue with Hegel and explore the possible compatibility of Fichte's model of self-consciousness with Hegel's theory of unconscious spirit.

In the first principle, Fichte demonstrates that the *I* is entirely the result of its own activity;—it does not presuppose an original being or ground other than this activity itself. Its very being *is* activity, the activity of its self-positing, hence, its own becoming. The *I* is therefore "unconditioned"; its own activity is its ground. Fichte states:

> Hence what is *absolutely posited*, and *founded on itself*, is the ground of *one particular* activity . . . of the human mind, and thus of its pure character; the pure character of activity as such. (*W* § 1: I, 96)

For Fichte, as for Hegel, the self is pure activity (*Tathandlung*). From Fichte's account, the "pure character of activity" or as Hegel describes it, this "unrest that is the self" (*PS* § 22) is what ultimately constitutes the foundation of the mental.

The "Act" as Fichte describes, is the activity of the *I*—an assertion, an animate act of will. This assertion is simply a "self-assertion," an "absolute" and "necessary" affirmation of its existence—at once both being and ground. "It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about" (*W* § 1: I, 96). The affirmation or willful self-assertion of "I" is the animation of the soul—an animism—the animus of *anima*. Such self-positing is the animating motive, intention, or purpose of the soul as activity.

Recall from our previous discussion of Boehme as well as Plotinus, the *Ungrund* precedes the will's arousing itself to self-awareness—the being whose essence it is to reveal itself. Thus, self-affirmation as "I" is the primordial act, an underground activity that is itself the ground of its original being. At this stage, Fichte's absolute self may be compared to the unconscious functions of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception—the impersonal unifying agent of all mental activity that directly knows but cannot be known directly. But the presence of the *Ungrund* within Fichte's self-positing *I* may also be inferred because it reveals the primordial activity of the self's unconscious recognition of itself as it "imposes" a "form" on itself—the form of object—thus grounding its own existence (*W* § 1: I, 97). This "substrate" or *Ungrund* is a form of consciousness without having "real" or externally actualized sensuous consciousness. Fichte is suggesting, as does Hegel, that the self *projects* itself—"I" asserts itself through primal activity—the posit (*setzen*)—and gives itself form, a sense of unconscious self-consciousness. The projection of consciousness from unconsciousness—an unconscious *Ich*—may be clearly seen in Freud who in *The Ego and the Id* adduced that "[t]he ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface"(*SE*, 19, 26). The *I* initially projects itself into being, a being it had only known unconsciously.

When the self posits itself unconsciously, it gives itself a ground—a "*something*"—on which it can further act on its own activity. The point Fichte is trying to make is that through positing, the self gives itself its own content as itself; hence, the self has an original sense of unconscious self-consciousness. However, such rudimentary self-consciousness is not the same as the self-consciousness of oneself as an object for consciousness, rather this unconscious self-awareness is a form of self-consciousness of the *act* of being oneself who posits. For Fichte,

> The self exists only insofar as it is conscious of itself. . . . You cannot think at all without subjoining in thought your self, as conscious of itself; from your self-consciousness you can never abstract. (*W*, § 1: I, 97)

Fichte explains what Kant left unanswered: the a priori ground or condition of the "I think" of consciousness and subjectivity itself is activity, and activity is what constitutes the self. "Being" and "doing" are the same, insofar as the activity of positing is a doing. In Fichte's words, "*To posit*" and "*to be*" are "perfectly

identical" (*W* § 1: I, 98). For Fichte, the mind does not merely project static or fixed categories onto experience as Kant suggests, rather, like Hegel's viewpoint, it actively structures experience, hence itself, through a fluid dynamic process of positing. Such positing initially takes place unconsciously, and the *I* is aware of such activity even if it is not fully self-conscious of itself as a subject who takes itself as a subject.

This initial pre-familiarity of the absolute self as unconscious self-consciousness takes place within the realm of *interiority* before consciousness becomes externalized and assumes its regular course of development. "*The self exists for itself*"—necessarily—it "*begins by an absolute positing of its own existence*"(*W* § 1: I, 98). But this "begins" is an eternal beginning of the self-asserting will that proclaims "I am!," or more aptly, "I!" At this level of self-assertion, an unrefined self-consciousness is already implicit in the act of positing which becomes explicit once it is posited; there is an unconscious recognition that the "I" exists, which wants to express itself. This position is not unlike Hegel's notion of unconscious spirit that emerges from the abyss of its own "inwardness" and "internality" (*EG* § 453) only to intuit itself as soul that feels itself through its own activity.

Fichte is particularly vague about the relationship between the absolute self having consciousness let alone unconscious self-consciousness. Presumably, the absolute self is conscious and necessarily has to be or it would not be a self. But given that Fichte does not even define what he means by "positing," our attribution of unconscious self-awareness must be viewed within the context of what Fichte does not directly say but what nevertheless may be inferred about the original positing activity of the self. The difficulty of interpretation is largely due to the opacity of the text itself, but unconscious agency must be presupposed if the absolute self is to be able to posit itself at all.

Because the self posits itself absolutely, it does so without the use of mediation, hence the posit is simply the expression of its self-affirmation as pure generative activity. Fichte states: "The I posits itself *absolutely*, i.e, without any mediation."[68] The self-consciousness involved here would thus be prereflective. This would imply that nothing exists prior to the positing activity—the self must emerge as self-consciousness, albeit unconsciously. As Dieter Henrich puts it, "[T]here would not be any Self-Subject prior to self-consciousness; rather, the subject, too, first emerges at the same time as the whole consciousness expressed in the identity 'I = I'."[69] There is an immediacy to the posit—the entire self materializes all at once; thus, for Fichte, "self-consciousness is immediate."[70] Therefore, the question of original ground *is* the act, the I *is* the positing itself as self-grounding, which necessitates its becoming aware of itself for itself as the self takes itself as its object. Fichte alludes to this: "[N]o object comes to consciousness except under the condition that I am also conscious of myself."[71]

This immediate form of self-consciousness is important for our understanding of the unconscious organization of the self, for in its immediacy unconscious self-consciousness is not epistemically accessible to conscious reflective

awareness. Fichte tells us: "That immediate self-consciousness is not raised to consciousness nor can it ever be. As soon as one reflects on it, it ceases to be what it is, and it disappears into a higher region."[72] As we will see, the spectra of Fichte's theory of self-consciousness has further implications for Hegel's notion of the abyss, a topic we will take up later when we examine Hegel's reflection thesis of self-recognition. In the meantime, let us turn our attention to the role of negation in Fichte's model of self-consciousness and see how it influences Hegel's dialectic.

In Fichte's second principle, The *I* engages in counterpositing (*entgegensetzen*) itself to itself as a not—a negation. At this stage, the self enters into a conflict with what it is not—its opposite. "Opposition in general is posited absolutely by the self" (*W* § 2: I, 103). The ~ *I* is opposed to the *I* and thus forms a firm antithesis. This opposition immediately propels the self into a psychic conflict with itself; although the negation is posited by the *I* and for the *I*, it is nonetheless *other* than the *I*. Hence, in Fichte's second principle or act of the mind's positing, the self is made aware of its limitation, its finitude—its *nothingness*.

Upon engaging in this new act—negating—there is a doubling of the positing; yet this doubling is a continual series of positing that stands in *relation* to both affirmation and denial, identity and difference, self and not-self. Fichte notes: "Opposition is possible only on the assumption of a unity of consciousness between the self that posits and the self that opposes. . . . It is only in relation to a positing that it becomes a counterpositing" (*W* § 2: I, 104). Hence, the self's initial activity opposes itself—its own activity—which in turn is negative activity. This negation is also an absolute determination of opposition, an absolute standpoint of what is not—of "nonexistence." It is not hard to see the impact of Fichte's account of negativity on Hegel's dialectic. Fichte's "*principle of opposition*" or "*category of negation*" is the stock and trade of spirit's laborious movement. The violent character of negativity, negation, and conflict is the essential driving force of the dialectic itself. In fact, for Hegel, "*being* and *nothing* are the same" (*SL*, 82)—a pure unity of becoming. Without negation, the dialectical motion of thought would not be possible. Like Fichte's self-asserting *I* as pure activity, of "unrest," spirit is a stream—it flows.

Fichte maintains that the act of counterpositing conditions the self as "matter," that is, with respect to content, but remains "absolutely unconditioned in form" (*W* § 2: I, 104). What he means by this is that the act of self-positing gives the *I* substance—a "*something*" in which the *I* and not-*I* or self and non-self are counterposited. Therefore, the act of opposing is "*materially* conditioned" because being an act at all, it is in relation to another act and thus is grounded as an existent being. The fact that "we act *so*" and not otherwise is unconditioned "*formally*" because we don't know how other than to act. For Fichte, the activity that forms the relation between the absolute self and the absolute non-self poses an ontological tension, that is, opposition introduces a gap between identity (already "presuppose[d]" by the self-positing of the self) and difference that must be resolved by a "decree of reason" (*W* § 3: I, 106).

The dialectical tension between the self and the not-self "mutually *limit* one another," hence each opposite is limited by the other. If reason is to succeed, it must find a way to reconcile and overcome such mutually limiting finite positions. Fichte maintains that the task of the third principle or mental operation is to seek their unification—a unity already contained in the first principle. The idea of limit through negation also contains the notion of divisibility—the "*capacity for quantity* in general, not any *determinate* quantity" (*W* § 3: I, 109). Here both the *I* and the not-*I* are "*absolutely posited as divisible*." Therefore, the *I* counterposits in the *I* the divisible *I* and the divisible not-*I*; thereby the conflict imposed by opposition is neutralized if not nullified, at least in principle, through the relation of mutual limitation.[73] For Fichte, the concept of divisibility unifies the opposing self from the non-self—opposition is synthesized.

At this point, we may say that Fichte gives conceptual birth to the well-characterized yet often bastardized triad: *thesis—antithesis—synthesis*. Fichte asserts:

> Just as there can be no antithesis without synthesis, no synthesis without antithesis, so there can be neither without a thesis—an absolute positing, whereby an A (the self) is neither equated nor opposed to any other, but is just absolutely posited. (*W* § 3: I, 115)

This dialectic is attributed to Hegel by many analytic philosophers, most notably Karl Popper, yet it is such an imprecise and watered-down appraisal of Hegel's method that anyone with a favorable attitude toward transcendental idealism is appalled by its oversimplification. For Fichte, the synthetic process presupposes an opposition—the initial act is the generation of difference—which demands reconciliation. The ultimate ground has no ground, only self-affirmation or assertion—completely unconditioned by anything other than its own activity—then it proceeds to generate its own self-opposition within itself only to seek a resolution of conflict through a synthetic function, which then gives rise once more to opposition, and thus this process continues toward absolute unity.

Fichte is ultimately concerned with the complete abolition of all contradiction united in a single absolute unity of consciousness—a unity from which the self emerges and one in which it arrives through an onerous strife to terminate opposition. Fichte clearly anticipates Hegel's grand synthesis or complex holism. He declares:

> —All syntheses established must be rooted in the highest synthesis which we have just effected, and be derivable therefrom. In the self and not-self thus united, and to the extent that they are united thereby, we have therefore to seek out opposing characteristics that remain, and to unite them through a new ground of conjunction, which again must be contained in the highest conjunctive ground of all. And in the opposites united by this first synthesis, we again have to find new opposites, and to combine them by a new ground

> of conjunction, contained in that already derived. And this we must continue so far as we can, until we arrive at opposites which can no longer be altogether combined, and are thereby transported into the practical part of this work. (*W* § 3: I, 115)

Fichte ultimately characterizes the self as an infinite "striving" (*streben*). This is especially important for Fichte's "practical" or ethical philosophy, for such striving for an ideal unity of both theoretical knowledge and moral action is the goal. However, the infinite striving of the self arises out of its inability to complete itself in the world of knowing, which initiates its subsequent move to action where the conditions for satisfaction may come only in the infinite future.

The self's infinite striving has implications for Fichte's theory of freedom. For Fichte, the self is ultimately free—freedom being the source of the self. But the self is not so perfect that it does not have to strive: we strive because we cannot achieve pure knowing, thus instituting the transition to the practical realm. Yet Fichte paradoxically views the self as infinitely free, but as self-determination, freedom by itself is divine while striving is not. Fichte argues that the movement from indeterminacy or infinite freedom to empirical determination is necessary because the absolute self is nothing if it is merely itself. Thus begins the self-determination of the self initiated on the level of theoretical knowledge. This enterprise remains incomplete, however, which triggers the transition to Fichte's theory of action.

But even before Fichte articulates his ethical theory, the conflict between freedom and limit is seen to be reconciled in theoretical knowledge through the powers of imagination (*W* § 4, III: I, 209–217). For Fichte, imagination becomes the ultimate ground of freedom and thus provides a stable unity for the self's ability to overcome contradiction. The infinite striving or ultimate task of the self is to overcome the causally and mechanically determining objective world and to achieve an absolute standpoint of knowledge as embodied freedom. Like the synthetic thrust of Fichte's system, imagination "is what gives strength and completeness to the whole; it must be a system, and it must be *one*; the opposites must be united" (*W* § 3: I, 115). Imagination is therefore the basis for the entire work of the mind. Such an infinite, unbounded striving or desire for the absolute unity of opposition—a single unity of consciousness—is the hallmark of Hegelian absolute knowing. Although this skeletal structure of the Fichtean dialectic is taken up and refined by Hegel, Fichte's influence is nonetheless profound. Fichte's treatment of imagination is further relevant to Hegel's emphasis on "intelligence as [an] unconscious abyss" (*EG* § 453) that is operative throughout the stages of theoretical spirit, a subject we will attend to carefully when examining Hegel's account of imagination. For Hegel, the unconscious is intelligent and intelligible. But even Fichte recognizes that the aboriginal ground of psychic life has an unconscious foundation, at once disclosed through imagination, and known through "intellectual intuition." He states:

> Into the infinite beyond . . . there is projected a determinate product of the absolutely productive imagination, by means of a dark, unreflected intuition that does not reach determinate consciousness. (*W* § 4, III: I, 235)

Here Fichte is very clear that there is an unconscious "determinate product" (e.g., images and thought) at work in the imagination that is "projected" by a "dark," or as Hegel says "nightlike" abyss which Fichte labels as an "unreflected intuition." This dark intuition is none other than an unconscious region of the mind where the free agency of the intuited self is active and determining—willing the content of productive imagination, beneath the "reach" of "determinate consciousness." This underworld is the ground of freedom—the *Ungrund*—allowing higher forms of consciousness to flourish—unified in its depths. We can see parallels to Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, the "I think" that accompanies all representations.[74] There remains a powerful connection to the transcendental unity, because Fichte's absolute self functions as a unifying unifier, an unconscious organizing mental agent.

The unconscious is responsible for the most basal ground of cognition and imagination. Fichte's ego may be further related to Kant's notion of intellectual intuition as a self-intuiting operation—the positing of its self to itself. As a borderline construct standing between conceptual and experiential knowledge, Fichte's reliance on intellectual intuition attempts to explain the very process by which the *I* comes about in elevated consciousness. For Fichte, intellectual intuition is therefore the initial structure of the self itself as process. Like Kant's pure apperception, Fichte's self-intuition is tantamount to the "I think" that accompanies all representations—the very feature that makes consciousness possible.[75] The absolute self, the self-positing *I* that "exists insofar as it is conscious of itself" is an original unconscious self-consciousness that is a form of "unreflected intuition." The point here is, that as a particular kind of self-consciousness, the absolute or unconditioned ground of the self as subjectivity is unconscious agency. The subject cannot exist apart from its own self-awareness of itself.[76] The *I* is unconsciously "self-grounded."

In the realm of this "infinite beyond" that Fichte attributes to the depths of imagination—where Freud would credit the unconscious ego—lies the striving, the yearning—a desire for unity, a *wish*. It is in this mystery of activity that we may find the original *I*—the soul that intuits itself. As we will further see, this characterization of the absolute self asserting itself within its "dark" nether-regions may be attributed to Hegel's feeling soul. Moreover, this "immediate self-consciousness" that Fichte attributes to the self-positing *I* may be advanced by our treatment of Hegel's understanding of unconscious spirit. If the primal self knows itself intuitively, that is prereflectively—before mediated self-consciousness occurs—then we may say that the original form of consciousness is a self-consciousness that is properly understood as unconscious and thus belonging to an unconscious self.

It is important to understand that Fichte's prereflective[77] self-consciousness is not a mediated self-consciousness where the self reflects on itself as an object