

BROOK ZIPORYN

MISSED EXIT: HOW THE HEGEL OF 1802 ALMOST BECAME A CHINESE PHILOSOPHER

ABSTRACT

The Middle or Center (*zhong* 中) is one of the most unignorably recurring motifs in almost all Chinese philosophy, in all periods, in all schools, not only in ethics but in epistemology, metaphysics and ontology as well. It is a motif that is, however, glaringly lacking in resonance in most European philosophy, with the exception of a few brief appearances in the realm of ancient Greek virtue ethics. This paper explores a short-lived exception to this generalization: when Kant (particularly the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*) got mingled with Spinoza in the minds of Schelling and Hegel, in the brief period of their collaboration as editors of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* between 1800 and 1803. In Hegel's works of this period, particularly "Glauben und Wissen," we see a glimpse of the philosophy of the Middle that might have been, had not both Hegel and Schelling veered away from it, in different directions, a few years later, building upon but defanging the explosive implications of the philosophy of the Middle to make it more compatible with traditional European philosophical concerns, particularly those derived from monotheism. A Chinese-European comparative approach to the problem of the Absolute as Middle, where the experience of *Beauty* is literally the concrete sensuous present of this = Absolute, is attempted in this paper, tracking the premises and implications of this strange and tantalizing episode in the history of Western thought.

If we were to make a "word-cloud" graph of all philosophical terms ever used in Chinese classical traditions, what would be the biggest word? One of the chief contenders would surely be *zhong* 中: the Middle, the Center, the Mean. *Zhong* is of course a term one finds used in a huge variety of ways and with a broad range of meanings, but again and again it is singled out for special importance in Chinese thought, in almost every period of its history. Its prominence as an ethical motif is unmistakable as soon as ethics itself emerges in China.¹ Just as early, we even start to feel it nosing its way into

BROOK ZIPORYN, Professor of Chinese Religion, Philosophy and Comparative Thought, Divinity School, University of Chicago. Specialties: Chinese Buddhist philosophy, German Idealism, comparative philosophy. E-mail: ziporyn@uchicago.edu

Confucian thought as an *epistemological* motif.² But most distinctive is its indispensable role in metaphysics and ontology. It is true that this becomes more obvious in the back-formations that come with Neo-Confucianism, in response to the extended significance of the motif of the Middle Way in Buddhism,³ which the Neo-Confucians wanted to match and surpass; but looking back to the pre-Buddhist tradition, they did indeed find that, while there was relatively little in the way of explicit ontological or metaphysical speculation, what little they could find there was in fact all about some form of the idea of the Middle.⁴

The motif of the Middle, following the Madhyamika development of the term in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism from the early Buddhist idea of the Middle Way as a repudiation of ethical extremes (indulgence in desire and suppression of desire) and of views of self (eternalism and annihilationism) to a full denial of all opposite views (being and non-being, sameness and difference, arising and perishing), reaches its most extensive ontological development in Chinese Buddhist speculation, most notably in the Sanlun and Tiantai Schools, where *zhong*, Middle, is made a synonym for the Buddha-nature (Buddhatā, *foxing* 佛性), for the Dharmakāya (*fashen* 法身, the eternal and omnipresent “dharma-body” of all Buddhas), for the Dharmatā (*faxing* 法性, “the nature of all dharmas”), for the Dharmadhātu (*fajie* 法界, “the entire field of all phenomena,” the universe as a whole). It becomes the Chinese Buddhist word, we may loosely say, for “the Absolute.” The Middle means what is beyond all relativity, for it is what belongs to neither of any pair of opposites. But the Middle is the point of identity of opposites but also their defining point of contrast and mutual exclusion, thus serving as a vivid image of what is at once beyond the extremes but also productive of and immanent in the extremes; it is a way of talking about Absoluteness without positing a transcendental realm that is ontologically distinct from the plane of immanence.⁵ This notion of Middle, as the Great Ultimate as interface between Yin and Yang which is productive of both, defining of both, impartially inclusive of both, facilitating their interaction and balance, serving both as their absolute ground and as their absolute standard, continues to bear abundant fruit among the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians.

One finds oneself surprised, on returning to engagement with the Western philosophical traditions, to rediscover how little importance this motif of the Middle has had there. The corresponding “word cloud” graph in this case would prominently feature words in various languages meaning things like “the supreme,” “the ultimate,” “the absolute,” “the fundamental,” “the original,” “the deepest,” “the first,” “the last,” “the highest,” “the purest,” and so on—all sorts of *extremes*—but I think we’d have to search pretty carefully to

find words meaning “the Middle.”⁶ Yes, “the Mean” is the key idea in Aristotle’s ethics; but, surprisingly to an observer familiar with the Chinese traditions, Aristotle’s *metaphysics* seems to be basically untouched by this motif; the notion of the Good emerging in the ethics is not back-loaded into the metaphysics as one might expect, given the importance of the idea of the “highest good” there. Instead, the metaphysics remain entirely beholden to the motifs of the extremes: “the highest” and “the purest” and “the most fundamental.” Perhaps because theorizing on the *arché* or fundamental source, the “beginning,” in physics and metaphysics precedes theorizing on ethics in Greek thought, European traditions seem disinclined to take seriously the ethical motif of “the middle” as a candidate for its basic guiding metaphor for ontology and metaphysics. That would be a clue to what motivates its prominence in Chinese thought, where ethics precedes metaphysics: the ethical motif of the Mean is firmly entrenched as the most basic principle by the time speculation turns to metaphysical matters, and thus finds the resolution of oppositions in the Middle as its handiest and most intuitive word for what encompasses and transcends all one-sidedness, all limitations: in short, for what, if anything, is inexhaustible, unconditional, omnipresent and absolute.

There was one brief moment in European thought, however, when there too the Middle became the ultimate category of a total system of philosophical speculation, the master key to ontology, metaphysics, ethics, nature-philosophy, and epistemology all at once. This was in the whirlwind of thinking during the formative period of German Idealism, especially when Kant got mingled with Spinoza in the minds of Schelling and Hegel, in the brief period of their collaboration as editors of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* between 1800 and 1803. The term Middle comes there to be a way of re-describing what is otherwise called the “identity point” or “indifference point” (*Indifferenzpunkt*) in Schelling’s “Identity Philosophy.” It appears most prominently, and is perhaps elaborated with the greatest rigor, in Hegel’s presentation of that philosophy, especially in the text “Faith and Knowledge” (“Glauben und Wissen”), published in that journal in 1802.⁷ Later this “identity philosophy” was rejected by both Schelling and Hegel.⁸ But in fact Hegel, though his terminology changes, never repudiates the infinite active indifference point between every pair of opposites, where each turns into the other, positing and transcending them both: the Idea of the Middle.⁹ What is this indifference point, this Middle, for Hegel of 1802?

Hegel had declared that the real task of philosophy lies precisely in overcoming the dichotomies posited by the reflective intellect (*der Verstand*)—i.e., the dualism between the finite and the infinite

and their various synonyms—while also giving them their due importance.¹⁰ The work of the Middle is precisely this overcoming of dualisms, while also grounding and determining them. But to grasp its derivation and applications, we must first get clear about the two contrasted extremes between which it is supposed to be the “middle.” I just mentioned the dichotomy of “the finite and the infinite” and “its various synonyms.” One of the things that makes Hegel’s writing style frustrating to many readers, in this period and later, is his use of an unexplained system of synonyms, at times freely substituting one for another in the same sentence. He is assuming the results of Schelling’s reading of Fichte’s reading of Kant, and that his readers are already on board with these results. “Infinity” is used as a synonym for all of the following: “the concept,” “freedom,” “spontaneity,” “thought,” “ideality,” “the supersensuous,” “the universal,” “self-identity,” “the I,” “lawfulness,” “unity.” This is because for Kant, *universality* and *necessity*, the characteristics of all concepts of the Understanding as opposed to percepts of intuition, are not found in empirical experience (i.e., are “transcendental”), which is here construed to mean that they are *spontaneously* produced by cognition. This necessary structure of experience is explained by Kant as rooted in the transcendental *unity* of apperception, which is interpreted by Fichte as the self-positing (and therefore *free*) “I am I” (identity to itself), and this is assimilated to the transcendental freedom of the self in Kant’s moral theory, since it is itself already *normative* (universality is not a found or experienced unity, but a maxim or rule for unifying an indefinite number of particulars in the future).¹¹ (For Hegel all these will be the “abstract” unity only, not the unity of the Middle, to be discussed in a moment.) Conversely, “finitude” is used as a synonym for “sensibility,” “intuition” (Kant’s word for direct experience of a spatio-temporal particular), “the manifold,” “difference,” “reality,” “the sensuous,” “necessity” (as the *separateness* of cause and effect), “nature” (ditto), “mechanism,” (ditto) “the particular,” (ditto), “sunderedness (ditto).” Once these chains of synonyms are understood, we can perceive the progression of Hegel’s argument about the Middle quite clearly. The Middle is the connecting and converging point of all these seemingly dichotomous pairs at once, and also the point that divides and defines each pair, since they are for Hegel all versions of one and the same false dichotomy.

The motif of the Middle emerges most clearly in Hegel’s critique of Kant in “Faith and Knowledge.” For Kant—and for Jacobi and Fichte, the other two targets of this critique—the Absolute (initially identified with the infinite unconditioned reality) is “beyond” both thought (the Understanding and Reason) and perception (intuition):

it is beyond experience entirely.¹² It can never be known by thinking, and it can never be experienced, either by the senses or by introspection. It is noteworthy that Hegel at this time, in sharp contrast to his later notorious insistence of his own orthodoxy (at a time when a rejection of Christian faith would have threatened his professional position), emphatically identifies the premise he is critiquing, the exclusion of any direct manifestation of infinity from all finite experience, as a philosophical translation of the “basic standpoint of Protestantism”: the rejection of idolatry, expanded to include all institutions, all art, all definite concepts, all direct experiences in space or time, in short anything *concrete* considered as a manifestation of God. “In sighs and prayers [the Protestant] seeks for the God whom he denies to himself in intuition, because of the risk that the intellect will cognize what is intuited as a mere thing, reducing the sacred grove to mere timber.”¹³ Indeed, “the fundamental principle common to the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte is, then, the absoluteness of finitude and, resulting from it, the absolute antithesis of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the sensuous and the supersensuous, and the beyondness of what is truly real and absolute.”¹⁴ Hegel here characterizes Protestantism as excluding from the world of finite experience all concrete apprehension of the infinite, of all infinite values, artificially removing all conceivable content from the “infinite” side, to which all access had been strictly denied in perception or experience, sensory or intellectual. The infinite was not allowed to be present in any percept or any concept or Idea. But Ideas and concepts and percepts are the only possible source of any actual content. So in a typical reversal, Hegel sees this “Protestant” consciousness then swinging around to embrace the other extreme: the finite, the world, intuition (experience) as the only supplier of real content, the only real value.¹⁵ Secular empiricism and materialism is thus according to Hegel a reverse by-product of this basic Protestant orientation. The only alternatives it allows are 1) faith in an Absolute Beyond which is never present in either intellectual or sensory experience or 2) total acceptance of empirical life and empirical pleasures in their finitude as the sole value and the sole truth. Both of these extremes are premised on the same basic Protestant dichotomy between finite and infinite (and all their synonyms).

The Middle is the overcoming of precisely this dichotomy between finite and infinite, mind and matter, freedom and necessity, unity and diversity. It is initially nothing more or less than a word for Schelling’s version of Spinoza’s God, Spinoza being, for the Schelling of this time, “the *first* who, with complete clarity, saw mind and matter as one, thought and extension simply as modifications of

the same principle.”¹⁶ Hegel sees that this provides the exit from the Protestant dualist impasse:

Jacobi says: ‘*Either* God exists and exists *outside* me, a living being subsisting apart; *or else* I am God. *There is no third way.*’ Philosophy, on the contrary, says *there is a third way*, and it is [authentic] philosophy only because there is one. For philosophy predicates of God not only being but also thought, that is, Ego, and recognizes him as the absolute identity of being and thought. Philosophy recognizes that there is no *outside* for God, and hence that God is not an entity that subsists apart, one that is determined by something outside it, or in other words, not something apart from which other things have standing. Outside of God nothing has standing at all, there is nothing. Hence the *Either-Or*, which is the a principle of all formal logic and of the intellect [i.e., *Verstand*] that has renounced Reason [i.e., *Vernunft*], is abolished without trace in the *absolute middle* [emphasis added]. . . . the Third that is truly the First and the Only One. . . .¹⁷

The excavation of this “Absolute Middle” determines Hegel’s entire reading of Kant. The *Critique of Pure Reason* begins by pondering the question, “How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?” For Hegel, this is also a question about the Middle:

This problem expresses nothing else but the Idea that subject and predicate of the synthetic judgment are identical in the *a priori* way. That is to say, these heterogeneous elements, the subject [of the proposition] which is the particular and in the form of being, and the predicate which is the universal and in the form of thought, are at the same time absolutely identical. It is Reason alone that is the possibility of this positing for Reason is nothing else but the identity of heterogeneous elements of this kind.¹⁸

All knowledge is for Kant the joining of particulars to universals in judgments, determining what some present intuited representation actually “is,” i.e., what universally cognizable content (universal) can be attached to a particular sensuous intuition. Knowledge is, in other words, the joining of particulars to universals. But universals are inseparable from the categories, and all the categories, ultimately, are expressions of the “transcendental unity of apperception” in which they are rooted. To know is to interrelate, to unify: to join universals to particulars, thereby also leading to the joining of particulars to particulars, as well as universals to universals.

The original synthetic unity of apperception is the condition of possibility not only of thinking, but also of perception: it is recognized later in Kant’s book, in the deduction of the categories, as the principle also of the “figurative synthesis,” i.e., the forms of intuition, space and time, which are there conceived as synthetic unities produced by cognition on its own power: “the absolute synthetic

activity of the productive imagination is conceived as the principle of the very sensibility which was previously characterized only as receptivity.”¹⁹ This is the key to grasping Hegel’s reading of Kant’s First Critique. Kant’s initial assertion that sensibility, the faculty operative in sensuous intuition (i.e., perception in space and time), is exclusively passive and receptive is *refuted by Kant himself* when he gets to the transcendental deduction of the categories, in his claim that not only the categories but the *a priori* intuitions of space and time themselves are dependent upon the original synthetic unity of apperception, the “I think” which “must be able to accompany all representations.” So both thought and perception—the entirety of experience—is accomplished by the original synthetic unity of universal and particular, of infinite and finitude.²⁰

But on Hegel’s reading, the unity of apperception embodied in the necessarily available connection to “I think” ends up not having any real content other than “the necessary possibility of connecting” per se. This is the infinite again: necessity and universality. For all this means is that non-closeability, the openness to connection, is a *necessary* condition for any finite experience, without which it can never appear in any consciousness, whether sensuously or conceptually: all content is determination, and all determination is finite, but the appearance of the finite is itself conditioned by *not being limited to any finite experience or any finite set of experiences*. The unity of the “I” is not a finite thing appearing in experience, but the infinite which is a condition of experience and equally omnipresent in every experience: it merely means that nothing stands outside or apart from the interconnections of the manifold of experience. It is not the unity of an empirical collecting of various particulars into a single finite whole: “unity” never appears as an intuition sensuous particular at all. Rather, it is *necessary universality as such*, a mode of relating one thing to another, a rule by which to join particulars, a way to connect one particular to another.²¹ As Hegel puts it, the very idea of “a single thing” is merely an abstraction, a “thing of reason”: there are no such separate things in reality, nor in experience. Single things have simply never occurred anywhere, to anyone. Finite things that are not also instantiations of this infinity simply never occur. We obtain an idea of any such entity only by studiously neglecting a lot of what always comes with it (the abstracting work of the intellect, *der Verstand*, which divides things into finite opposites).²²

This original synthetic unity is not *produced out of* the opposed terms (unity and multiplicity, the single experiencer and the multiple experiences, the universal and the particular, freedom and necessity, infinity and finitude), but is “a truly necessary, absolute, original

identity of opposites.” It is the condition of experience, not its occasional result. The Middle is operative in all experience without exception: “this relative identity and antithesis is what seeing or being conscious consists in; but the identity is completely identical with the difference just as it is in the magnet.”²³ The magnet, an image borrowed from Schelling, provides a concrete exemplification of the Middle as both identity and difference of the opposites: the north-south polarity is *always necessarily* present at every point of a magnet, and even if it is cut into smaller pieces, every concrete locus will have this structure, even the point that was formerly identified as the midpoint. But this polarity *always necessarily* has a middle, however small the magnet is cut, which is by definition neither north nor south. Every point is the Middle, and every point is north and is south. The Middle is everywhere and the division is everywhere. The opposites are everywhere and the overcoming of the opposites is also everywhere. “This is how Kant truly solved his problem, ‘How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?’ They are possible through the original, absolute identity of the heterogeneous.” This is the “absolute identity as the mediating concept (*Mittelbegriff*). . . .”²⁴

But the Middle is not something imposed from outside on the extremes, or an infinite that supplants the finite; rather, it is for Hegel a way to overcome the antithesis of finite and infinite *immanently*: indeed, it becomes known simply by thinking through the nature of finitude itself. The common mistake of these very “Protestant” thinkers (Kant, Jacobi, Fichte), is failure to *follow through all the way* on their critique of finitude, on this sense of an unreachable beyond in every possible intuited experience. They take the necessary limitation, the sense that “it only *appears* this way” as something that is merely “subjective,” telling us nothing about reality. Hegel’s point is that to “know all our experience to be necessarily false” is also an experience: “. . . Kant regards discursive intellect [*Verstand*] . . . as in itself and absolute. Cognition of appearances is dogmatically regarded as the only kind of cognition there is, and rational cognition is denied. . . . Kant never seems to have had the slightest doubt that the intellect is the absolute of human spirit. The intellect is (for him) the absolute, immovable, insuperable finitude of human Reason.”²⁵ For Hegel, in contrast, the “inescapable sense of unreachable beyondness” is also pre-saturated with *its* own beyond. To view all experience as merely “inner” is also merely inner, and we experience this “mere innerness” as incapable of being the total reality. But that means this mere innerness is itself incapable of being what it appears to be, incapable of being the whole story, is untrustworthy, immanently and necessarily requires connection to something outside it. To be present at all, it too is

always pre-linked to what it is not. Just because it is limited to our innerness, it cannot be taken as merely limited to our innerness. There is an experienced *necessity* involved in this limitation, and this experience itself, as Kant showed, is irreducible to any form of finitude.²⁶ Our experience of the for-us-necessary separation of necessity and freedom, or of universal and particular, of intuition and spontaneity, indeed of possibility and actuality, entails the copresence of the *necessary idea* of the possibility of an intellect for which this is *not* so; Kant indeed raises this idea precisely *as a possibility*.²⁷ But the separation of possible and actual is itself one of the points under dispute; hence for Hegel, to “conceive and know” that this is a *necessary idea* is “also an exercise of the cognitive faculty,” and “Kant has simply no ground except experience and empirical psychology for holding that the human cognitive faculty essential consists in the way it appears,” moving either from the universal to the particular or vice versa, incapable of experiencing them both simultaneously as one, in spontaneous intuition (intuitive intellect or intellectual intuition, which Hegel sees as identical to the transcendental imagination even in Kant himself).²⁸ Kant himself thinks of the intuitive intellect as a *necessary Idea*; “it is he himself who establishes the opposite experience, [the experience] of thinking a nondiscursive intellect. He himself shows that his cognitive faculty is aware not only of the appearance and of the separation of the possible and actual in it, but also of Reason and the In-itself. Kant has here before him both the Idea of a Reason in which possibility and actuality are absolutely identical and its appearance as cognitive faculty wherein they are separated. In the experience of his thinking he finds both thoughts.”²⁹ Kant himself thinks that which he claims thinking cannot think, and he thinks it as necessary and as immanent to what it appears to negate. This simultaneous necessity and negation which is negation of negation, this inherent bridging even in the very fact of sundering, this inescapable pre-linking even of our own finitude and falseness, is what Hegel calls “Middle,” and on this reading it must be the ground of all experience of any kind, indeed must be present in and as every single moment of awareness without exception. The Middle term is the relation between self-positing formal identity of the I and the manifold of sensuous experience. But these terms are only mutually exclusive when taken *outside* of this relation to each other that constitutes them:

When taken to exist in itself, the formal identity is freedom, practical Reason, autonomy, law, practical Ideal, etc., and its absolute opposite is necessity, the inclination and drives, heteronomy, nature, etc. The connection between the two is an incomplete one within the bounds of an absolute antithesis. . . . The manifold gets

determined by the unity [in practical philosophy] just as the emptiness of identity gets plenished by the manifold [in theoretical philosophy]. Whether active or passive, each supervenes to the other in a formal way, as something alien. This formal cognition only brings about impoverished identities, and allows the antithesis to persist in its complete absoluteness. What it lacks is the middle term (*Mittelglied*), which is Reason. . . . It is recognized [by Kant] that this antithesis necessarily presupposes a middle, and that in this middle the antithesis and its content must be brought to nothing. But this is not an actual, genuine nullification; it is [in Kant] only a confession that the finite *ought* to be suspended.³⁰

This is Hegel's key move: pointing out that to be aware of the infinite as beyond is already an actual experience of the infinite, a real intuition of it. As he says when critiquing Fichte's version of this "Protestantism" derived from Kant, this eternal finitude of the self, of all experienced knowing, with the truth always "beyond" it:

The objective world [for Fichte as for Kant] supervenes upon pure knowledge [i.e., the spontaneity of the self-positing self, freedom, etc.] as something alien that completes it. It does this by way of an inference from there being something missing in the point of attachment to the necessity of what is missing, an inference from the incompleteness of the Absolute, which is itself just one part, to the other part that completes it. But the insight that there is a deficiency in what is posited as Absolute [i.e., initially that self-positing knowing self], that the Absolute is just a part, is only possible through the Idea of totality or in general, through the awareness that for the sake of the so-called intellectual intuition, for the sake of thinking oneself and of pure knowing, we have abstracted from an alien other which is afterwards taken back again. Why does not this idea of the totality itself, the measure against which pure knowing shows itself to be incomplete, step forth as the Absolute?³¹

That is, the self feels itself as Absolute (self-positing, free, incapable of wrongness, subjectively "certain," having no outside), but at the same time as limited and incomplete, necessarily in need of a truth that always lies outside it. Hegel asks, why isn't this "feels itself as limited" also included in what the self is, just as much as "feels itself as Absolute"? Its feeling of its absoluteness, in fact, is what allows it to feel itself as finite; they are really two sides of the same coin. And this two-sided coin is the *true* Absoluteness, the identity of identity and difference: the Middle.

This Middle is thus the insuperable prior inseparability of opposed items that grounds all experience. Hegel's tells us that this is precisely what Kant himself is displaying, without realizing it and even while believing himself to be rejecting it, in the Antinomies. "Kant recognized that this conflict originates only through and within finitude and is therefore a necessary illusion. . . ." Kant

showed that the finite categories on which the antinomies were based could not be final truths. But “what is positive in these antinomies, their middle, remains unrecognized. Reason appears pure only in its negative aspect as suspension of reflection.”³² For in each of these, he is showing that the contradiction is *necessary*, and he himself *experiences it as necessary* in that very exposition. What stands beyond the contradiction is *the elucidation of the contradiction itself*, which is necessarily *ipso facto* a simultaneous awareness of both of the two contradictory positions: this awareness is *itself the Middle that subsumes and creates them as such*. The display of the antinomies is Reason comprehending the finitude of the categories of the Understanding precisely as finite, and thereby transcending them, while also seeing that they are necessary products of Reason itself.

This “negative” inseparability pertaining to the Middle is the true model of the slippery idea of “unity”: not the abstract unity of certainty, freedom, self-creation, the universal infinite alone, but the unity of the magnet, the unity of unity and diversity, of freedom and nature. That rewriting of what unity is has enormous consequences. For the true heart of the Kantian system, according to Hegel, the site of both his greatest speculative insight and his most amazing blindness to his own accomplishment, comes in the *Critique of Judgment*. It is here that we finally have the full exposition of the Middle. Here, Hegel says, is “the most interesting point in the Kantian system, the point at which a region is recognized that is a middle between the empirical manifold and the absolute abstract unity. But once again, it is [in Kant’s view] not a region accessible to cognition. Only the aspect in which it is appearance is called forth, and not its ground, which is Reason. It is acknowledged as thought, but with respect to cognition all reality is denied to it.”³³ What is this middle? Hegel says, “It is, namely, in the *reflecting judgment* that Kant finds the middle term between the concept of nature and the concept of freedom.”³⁴ The reflecting judgment is operative in the *productive imagination*, and thus in the actual experience of *beauty*. For here, as Kant points out, because conceptuality is given without any specific concept, joined to an infinite production of intuitions, it is not a particular intuition that is subsumed under a particular concept, but the very form of the faculty of intuition as such and the form of the faculty of conceptuality as such that converge, giving us the essence of judgment per se, and thus the unity of all forms of cognition.³⁵ Hegel points out that Kant has seen that beauty is the experience of “an imagination lawful by itself, of lawfulness without law . . . free concord of imagination and intellect,” but “without the mildest suspicion that we are here in the territory of Reason.”³⁶ Kant sees here two impossibilities, without seeing that they are magnet-inseparable

and thus the solution to each other; on the one hand, he sees the aesthetic as incapable of conceptualization, and on the other, the Ideas of Reason as incapable of sensuous exemplification. Hegel merely puts these two together: “the aesthetic has its exposition in the Idea of Reason, and the Idea of Reason has its demonstration in Beauty.”³⁷ Beauty is “the Idea as experienced,” where “the form of opposition between intuition and concept falls away. Kant recognizes this vanishing of the antithesis negatively in the concept of a supersensuous realm in general. But he does not recognize that as beauty, it is positive, it is intuited, or to use his own language, it is given in experience.”³⁸

Kant had given four aspects to his definition of beauty: Beauty presents, in a non-conceptual and sensuous way, the two characteristics of knowledge, i.e., 1) universality and 2) necessity. But it also 3) gives pleasure that is untouched by any particular personal desire, and finally 4) presents the *form* of “purpose” in an object, but perceived in it *apart from the representation of any specific purpose*.³⁹ The first two aspects mean that to feel something to be beautiful, as opposed to merely pleasant to me here and now, means that I am feeling not just pleasure but the additional sense that it is or should be universally and necessarily pleasant to all. Necessity and universality are the conditions of true knowledge, and the “should” is the condition of all moral agency, thus enfolding the focal points of the previous two *Critiques*. Inseparable from these, but more salient for our topic here, are the last two aspects (delight without particular personal desire and purposivity without any specific idea of a goal), which really amount to the same thing: beauty is *purposivity without purpose*. That is, beauty is the experience of the general form of purposivity without any specific, identifiable purpose being apparent. It is the unity of purpose and purposelessness, of knowledge (i.e., the parts seem to be deliberately arranged as guided by some mentation, some purpose) and non-knowledge (we don’t know what the reason or purpose is), of coherence and incoherence, of consciousness and unconsciousness.⁴⁰

The enormous meaning of this move for Schelling and Hegel becomes clear when we recall how Kant defines the idea of “purpose” itself: to say that something has a purpose is, naively, to say that it is made that way by guidance of an intention, which requires a mind. But mind had already been broken down by Kant into its transcendental essence: the original infinite unity operative in and as all conceptuality and perception per se. Kant defines purpose as what happens when a *concept* has causal efficacy in bringing about the intuitions it subsumes, when a universality *causes* particulars, when knowledge causes what it knows, when a concept determinates

the particular sensory experiences exemplifying it.⁴¹ To understand this we must remember that for Kant a “concept” is a universal *rule for unifying* the particulars that are its object. Purpose is analyzed into causation by concepts, and concepts are further analyzed into spontaneous inexhaustible omnipresent maxims of unifying, i.e., infinity, universality, spontaneity, and necessity. Dropping out the specificity of any particular concept in any particular mind, we can boil this down to its essence, so the pure universal form of “purpose” emerges, abstracted from any specific content. Purpose means universality that causes its particulars, or unity that causes its own diversity, or mind that causes its own objects. Purposivity, the pure form of purpose, means this causal power of concepts, i.e., the power of universality as infinite unity to determine its own instantiations in particular intuitions. Once the specific purpose, answering to a specific particular pathological desire or utility, drops out, leaving only the form, we have beauty: purposivity without purpose. The dropping out of a specific purpose eliminates the possibility of finding any purpose *external* to the putatively purposive entity. All that appears, then, is the experience of a *whole that determines its own parts*.⁴²

Kant considers this idea in relation to biological organisms, which he sees as exemplifying this unity where each part is both cause and effect of not only the functioning but even the formation of every other part: the parts are only comprehensible through the whole, and the formation of the parts by the whole is also the formation of each part by every other part, so that they are reciprocally purpose and means to each other. When we judge something to be an organism, we are applying this (a priori and merely regulative) idea of a natural purpose to it, seeing it as a unity that determinates its parts, all of which are purposes to each other. Here unity is experienced as determining its parts, and this allows us to think of these entities as exemplifying the idea of purposivity even when we can locate no specific purpose that they serve, external to themselves; they are themselves manifestations of purposiveness, but not in service to a purpose beyond themselves: we may say that their sole purpose is the preservation of that very unity. They are their own goal, autotelic, ends in themselves: their purpose is to preserve purposivity without being subordinated to any definite purpose beyond themselves. But this purposiveness without purpose we find in Life, in “internal teleology,” is thus a version of what Kant had identified already as Beauty itself.

Kant then considers four possible explanations of this appearance of purposivity in some natural objects: 1) mechanism produces them by utter chance (Democritus, Epicurus), 2) mechanism and all

efficient causality are rooted in absolute unity, necessity, universality (Spinoza), which is thus also unity as causal; 3) world-soul (world is purposive from within); and 4) theism (external designer of nature, but nowhere seen in any sensuous intuition). None are acceptable, but for Kant, theism is, as always, the preferred regulative idea.⁴³

Now Kant's offers three objections to Spinoza's solution: 1) the original unity of Being which is the substrate of all accidents is "impossible to understand"; 2) this unity does not explain purpose, which requires not just unity but "a special kind of unity," that of concepts and understanding and purpose and design, such that things are intentional products of the original unity instead of merely "accidents" inhering in it as in Spinoza; and 3) though admitting that in one sense we could perhaps say that Spinoza's determining unity allows us an understanding of things in nature as themselves purposes, so much so that "all things must be thought as purposes" (since Spinoza can say that considered in themselves rather than comparatively "all things are perfect," as necessarily being just what they are, as essences inherent in God-Substance, and hence as self-preserving unity, as *conatus*), such that "to be a thing is the same as to be a purpose," Kant objects that this sort of purposiveness is applicable equally to everything, as functions of a necessity removing all contingency, and thus tells us nothing.

Hegel and Schelling, on the contrary, see that Kant has here stumbled into his point of contact with Spinoza, and it is his own philosophy that explains all three of these points. His own exposition has unknowingly arrived at precisely the thought of a necessary, universal, determinative unity productive of its own instantiations, but also immediately intuitively present as the Middle point between finite and infinite (*et alia*) that Kant has himself displayed as necessarily functioning in speculative Reason, in Life, and in Beauty. They see that this is already the "whole" of Spinoza, which is not to be conceived as a finite, sensuous whole (whole/part in this sense is a mere category of finitude, of the Understanding), but rather as inseparability itself, with all its synonyms: the necessary, self-caused, spontaneous, inexhaustible, omnipresent infinite unity—and it was Kant who showed that this was really all there was to conceptuality per se, that purposive action is just determination by a concept, and to be a concept is just to be infinite universal unity, an untotalizable way of prospectively unifying an inexhaustible set of sensuous particulars. Kant has himself already blown the bottom out of the concepts of "understanding" and "design," reducing them to "determining infinite universal unity" as such. He had even pointed out that the distinction between possibility and actuality, and between contingency and necessity, and between mechanism and

teleology, was a peculiarity of our particular cognitive faculty, *and* that we could know this (and know it as necessary to our cognitive function), i.e., that we are able to conceive the possibility of other types of cognition, a possibility which is already an actual presence in experience once the possible-actual distinction is already thus experienced as bracketed. This also means that “understanding and design” is not a special type of unity after all; it is a mere analogy for determinative unity, one that is derived from our own peculiar universal-to-particular kind of cognition, which would not have to pertain to the operations of reality conceived as a genuine determinative unity.⁴⁴ This should answer his own objections to Spinoza’s collapsing of these categories, and indeed to his objection that this type of unity was “impossible to understand”: for just knowing that we both necessarily separate these categories, *and* that we understand that this is a peculiarity of our own limitation is already to see their unity in a larger experience. The self-limitation of the opposed categories is their revelation of the infinite Middle which encompasses and surpasses both. We know infinity not by picturing it, but by knowing the *necessary* inability of any intuition and any concept to be adequate to it. That knowing *is* the positive knowing of the infinite; there is no more to be known there.

And it is in beauty, as the form of purposivity (determinative power of a concept, i.e., of infinite unity) without limitation to the content of a particular purpose, that this unity characteristic of mind (and thus in knowledge seemingly merely passive, and in moral action one-sidedly active) is seen as *genuinely* infinite, and as genuinely causing its own parts: the infinite determining its own finite expressions, at once ideality and reality, infinite and finite, mind and matter. This is what Hegel calls the Middle here, and will later call the “true infinite”—the true unity of unity and multiplicity, the true self-causality of necessity and freedom, the identity of identity and difference, of finite and infinite: the unity of the middle point of the magnet.⁴⁵ But in “Faith and Knowledge,” Hegel attributes this idea specifically to Spinoza.⁴⁶ Kant sees the *possibility* of a point of view that views the mechanism of nature (where effect and cause, part and whole, particular and universal, actual and possible are really separate), and the manifestation of organism and beauty (where all these things are non-dual) as two manifestations of a deeper unity inaccessible to our form of cognition. For Hegel, Spinoza has presented this true infinite, the Middle that unifies infinite and finite, teleology and mechanism: for “purpose” simply *means* “the whole that determines its parts,” and beauty, purposivity without purpose, means “the infinite that is present in and as all finitude.”⁴⁷ These are two ways of saying “The Middle.” Hegel remarks,

“In understanding Spinoza’s unity, Kant should have kept his eye on his own Idea of the intuitive intellect in which concept and intuition, possibility and actuality are one ... as the absolutely intelligible and in itself organic unity ... which is by nature purposive (*Naturzweck*), and, which he conceives as the determination of the parts by the whole, or as identity of cause and effect.”⁴⁸ Kant failed to see that Spinoza’s unity is the real Middle, the true infinite, the true convergence of purpose and mechanism—the exact definition of what Schelling, following Kant, had already called *life*, and *beauty*.⁴⁹

Kant had thus unknowingly converged with Spinoza, but also in a way stepped beyond him: he has identified this experience of reality in terms of this purposeless-purposivity precisely as Beauty (rather than, as in Spinoza, merely as *beatitude*). Since Spinoza’s “whole” is actually infinite, it cannot be determinate; famously, according to Hegel’s reading of Spinoza, “determination is negation.” That means the infinite purpose, i.e., the determining power of the whole, cannot be any specific content, cannot be present as *any specific purpose*. It can only be purposivity per se (the determining power of infinite inexhaustible unfinishable unity) without a specific purpose: life, beauty, beauty as life, life as beauty. Beauty is the Middle itself as present to direct experience: it is the joining of nature (necessity, sensuous intuition, diversity, finitude, lack of identifiable purpose) and freedom (subjectivity, spontaneity, unity, infinity, purposivity as causative power of inseparability).⁵⁰

We have here arrived back, unexpectedly and circuitously, at the Tiantai Buddhist idea of the Three Truths, where every single experienced determinate entity is, precisely because it is determinate, necessarily at every point inseparable from and thereby identical to its own negation, and thus also with the necessarily indeterminate and infinitely redetermining unfinishable whole, which is equally any and every other determinate entity.⁵¹ The inseparability of all determinations is here what determines them—what Hegel therefore calls “Purposivity”—but by definition this can never be any one specific purpose: the totality causes all its parts, but that totality is necessarily indeterminate and uncloseable. We notice too that we could also describe this Middle as Beauty as Life as Purposeless-Purpose (inseparability as causal power) in terms of the Neo-Confucian idea of the Middle (*zhong* 中, which also implies *gong* 公, unbiasedness, impartiality) as Life (*shengsheng* 生生) which can never be completed (*buxi* 不息) and is thus always ongoing and untotaled, as “all beings being one body” (*wanwu yiti* 萬物一體) which is also the one body as all things, *yiti wanwu* 一體萬物). The category of “purpose” is not so explicitly thematized in Chinese traditions, for

“purpose” seems to be a peculiarly Western obsession with deep roots in the monotheist and Greek tradition, which sees the world and all creatures as deliberately created by a purposively acting mind. But Hegel has used the Kantian system to dismantle this notion of purpose, breaking it down into its component parts. What he ends up with was, for a few brief years, the overcoming of the obsession with (what Hegel calls “external”) purpose, finding his inspiration in a creative Schellingian reading of Kant and Spinoza. Hegel tries to rethink teleology now and in the future as “internal purposivity,” even claiming that this is the original idea of organic purpose found already in Aristotle; but the shadow of monotheism and the eschatological view of history, with its goal in the future, seems to catch up with him in 1807: the purpose of things still falls outside themselves, in a now determinately finished “whole,” or in “history” or in “the full manifestation and self-consciousness of Geist.” Hegel is well aware of the philosophical limitations that the idea of God produces, even when, in 1807, he is also able to applaud it as a way of stressing, now *against* Spinoza, that the Absolute is not only Substance but also Subject. But against that concession, Hegel goes on to note, in the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, two important drawbacks of using the term “God” for the Absolute: it makes the content of the Absolute seem to be determinate in advance, and it makes it seem separate from the consciousness that is cognizing it or talking about it. *The term God, according to Hegel, actually makes the realization of the Absolute impossible.*⁵² Both of these problems are aspect of “sunderedness,” making the Absolute into a particular being and pinning the name “God” on it. For as long as God is called God, God really ends up being some one particular being, however much theologians struggle against it. If “existing for and in God” is different from “existing for and in oneself,” God is ipso facto different from oneself, and as Hegel well knew, this meant God was a particular, not an infinite universal, much less the True Infinite, the Middle, Life. Instead it becomes *a Middle, a Life*. Purposivity without Purpose suddenly has a definite, specific purpose: the end of history, the manifestation of God, the Truth, *the* (finished, closed) Whole. Beauty vanishes into utility—straightforward purposivity with a definite purpose, with means necessarily subordinated to the otherness of a goal—as soon as God becomes determinate. The Incarnation—God’s definite manifestation in the world in a particular time, a particular place, a particular form, a particular personality, thereby excluding and subordinating all other times, places, forms, personalities into mere means toward that definite purpose—is the eradication of the possibility of Beauty.⁵³ This is just the impasse that is avoided in the

Chinese systems, devoid of both a definite God and the grammatical requirements for an either/or with respect to number, and thus to definite inclusion and definite exclusion.

The explicit application of the Middle to the question of Purpose, rendering a very clear idea of Purposivity without Purpose, be it noted, does appear explicitly in the Tiantai system, as rooted in the *Lotus Sutra* notion of *buqiu zide* 不求自得: “attainment without seeking.” This phrase very emphatically does not mean that a goal is attained without any kind of seeking, without having any purposivity at all: it means rather that goal X is without seeking X, but requiring the misdirected seeking of Y. These goals, however, are not *the one goal* of all beings; all goals qua goal work this way, this is the nature of purpose and its satisfaction in general.⁵⁴ It is indeed oriented toward the future, but not toward a single historical future, like monotheist eschatology; rather, toward an infinity of futures, one for each sentient being or indeed for each moment of experience. We might speak of it as an infinity of individual eschatons. But the key is of course that the “future” moments towards which this conception points—the attainment of Buddhahood—is itself happening *now*, in the Tiantai view, because the conception of moments of time is consistently that which is applied to all other types of putatively separate entities: they are not really divisible at all, and indeed each is caused by the totality of all of them. Beauty as the Middle, as Purpose-Purposeless, as Conscious-Unconscious, as Freedom-Necessity is precisely what the Tiantai vision gives us at every moment of experience: to live every moment as the Bodhisattva who is doing the work of Bodhisattva without knowing it, without knowing how, without in fact even knowing he is a Bodhisattva—and only *because* he preserves this eternal non-knowing together with his knowing of his non-knowing. But there is a final fuller immanence here: the Tiantai/*Lotus* version does not exclude having a particular purpose—which is impossible: for to exclude purpose would just be to make “purposelessness” into one’s purpose, and to exclude this purpose would be another purpose, and so ad infinitum. Rather, one consciously embraces a particular purpose but also knows that one does not know what one’s real purpose is, what other purposes one is fulfilling in fulfilling this apparent purpose. To do whatever you feel like, whatever you are drawn to do, for any reason at all, knowing your motivation from your petty particular purpose but also knowing that this cannot be your only purpose, both knowing and non-knowing your purpose, while also knowing that you are also doing much more than you know, and are fulfilling infinite unknown purposes only by having a particular purpose and yet not knowing the real purpose of that purpose—that is the

distinctive form of beauty which is fully available to every moment of experience of any sentient being: this is the Tiantai vision.

Hegel comes close to this idea in his notion of “the Cunning of Reason,” but there the *singularity* and *externality* of the Goal of “Reason” reverses the meaning. The externality of the Purpose is, however, merely apparent for Hegel as for Tiantai, for time as a series of separate moments is not ultimate reality, but merely the form in which the Concept (i.e., the Middle) appears *phenomenally*.⁵⁵ In reality, time too is an unfinishable unity, and all its parts are determined by its inseparability. Hence, in reality, as Hegel famously remarks in an addition derived from his lectures to the final section on Teleology in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, the end is reached at every moment:

The accomplishing of the infinite purpose consists therefore only in sublating the illusion that it has not yet been accomplished. The good, the absolute good, fulfills itself eternally in the world, and the result is that it is already fulfilled in and for itself, and does not need to wait upon us for this to happen. This is the illusion in which we live, and at the same time it is this illusion alone that is the activating element upon which our interest in the world rests. It is within its own process that the Idea produces that illusion for itself; it posits an other confronting itself, and its action consists in sublating that illusion. Only from this error does the truth come forth, and herein lies our reconciliation with error and with finitude. Otherness or error, as sublated, is itself a necessary moment of the truth, which can only be in that it makes itself into its own result.⁵⁶

If this is an accurate transcription of Hegel’s meaning, he would be very close to being a Chinese philosopher after all. The future realization must be taking place at every moment, for the future is not really separable from the present. Indeed, the realization cannot be some specific state at the End—that would be a specific purpose, and thus necessarily would be utility rather than beauty. Hence it can only be always going on, reaching the End at every moment (including Hegel’s own moment of writing, which is why he legitimately speaks of it as the End of History). But by the same token, this idea of the Middle as Beauty should overcome not just the futurity of the End, but also its *singularity*: the indivisibility-as-causal-power, Purposivity Without Purpose, cannot be any specific End. Hegel, however, continues to speak of *the* infinite End. He wants this to mean the *true* infinite; but the true infinite is no more one than many; it cannot be any particular determination that excludes any other determination. That is what makes it beautiful: it is the inseparability that causes all things, but not any one specific End. It follows from the inseparability of the present and the future, from the fact that the infinite End is fulfilling itself at all times, that the

disjunction between apparent purpose and The Real Purpose stipulated in the Cunning of Reason is illusory: *every* purpose is precisely the infinite purpose, and there simply is no other infinite purpose, no other infinite End besides these, fulfilled as each of them in each moment. That is the view we find in Tiantai Buddhism.

Perhaps it is the grammar of his language that constrains Hegel to make this distinction *the* Infinite purpose and simply any purpose per se qua infinite: it requires a choice between definite and indefinite article, and a choice between singular and plural. Or perhaps it is just the habit of monotheism that favors this knee-jerk assumption that the infinite must be One. Spinoza knew better, knew that the infinite One could not be any specific oneness. God, he says, is only improperly spoken of as One.⁵⁷ The best Chinese thinkers knew better too: they knew that one and many were just alternate descriptions of the same one-and-many continuity which posited and transcended any and every finite determination and every determinate purpose: the Middle as Great Ultimate. To really become a Chinese philosopher, it seems, Hegel would have needed to get rid of Indo-European grammar and get rid of the monotheist God. Perhaps, as Nietzsche suggested, to get rid of one is to get rid of the other.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Chicago, Illinois

ENDNOTES

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1. E.g., *Analects* 9:16 and, really, too many other places to list.
2. E.g., *Analects* 9: 8, and, given the lexical and doctrinal inseparability of ethics and moral epistemology in this text, arguably but quite radically in the double negation of the two extremes for both ethics and epistemology in 18: 8: nothing permissible or unpermissible as both nothing right or wrong, and nothing true or false; and then again, both ethically and epistemologically in *Mencius* 7A: 26, and less explicitly 7B: 36, even 5B: 1.
3. The highlighting of this aspect of the tradition was, as mentioned, mediated by the incursion of Buddhism into Chinese thought. Buddhism called itself “the Middle Way,” (Pali: *Majjhimāpaṭipadā*; Sanskrit: *Madhyamāpratipadā*) initially again primarily in an ethical sense: early Buddhism defines itself as the middle way between the two extremes of asceticism and worldly indulgence, represented by the two successive unsatisfying periods of the founder’s life, first as a sybarite prince and then as a self-mortifying ascetic. Already in the Pali canon, though, the Middle has a prominent expanded meaning: it denotes also the avoidance of the two extremes of “eternalism” and “annihilationism” (*śāśvata-/sassata-vāda*, *uccheda-vāda*) in the doctrine of dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda/pratītyasamutpāda*). This is already also a “middle way” between sameness and difference, for example, between successive moments in the life and indeed lives of a sentient being in the causal continuity of the karmic process; the central doctrine of non-self *anātta* signifies, among

other things, that the person identified as the causal antecedent and consequent of a given being, whether in the present lifetime or in previous or subsequent lifetimes, is neither precisely that “same” person nor completely “an other” being. Right view is “Middle” view: non-self qua dependent co-arising. The later elaboration of these ideas is found in a school that calls itself “The Middle View” school: Madhyamika. There “Emptiness” (*sunyata*) is itself read as a refutation of the extremes of being and non-being in a still broader ontological sense. The excluded middle of naïve realist ontology is here an engine precisely of extremes, which the Madhyamika dialectic replaces with the abandonment of all views, all of which are thus seen as extremes: emptiness, the abandonment of those views, is thus the Middle. Nagarjuna sums up his position with the famous “eight negations”: neither arising nor perishing, neither eternal nor destroyed, neither one nor different, neither coming nor going. To identify any instance of experience, whether subject or predicate, as anything at all is to identify it as one or the other of some pair in an excluded middle. The refutation of ontological realism is thus the re-establishment of precisely that previously excluded middle.

4. The “Great Commentary” to the *Zhouyi*, which does not use the term *zhong* but has a lot to say about the interfacing and combining of yin and yang, of door-hinges and supreme ultimates (derived from a term that artfully combines the sense of “the highest” and “the middle”: the ridgebeam of a two-sided slanted roof) positioned between these two extremes, mediating between them, enabling their interaction, and indeed somehow producing those extremes; and a weird little text from the *Liji*, the “Zhongyong” (中庸), actually takes the motif of the Middle from its sources in ethics to the farthest reaches of Confucian proto-ontology: arguably the *only* attempt at a thoroughgoing ontology found in that corpus, and it’s all about the Middle. What happens in the “Zhongyong” involves a play on the sense of *zhong* both as the midpoint that joins extremes, and its sense as “within”—“inner” as opposed to “outer,” “hidden” as opposed to “manifest.” The latter is a fortuitous pun playing on a peculiarity of the language, but it enables the development of a *tour de force* of intuitive speculation thinking, where the unseen midpoint between contrasting psychological states is recast as their source, and indeed the unseen source of all the contrasting aspects of the experienced world, the “great root of all under heaven” (*tianxiazhidabenyue* 天下之大本也) in continuity with the unceasing “realness” (*cheng* 誠) which grounds and is subtly present in all the varied behavioral expressions of both humans and things. This move is probably drawing on certain developments that had already occurred in “Daoist” texts like the *Zhuangzi*, e.g., the “center of the circle” (*huanzhong* 環中) between various opposed rights-and-wrongs, which is identified as the “Axis of the Way” (*daoshu* 道樞), in the climactic passage of what is arguably the key theoretical chapter (the “Qiwulun”) of that text, ethically enabling a similarly ceaseless creativity of endless responses (*yiying wuqiong*), but arguably linked here also to the very productivity (*sheng*) of the array of contrasting and conflicting perspectives, values, and behaviors of all things. In all these texts, in various ways which cannot be reduced to a single shared position but which play on the same nodal ideas, the Middle has something to do with the source of the infinite creativity (in the *Zhouyi* phrase that comes to be used to summarize the ontology of the Neo-Confucians, *sheng sheng bu xi*). It is the ultimate term of ontology.
5. In the Tiantai case especially, this is very explicitly an *active* Middle, Buddha-nature not only as the “cause proper” (*zhengyin foxing* 正因佛性) but also as the “conditioning cause” (*yuanyin foxing* 緣因佛性) comprised of all the actions of sentient beings and the “revealing cause” (*liaoyin foxing* 了因), comprised of the cognitions of all sentient beings.
6. Though Hegel claims to find his own idea of Middle as the real Absolute in Plato’s *Timeaus*, 35a. See the critique of Jacobi in *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 132, n. 126. Most readers of Plato would probably find this to be a rather creative misreading.
7. One often has the feeling in works of this period that Hegel was being cast in the role of Schelling’s bulldog: the acerbic, snarky and somewhat pedantic polemicist

- whom Schelling would sic on his ideological enemies, charged with doing the dirty work of refuting them point by point, in a form that could dominate and silence them in purely theoretical philosophical debate perhaps more readily than Schelling's own looser and always more "Romantic" exposition of his ideas might.
8. Schelling would later call it "negative philosophy," of which he would admit that no one—by implication perhaps, not even himself—had a better grasp than Hegel, whose entire mature philosophy he sees, not entirely without justification, as merely an elaboration of that the point of view created by Schelling himself. Hegel's famously cutting line about a notion of the Absolute as "the night in which all cows are black" is often taken as his decisive repudiation of this sort of "indifference point" as the ultimate principle of philosophy, taken even by Schelling as a thinly veiled slapdown of Schellingian Identity Philosophy. But Hegel denied that the target of this remark was Schelling himself, deflecting it to his incompetent imitators, and indeed, even in the *Differenzschrift* of 1801, Hegel is defending Schelling against this interpretation, or at least enunciates clearly that this is not a proper interpretation of the Identity Philosophy's Absolute as indifference-point: it is not—as "common sense" and "the intellect" (*der Verstand*) both take it to be—merely identity (of subject and object, of finite and infinite, of freedom and necessity), but already a second-order "identity of identity and non-identity; "being opposed and being one are both together in it." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Water Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 156.
 9. He changes his terminology, however: his new word for the Middle is *Geist*, also taken directly from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: i.e., Section 49, where he identifies *Geist* as the principle of life felt to be manifested in works of artistic genius, combining known purposiveness with the lack of a definite concept of purpose. That is precisely what Hegel calls the Middle: the creative genius who works both consciously and unconsciously to produce the actual world, rather than mere unconscious mechanism or the artisanship of a pre-existing theistic God who creates according to a plan known in advance. Hegel's mature philosophy thus still accepts the Middle as the supreme principle, but rather takes issue with its exposition, its manner of self-manifestation, the appeal to an intuition alleged by Schelling to only be available to an elite set of geniuses, as well as its implications, the premises and consequences that ought to go with it. Hegel wants to show that the idea can be demonstrated rigorously and discursively, starting from the instability of sense-perception itself, and from presuppositionless logical considerations. Most glaringly, he rejects the twofold progression of Schelling's exposition: proceeding from Subject to Object (transcendental philosophy to nature philosophy) and from Object to Subject (nature philosophy to transcendental philosophy), finding in their convergence the manifestation of the original subject-object which is the absolute in its two contrasted forms, but in both cases beginning with mere definitions and postulates in a way that Hegel found in violation of the required presuppositionlessness of philosophy. More importantly, the final form of fully manifest synthesis changes: instead of Art as the fully realized identity of identity and difference, of purpose and purposelessness, of freedom and necessity, of subject and object, of consciousness and unconsciousness, as it is in Schelling (most beautifully and complete expressed in the final chapter of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800): rather, in Hegel's mature thought, it becomes philosophy itself, Hegel's own philosophy, the *conscious* unity of consciousness and unconsciousness, that is the high point of the Spirit's development. This changes the relation not only to Art and Beauty and Myth and Poetry, to all the subrational forms of expression, but on the other side changes radically the relation to the State, which assumes a far more elevated role in Hegel's later thought. Schelling, on the other hand, repudiates his own earlier Identity Philosophy as a form of "negative philosophy"; with his 1809 *Essay on Human Freedom* (though arguably as early as 1804 we begin to see rumblings of this turn), Schelling rejects the notion of freedom in his earlier thought, the freedom-necessity of the indifference point, of the Middle, in favor of a moralized "freedom to do good and evil"—in effect, moving closer to both Fichte and in another sense to Jacobi:

freedom is at the basis of the world, and is something genuinely ontologically irreducible to necessity, incapable of derivation from the system of necessity. A similar backpedaling occurs with respect to the subject-object relation: henceforth Schelling will criticize Hegel just as Jacobi had criticized Fichte-Schelling-Hegel in the old days, for reducing the objective givenness of the world to some immanent principle of immediately experienced subjectivity, seemingly no longer convinced by his own assurances earlier on that this entailed at the same time the derivation in the opposite direction, from object to subject, from necessity to freedom, from immanence to transcendence, from givenness to self-positing. Schelling backslides to a position that insists on an unbridgeable Beyondness-to-Thought of reality, which Hegel sees, rightly I think, to be incompatible with the insight of the Middle: that “Beyondness” per se—total separation of anything from anything else—is impossible.

10. Hegel, *Difference*, 90–91 and 155.
11. Meanwhile, the idea of *freedom* is also not found in experience and could never have been derived from it, being rather a universal transcendental condition of presupposed in the experience of practical action, in judging something that happens to be a deed rather than an event. The unity demanded in both knowledge (First Critique) and action (Second Critique) is equally transcendental, “universal,” not derived from or terminable in a finite set of particulars, but a necessary *infinity*, which is not found in experience but only spontaneously produced as the condition of subjectivity. It is an “infinite” unity, because no accomplished unification can exhaust it; it is a norm for how to continue to unify whatever intuitions ever appear; it can never appear as such, as complete, in experience. Fichte already sees the first two Critiques as converging around this point, seeing the idea of knowledge in the First Critique as already normative, as well as spontaneous (not derived from experience), necessary, and universal, a prospective-purposive, as Kant explores in the Second Critique.
12. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 56.
13. *Ibid.*, 57.
14. *Ibid.*, 62.
15. “The beautiful subjectivity of Protestantism is transformed into empirical subjectivity; the poetry of Protestant grief that scorns all reconciliation with empirical existence is transformed into the prose of satisfaction with the finite and of good conscience about it.” *Ibid.*, 60.
16. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15.
17. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 169–70.
18. *Ibid.*, 69.
19. *Ibid.*, 69–70.
20. “The main point is that productive imagination is a truly speculative Idea, both in the form of sensuous intuition and in that of experience which is the comprehending of the intuition.” *Ibid.*, 71.
21. Kant *wants* to say that empirical consciousness is diverse, and unrelated to the identity of the subject. There is a relation to identity only in so far as I conjoin one representation to another. But once he allows that even sensibility, the awareness of space and time, is a function of the transcendental unity of apperception, of the non-isolability of particulars, every single instance of consciousness, sensuous or conception, becomes an immediate manifestation of this non-isolability. It is only by uniting a “many” (othernesses, differences) into one consciousness that I can represent to myself the identity of consciousness. Hence the synthetic unity is also dependent on the diversity, and vice versa. Hegel sees a reciprocity implied here.
22. A central theme of Hegel’s thought from beginning to end, but stated very directly in *Faith and Knowledge* in the critique of Jacobi’s critique of Spinoza, 109. No moment of experience is isolated, or even “first.” They all come “pre-connected,” or bearing the necessary possibility of connection, as the condition of being experienced at all, even, say, experienced as “disconnected” or “individual.” Without this I would not be able to say “this is my experience,” or “I am experiencing this,” or

- even “an experience is going on here.” At least the contrast to “this experience not yet having happened” is necessary, and this requires a bridging of two experiences.
23. *Ibid.*, 70.
 24. This is for Hegel made manifest for thought in threefold structure of syllogistic Reason, i.e., “not in the judgment, but in the [syllogistic] inference.” *Ibid.*, 72.
 25. *Ibid.*, 77.
 26. That this necessity itself must also be connected to its own other is also true; we may view this as precisely the point on which Hegel henceforth exerts his greatest intellectual efforts. Necessity cannot appear as necessity alone; it must be necessity-contingency, or the Middle that makes and transcends both.
 27. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Section 77.
 28. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 89.
 29. *Ibid.*, 89–90.
 30. *Ibid.*, 93–94.
 31. *Ibid.*, 159.
 32. *Ibid.*, 83–84.
 33. *Ibid.*, 85.
 34. Judgment is for Kant the joining of an intuition (particular sensory experience) to a concept, a particular to a universal. But “reflective judgments” start with the particular and go searching for an as-yet-unknown universal (as opposed to “determinative judgments,” which simply subsume a particular under a known universal). The judgments “it is beautiful” is thus reflective rather than determinative—where the *content* of the concept is lacking, but the *form* of a concept is present, i.e., necessity, universality, disinterestedness and purposivity.
 35. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Section 35.
 36. *Ibid.*, 86.
 37. *Ibid.*, 87.
 38. *Ibid.*, 87.
 39. *Ibid.*, Sections 1–22.
 40. This is indeed what Schelling of 1800 puts at the very end of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* as the final consummation and overcoming of all dualisms, the unity of conscious purpose and unconscious purposelessness, necessity and freedom in the work of art.
 41. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Section 10.
 42. *Ibid.*, Section 65.
 43. *Ibid.*, Sections 72–73.
 44. *Ibid.*, Sections 76–77. And Kant even stumbles directly on *space*—in Spinoza’s language, extension, and attribute of Substance, or Substance (God itself) considered in one of the infinite possible ways of considering it—as the candidate for this unity determining all natural existence. Of course he then clarifies that space is only the formal condition rather than the real ground of all particulars, although he has just told us that this distinction is peculiar to our own cognitive faculty. But even then, he has to note that when we think through what space means, it begins to look more like the real ground, in that it entails mutual determination of all its parts. “For in that case the unity constituting the basis of the possibility of natural formations would only be the unity of space. But space is not a real ground of the generation of things. It is only their formal condition—although from the fact that no part in it can be determined except in relation to the whole (the representation of which, therefore, underlies the possibility of the parts) it has some resemblance to the real ground of which we are in search” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 237).
 45. He puts it in more familiar terms in his discussion of Jacobi: “They understood the sphere of this antithesis, a finite and an infinite, to be absolute: but [they did not see that] if infinity is thus set up against finitude, each is as finite as the other” (Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 63).
 46. “But if the incommensurables are posited, not as these abstractions, existing for themselves (in numbers), nor as parts having standing apart from the whole, but accord to what they are in themselves; that is, if they are posited only in the whole, then the authentic concept, the true equality of whole and parts, and the affirmative

infinite, the *actual* infinite, is present for intuitive, i.e., geometrical, cognition. This idea of the infinite is one of the most important in Spinoza's system." Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 113.

47. Kant, says Hegel, reads Spinoza (as do most modern readers) as reducing the appearance of purpose to the reality of mere efficient causality, where the explanation of things lies only in the abstract ontological unity of things rather than their purposive, "final" type of unity—and Kant rejects this as an adequate explanation of living things, of the appearance of purposive organisms where all parts are means and all parts are ends, as does Hegel. But Hegel, on the contrary, reads Spinoza differently, thanks to Kant's own rethink of what "purpose" and "causality" and "unity" actually mean.
48. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 91.
49. Hegel is in effect saying to Kant: "You say we cannot help seeing organic life as purposive, and nature as designed for a purpose, and this is why we necessarily posit the existence of a Creator, although this is actually an invalid inference. You say we cannot help making this invalid inference. But you yourself have just shown that we can know clearly that it *is* an invalid inference: we can know both that it is a necessary inference *and* that it is necessarily invalid. The knowledge that this inference is not valid means that although it may be necessary to make it, it does not limit our cognition. We see beyond it, because *you* saw beyond it. Our cognition, in knowing the falseness of our sense that there must be a God, and that the world must have an external purpose, has already stepped beyond the necessity of positing the truth of those propositions: it is possible to know these inferences as invalid, and also the reasons why were impelled necessarily to make them. The knowledge of both the necessary finite cognition and that its necessary falseness is already the prior unity, the Middle, that steps beyond both, grasps both, and is the necessary condition of both. What we see is the appearance of formative unity without any definite external purpose: that is just the same as seeing necessary infinite unity as the determining ground of all finite things, necessarily taking themselves as their own ends. This is just what Spinoza would say. This is the experience of the world as everywhere at once necessarily displaying purposivity [autotelic homeostatic conatus] and at the same time necessarily unable to establish any specific determinate purpose for this purposivity—that is, as Beauty. This is the true infinite fully available in our direct experience."
50. Hegel says of this: "On one side, there is the objective manifold determined by concepts, the intellect generally; and, on the other side, the intellect as pure abstraction. Neither theoretical (i.e., *Critique of Pure Reason*, dealing with necessity, knowledge, the True) nor practical philosophy (i.e., *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*, dealing with freedom, willing, morality, the Good), had lifted themselves above the sphere of the absolute judgment; the middle ground is the region of the identity of what in the absolute judgment is subject and predicate; this identity is the one and only true Reason. Yet according to Kant it belongs only to the reflecting judgment (and is thus purely an accidental function of the finite intellect); it is nothing for Reason." Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, 86.
51. The central idea of Tiantai is that "moretoitivity" of all determinate entities, the pre-inseparability of anything from its own negation, such that the omnipresent, the infinite, the whole, is at once 1) unavoidably presupposed in the production of any coherence at all, and 2) self-deconstructive and hence indeterminate, and therefore 3) is properly characterized equally as any possible content at all. To be one way or another, to be being or nonbeing, to be self or non-self, to be this or that, requires a relationship with something else. This relating, even as a contrast, requires a something in common by means of which the relating can be accomplished. So if any "this" is present, its "not-this" must also be copresent, and for them to serve as this/not-this to each other, some third thing which is neither this nor not-this must subtend them. However, 2) there is no coherent way to think of this third thing without leading to an infinite regress. It cannot be a thing, it cannot be determinate, it cannot be anything. In fact, the very fact that it is the necessary condition of all coherence is what makes it necessarily incoherent. Since it is everywhere, it cannot be

coherently determined, for to be determined is to be contrasted to an other, and to be contrasted to an other is to have something outside of itself, to fail to be exceptionless. Any term that is instantiated everywhere and at all times is *thereby* drained of its original content, for that content depends solely on its contrast with something “other.” To be exceptionlessly omnipresent is, *ipso facto*, to have no particular content, to be empty: whatever is everywhere is also therefore nowhere and nothing. This means it is instantiated in no one form more than in any other, and the instantiation even in negation thus applies to every possible experience. This is perhaps most succinctly expressed in Zhiyi’s text *Sinianchu*, where Zhiyi notes that Vasubandhu’s “consciousness-only” admits both “discerning consciousness” and consciousness that does not discern, consciousness in the form of *apparent* object, *sichenshi* 似塵識. To be “only,” i.e., the sole and exceptionless omnipresence, consciousness must be both explicit consciousness and what is apparently opposed to consciousness. By the same token, says Zhiyi, we can say form, *rupa*, matter also appears in two forms: explicit inert objective matter, and “discerning” matter, matter in the form of consciousness. Thus when we say “consciousness-only,” we can also say “form-only,” “matter-only” (*wei’sè* 唯色). Indeed, we can go on to say, “scent-only,” “sound-only,” “touch-only,” and so on, *ad libitum*. This “anything-only” is what Tiantai means by “each thing without exception is the Middle”: each thing is absolute, omnipresent, omnitemporal, but appears not only in its own form, but also in the forms of all other things. The “interfused Three Truths” (*yuanyong sandi* 圓融三諦) means that the Middle is also simultaneously Emptiness and Provisional Positing; it is an absoluteness, a transcending of opposites, that also produces those opposites and remains identical to them, an absolute that is not only that which is to be known as absolute but the act of knowing it and the conditions and activities that make this knowing possible, including the knowing of all other objects first as separate entities and later, on that basis, as aspects of the absolute. The absolute is the subject-object, the finite-infinite, the eternal-temporal. This is present everywhere and as everything, which merely means that any actual moment of experience is present throughout reality, is itself the totality of all that exists, its apparent self and its apparent opposite both: scent-only, sound-only, touch-only, and so on. Compare Hegel: “[O]rdinary common sense is bound to see nothing but nullification in those philosophical systems that satisfy the demand for conscious identity by suspending dichotomy in such a way that one of the opposites is raised to be the absolute and the other nullified. . . . Viewed from this speculative aspect, the limited is something totally different from what it appears to ordinary common sense; having been elevated into being the Absolute, it is no longer the limited thing that it was. The matter of the materialist is no longer inert matter which has life as its opposite and its formative agent; the Ego of the idealist is no longer an empirical consciousness which, as limited, must posit an infinite outside itself. . . . Speculation does indeed elevate finite things—matter, the Ego—to the infinite and thus nullifies them: matter and Ego so far as they are meant to embrace totality, are no longer matter and Ego” (Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, 101).

52. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), “Preface,” Section 23, 12–13. The term *God* has the advantage of anticipating the insight that the Absolute is not merely an unloving substance or universal, as is suggested by terms like *Being* or *Essence* or *the One*, but is equally a self-positing Subject. But Hegel here stresses that this is only an *anticipation* of the point, and, because it makes it into a fixed, pre-established, external being, this “mere anticipation that the Absolute is Subject is not only *not* the actuality of this Notion, but it even makes the actuality impossible; for the anticipation posits the subject as an inert point, whereas the actuality is self-movement.” Calling the Absolute “God” is *precisely what prevents its actual realization!*
53. Of course for Hegel as of 1807, this would only refer to the Incarnation understood in its inadequate, representational form, as having taken place at a certain time and place in history. See *Phenomenology of Spirit*, sections 763–68, 462–64. We have already seen, however, that (when still not a university professor who needed to

officially profess Protestantism to keep his job) Hegel is just as scathing about the inner spirit of Protestantism per se in 1802, as committed to an equally one-sided Beyondness. Whether God is conceived as other than here-and-now because it was present in a particular time and space and determinate form, or because it is necessarily beyond time and space and all determinate forms altogether, it is equally “Beyond” in the repudiated sense: evacuated from all present forms.

54. I have explored this in detail in *Emptiness and Omnipresence*, and will not repeat the exposition here.
55. *Phenomenology*, Preface, Section, 46, 27: time is “the existent Notion itself”—that is, the Notion (Concept) in the form of *existence*, being-there for immediate intuition, as that category of “existence” is explained later in the *Logic*. Time is the phenomenal appearing of the Concept (the Middle) to the immediacy of perception, rather than the Middle as conceptually grasped and fully understood.
56. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 286.
57. See Spinoza, “Metaphysical Thoughts,” Appendix to *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, trans. Stanley Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 106, and his explanation in Letter 50 to Jellis, *Correspondence of Spinoza*, trans. A. Wolf (New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1928), 269–70.