Introduction

Volumes 11 and 12 featured papers that considered the themes of consciousness and logic, themes bearing on the fundamental question of the possibility of knowledge. Volume 13 was dedicated to the topic of desire and its role as a presupposition of action and morality. The papers we have collected together in the present volume focus on the interaction of philosophical traditions. They examine ways in which Kant and the German idealists came to terms with and were influenced by representatives of early modern philosophy. By comparatively evaluating key features of the different philosophical traditions, the papers help us better appreciate the unique contributions of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling and Novalis.

In most cases, our authors compare the ideas of a single classical German philosopher with those of a single rationalist philosopher. These comparisons help us assess the ways in which specific metaphysical themes of the early modern period became either transformed or preserved in later philosophical movements. Some papers consider Kant's relationship to Wolff and Leibniz. Others discuss Fichte's relationship to Spinoza and Leibniz, or Hegel's relationship to Descartes and Spinoza. We include three papers, in addition, on the influence of Spinoza on Schelling and Novalis.

As is evident from this list of topics, Spinoza's influence on post-Kantian philosophy is given special attention in this volume. Perhaps a reason for this is that it is with reference to Spinoza that the question of the influence of early modern philosophy on classical German philosophy takes on special urgency. A consideration of the relationships of the post-Kantians to Spinoza helps us appreciate their metaphysical developments and innovations. It perhaps also suggests answers to questions that, in recent years, have been posed with renewed interest, such as whether Hegel's idealism should be regarded as "metaphysical" or "non-metaphysical".

The theme of our volume invites reflection not just on the relation of Kant and the German idealists to the early moderns, but also on the means by which these figures in the history of philosophy are typically classified. The volume neither provides nor implies a unified conception of rationalism. Most of our authors consider the relationship between two philosophers (such as Kant and Leibniz) and therefore presuppose no single conception of rationalism. Others call into question features often associated with rationalism. They challenge us to reconsider and perhaps modify our common classifications. We see this, for example, in the contributions of Ziche and Heidemann, as well as in the paper by de Boer which raises critical questions about the way in which the line be-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110651546-004
tween empiricism and rationalism is typically drawn. It is our expectation that this volume of the Yearbook will stimulate the productive reconsideration of what we mean by rationalism.

Rather than begin the volume with the essays that are most preoccupied with philosophers of the early modern period, we first include papers on Kant and last include a paper on Novalis. Of course, all of the papers discuss at least one early modern figure.

Four of our authors have contributed papers on Kant. The first paper is a discussion by de Boer of the lessons we should draw from Kant’s Dreams of a Spirit-Seer about his relationship to Wolff. The Dreams essay gives us a paradigmatic example of the early Kant’s reliance on the early moderns. Already in that essay, Kant’s preoccupation is the question of the relation of sensibility to the understanding, a question to which he repeatedly returns in assessing his relationship to the rationalists. The next two essays consider Kant’s views on the distinction between sensibility and the understanding as well, this time highlighting Kant’s treatment of Leibniz in the Critique of Pure Reason. Look’s paper evaluates Kant’s critique of Leibniz, while Jauernig provides a comprehensive portrayal of similarities and differences in how the two philosophers treat the distinction between sensibility and understanding. In the fourth paper on Kant, Ziche offers a new interpretation of how we should understand Kant’s effort to combine elements of the empiricist and rationalist traditions. At the center of Ziche’s attention in the essay is Kant’s account of the regulative function of ideas in natural scientific inquiry. A more detailed sketch of the topics of these four essays follows:

In “Staking Out the Terrain of Pure Reason: Kant’s Critique of Wolffian Metaphysics in Dreams of a Spirit-Seer”, Karin de Boer argues that in his 1766 Dreams essay, Kant is more of a rationalist than is commonly supposed. De Boer takes a careful look at Kant’s critique of Christian Wolff in that text, and she challenges those who suggest that Dreams is an expression of Kant’s temporary flirtation with empiricism. She argues that Kant should not be understood as rejecting Wolff’s rationalism, but rather as attacking Wolff’s view that the sensible and the intellectual constitute a continuum. De Boer’s paper first defends a “continuist” account of Wolff on metaphysical cognition, then goes on to argue that Kant’s objection to Wolff in Dreams is by no means evidence of his wholesale rejection of Wolffian rationalism. In addition, de Boer asks us to reconsider the meaning of the labels “empiricism” and “rationalism” in Kant’s pre-critical writings.

In his paper “Sensibility and Understanding in Leibniz and Kant”, Brandon Look reviews Kant’s discussion of Leibniz in the Amphiboly chapter of the Critique of Pure Reason. He focuses, in particular, on Kant’s charge that Leibniz
fails to acknowledge that understanding and sensibility are distinct sources of cognition. According to Look, Kant’s treatment of Leibniz is inaccurate. Look presents textual evidence to demonstrate that Leibniz held that concepts or thoughts are entirely distinct from sensations or perceptions, and that there is in Leibniz more of a distinction between sensibility and understanding than Kant acknowledges. In addition, Look suggests that Kant’s claim to improve upon Leibniz’s theory of knowledge is persuasive only if we take on board metaphysical assumptions that Leibniz clearly rejects: the assumption that there really is causal interaction among substances, and an assumption about the ultimate givenness of experience.

In “Finite Minds and their Representations in Leibniz and Kant”, Anja Jauer-nig dedicates her discussion to the meaning and role of representations in the works of the two philosophers. She carves out an interpretation of what each philosopher has in mind by sensible and conceptual representations. Particularly of interest to Jauernig are their respective accounts of the difference between finite and infinite minds, and between human and divine modes of sensible and intellectual representation. In addition to illuminating key points on which the two philosophers agree, Jauernig argues that Leibniz and Kant fundamentally disagree on how they understand the passivity of received sensible representations. This difference in her view explains further points of disagreement, for example, regarding the question of the clarity of representations.

Paul Ziche explores the interaction of empiricist and rationalist elements in Kant’s Critical philosophy in his paper, “Epistemic Confidence – Kant’s Rationalism of the Principles of Seeking and Finding”. According to Ziche, Kant argues that empiricist approaches cannot provide solid ground for our knowledge of nature. Nonetheless, Kant is convinced that empiricist methods are essential if our knowledge is to expand and be open to novelty. Our knowledge of nature thus requires more, for Kant, than the employment of rationalist methods of conceptual clarification; what we need, in addition, are rules that guide our openness to new discoveries. Ziche’s focus in this essay is on the role Kant assigns principles of reason in regulating our efforts to secure and expand our knowledge. The principles are a priori and therefore necessary, and they serve to guide our efforts to expand our scientific knowledge and refine and multiply our concepts. According to Ziche, Kant’s system of regulative principles functions as a multifaceted and rich heuristic.

Our three contributions on Fichte explore different aspects of his relationship to Spinoza and Leibniz. As is the case with Kant, we can better understand Fichte if we consider how his system was influenced by and responsive to early modern philosophy. The papers of both Haag and Ivaldo emphasize the role of the practical in Fichte’s responses to Spinoza and Leibniz. The first two papers
of this section focus on Fichte’s relation to Spinoza. In different ways, Breazeale and Haag set out to clarify Fichte’s ambivalent attitude towards Spinoza.

Fichte’s interest in and treatment of Spinoza is the topic of Daniel Breazeale’s essay, “Fichte’s Spinoza”. Drawing from Fichte’s unpublished and published writings, Breazeale makes the case that Fichte’s fascination with Spinoza was evident already in his very first sketches of what would become the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and survived into his final version of that work in 1812. Breazeale’s main thesis is that Fichte believed it was with reference to the “dogmatic” and “fatalistic” nature of Spinoza’s system that he could best demonstrate the virtues of his own “critical” philosophical alternative, a system far closer in nature to the transcendental idealism of Kant. In giving us a careful exploration of Fichte’s admiration of and departure from the Spinozist point of view, Breazeale helps us understand Fichte’s assertion that his own system is capable, in a way that Spinoza’s is not, both of accounting for the relationship between the unchangeable absolute and its changeable manifestations, and of giving human autonomy its due.

In his paper “Fichte’s Critique of Spinoza in the *Grundlage*”, Johannes Haag examines Fichte’s relationship to Spinoza in the 1794 *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*. Haag suggests that we misunderstand Fichte if we treat him, as many have and still do, as a “subjective Spinozist”. For Haag, this label is too weak to capture the radical nature of Fichte’s departure from Spinoza, a departure that is especially apparent in the critique of Spinoza that appears at the end of the third section of the *Grundlage*. Haag reconstructs Fichte’s criticisms step-by-step, and points out that one of Fichte’s important objections to Spinoza is revealed in the fact that the first principle of his *Grundlage* is a practical principle. Haag’s careful textual analysis of the relationship of Fichte to Spinoza helps him make the case that it is principally by means of Fichte’s relation to the practical that he is able to distinguish himself most essentially from Spinoza.

Fichte’s concept of striving is the central focus of Marco Ivaldo’s paper, “Die praktische Konstitution des ‘Setzens’ nach der Wissenschaftslehre Fichtes”. Ivaldo seeks to persuade us that an analysis of the concept of striving can demonstrate that Fichte is committed to the thesis that our relationship to the world is practically grounded. In addition, Ivaldo argues that this insight regarding the role of the practical was anticipated in Leibniz’s conception of appetite. A central focus of Ivaldo’s discussion is paragraph 5 of the *Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre*, where Fichte introduces his concept of striving. In this context, Fichte explains the meaning of the concept and thereby helps us understand and seriously consider his thesis that the concept as well as the foundation of philosophy is fundamentally practical.
The three papers on Hegel take on different projects. In the first two essays, Hegel is brought into conversation with Descartes and Spinoza in a way that allows us to evaluate his representations of the two philosophers, and to clarify his alternative to their respective systems. In the third paper, by Heidemann, the primary objective is to examine whether Hegel’s system presupposes rationalist principles.

John McCumber’s essay, “I Speak, Therefore I am: Hegel on Descartes”, has two main goals: the first is to consider Hegel’s assessment of Descartes’ place in the history of philosophy; the second is to specify key features of Hegel’s alternative to Descartes. McCumber points out that Hegel has much admiration for Descartes’ effort to provide a presuppositionless foundation for philosophy. Hegel is convinced that Descartes’ effort fails, however, in large part because it presupposes a doctrine of “fixed” essences and meanings. With the help of an analysis of the beginning of Hegel’s Logic, McCumber argues that the Hegelian alternative strategy for grounding philosophy requires us to replace the Cartesian commitment to “fixity” with the insight that our concepts are fundamentally malleable.

Yitzak Melamed’s contribution, “Hegel, Spinoza, and McTaggart on the Reality of Time”, offers us a discussion of an important issue in the history of interpretations of Hegel and Spinoza, namely that of the nature of change and duration. After critically assessing Hegel’s conclusion that Spinoza denied the reality of duration and change, Melamed develops and defends the thesis that these are real for Spinoza in that they truly belong to substance. Melamed then turns his attention to Hegel’s view of the reality of time as seen through the interpretive lens of McTaggart. McTaggart attributes to Hegel the assumption that the “absolute idea” or “fundamental reality” neither contains nor provides grounds for temporality. Although we can view reality under the aspect of time, this doesn’t mean for Hegel that the categories of the Logic are themselves temporal. The categories of the Logic lay out the blueprint of fundamental reality, but this reality is not in time.

Dietmar Heidemann’s central question in “Hegel: Ein Rationalist?” is whether Hegel can be accurately classified as a rationalist. According to Heidemann, Hegel is a rationalist in a wide but not a narrow sense. Hegel cannot be understood to be a rationalist in a narrow sense, Heidemann argues, because he rejects many key principles of figures such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. In addition, Heidemann dismisses the proposal that Hegel intends the Phenomenology as a means of testing various rationalist commitments. Heidemann furthermore considers Hegel’s Logic and its claim that our thought determinations are determinations of being. Heidemann considers two strategies for how Hegel might try
to ground this claim and concludes that there are strong reasons for rejecting the suggestion that the Logic rests on rationalist principles.

In the final two essays of this volume, on Schelling and Novalis, Spinoza is once again of central importance. Like Fichte, Schelling’s stance on the acceptance and reinterpretation of certain Spinozistic theses is somewhat ambivalent. Schelling’s overall assessment of Spinoza’s philosophy, however, is more positive. The same is true for Novalis, as we discover in Kneller’s examination of these relationships.

The central thesis of Brady Bowman’s paper, “Force, Existence, and the Transcendence of the Good in Schelling’s Weltalter (1815)”, is that Schelling aims to develop a conception of unity in his philosophy that binds together elements he believes are neglected in Spinoza’s philosophy. Included among these elements are moral freedom and divine creativity. Bowman claims that, in Weltalter, Schelling indeed succeeds in offering us such a comprehensive conception. Bowman carefully examines this conception; he notes Schelling’s frequent references to Spinoza and reinterpretation of fundamental Spinozistic theses.

In her paper, “Novalis, Spinoza and the Realization of Nature”, Jane Kneller challenges those who are inclined to assume that all post-Kantian German philosophy is essentially post-Kantian idealism. She argues that the early romantics Schlegel, Schleiermacher and especially Novalis embraced the spirit of Spinoza’s non-reductive naturalism. These figures espoused a philosophy that was thoroughly compatible with the radical enlightenment call for a secular morality. On Kneller’s interpretation, Novalis held that atheism need not be incompatible with religion. She makes the case that Novalis drew inspiration from Spinoza’s atheistic naturalism and insistence upon the inseparability of art and nature.